DANCE OF SWORDS:

U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO SAUDI ARABIA,
1942-1964

DISQUERIA

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Bruce R. Nardulli, M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
2002

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Allan R. Millett, Adviser
Professor Peter L. Hahn
Professor David Stebenne

Approved by

____________________
Adviser
History Graduate Program
ABSTRACT

The United States and Saudi Arabia have a long and complex history of security relations. These relations evolved under conditions in which both countries understood and valued the need for cooperation, but also were aware of its limits and the dangers of too close a partnership. U.S. security dealings with Saudi Arabia are an extreme, perhaps unique, case of how security ties unfolded under conditions in which sensitivities to those ties were always a central —oftentimes dominating—consideration. This was especially true in the most delicate area of military assistance. Distinct patterns of behavior by the two countries emerged as a result, patterns that continue to this day. This dissertation examines the first twenty years of the U.S.-Saudi military assistance relationship. It seeks to identify the principal factors responsible for how and why the military assistance process evolved as it did, focusing on the objectives and constraints of both U.S. and Saudi participants.

Drawing heavily on U.S. primary source materials, the research traces the history of military assistance from 1942-1964. These years are explored using six time periods. The first is from 1942 to 1945, tracing early political relations, security developments, and the initiation of military activities and assistance by the U.S. during the war years. The years 1945 to mid-1950 examine the transition from world war to cold war, and the first serious long-term plans and actions between the two countries on military assistance. The period from mid-1950 through 1953 focuses on efforts to formalize U.S.-Saudi military assistance via written agreements, and to establish a regular military advisory group inside the Kingdom. The years 1954-1956 are investigated against the backdrop of
what was a key phase of Arab nationalism and British decline in the region, all while the
U.S. continued to seek containment of Soviet influence with Saudi assistance. The
period 1957-1960 focuses on the effects of key developments inside Saudi Arabia on the
military assistance process; the Saudi internal power struggle between King Saud and
Crown Prince Faisal. Last are the years 1961 through 1964, characterized as an era of
Arab polarization and direct security threats to the Kingdom, most notably the war in the
Yemen. That war brought into sharp relief the many tensions inherent in the military
assistance relationship. It also was the period of greatest internal conflict between Saud
and Faisal, culminating in King Saud’s removal from the throne. The work concludes
with a summary of the principal findings and patterns of behavior observed over the
entire period. It also addresses the historically important question (and enduring policy
issue) of how to evaluate the effectiveness of the overall military assistance undertaking
with Saudi Arabia.

The Sword Dance or ‘Ardha’ is the national dance of Saudi Arabia. It is used
here as a metaphor for the intricate moves required by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia in their
military dealings, and to denote the distinct patterns of behavior that emerged.
DEDICATION

Dedicated to my wife Liliana, for her unrelenting support and who endured far more than anyone should ask.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to many people who gave of their time, knowledge, and advice throughout this endeavor.

I wish to thank Professors Peter Hahn and David Stebeene for their willingness to take on this project as members of my dissertation committee. They were generous with their time and guidance in significantly improving the final product. I would also like to thank Professors Martha Garland and John Guilmartin for all of their assistance in helping me move toward final completion of my Ph D. During a much earlier phase of this effort, Drs. Williamson Murray and Charles Hermann provided freely of their time, guidance, and support for which I am most appreciative.

A very special and deep dept of gratitude goes to Professor Allan Millett. In addition to being my dissertation adviser, he has been a mentor throughout my academic and professional career. His knowledge and expertise are exceeded only by his constant support and willingness to keep this research moving forward. For this I will always remain grateful.

At the History Graduate School I am most thankful to Joby Abernathy for all of her assistance on the many administrative procedures associated with this effort. Beth Russell of the Mershon Center also provided critical, oftentimes short notice, communication and support throughout.

At the U.S. Naval War College, I would like to thank Dr. Kenneth Watman who, along with Professor William Turcotte, provided me with the opportunity to both teach at the War College and time to write while there. Ken was also party to many long
discussions on the topic, and I benefited immensely from his sharp questioning and insights.

Much of this research was conducted while at RAND. The corporation was generous in providing flexibility and assistance along the way. Several RAND colleagues were instrumental in providing all manner of support. Donna Betancourt, David Chu, Natalie Crawford, Richard Darilek, Lynn Davis, Mike Hix, David Kassing Tom McNaugher, Jim Quinlivan, and Lauri Zeman all invested in this undertaking. I only hope they know what a difference they each made and my gratitude for all they have done. I also thank Robin Davis who worked tirelessly to produce a polished final document.

Finally, my greatest thanks are reserved for my parents, who made this entire journey possible.
VITA

August 14, 1956.............................................Born-Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

1981..........................................................M.A. (First), War Studies, King’s College, University of London

1998-1999.......................................................Visiting Professor, U.S. Naval War College, Newport Rhode Island

1986-Present....................................................Member, professional research staff, RAND

1984-1985........................................................Member, research staff, Consortium for the Study of Intelligence, National Strategy Information Center

1982-1984........................................................Graduate Teaching and Research Associate, Mershon Center, The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS


**FIELDS OF STUDY**

Major Field: History
Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................... ii
Dedication ........................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................. v
Vita ..................................................................................................................................... vii
List of Maps ...................................................................................................................... xii
List of Tables .................................................................................................................... xiii

CHAPTER 1  THE DANCE OF SWORDS .......................................................................1
  Introduction ................................................................................................................... 1
  Dance of Swords: The Genesis ................................................................................... 2
  The U.S. Security Lens: Four Broad Objectives ....................................................... 9
  Constraints on U.S. Objectives ............................................................................... 14
  The Saudi Dimensions of Security ........................................................................ 15
  Historiography ......................................................................................................... 21
  Organization and a Note on Terminology ................................................................. 40

CHAPTER 2  THE DANCE BEGINS: WORLD WAR TWO AND EMERGING
  SECURITY TIES ..................................................................................................... 45
  Overview ..................................................................................................................... 45
  The Strategic Setting ................................................................................................. 47
  Saudi Arabia Emerges As A U.S. Strategic Interest: Oil and Overflight ............... 49
  Beginnings of the Military Assistance Relationship .............................................. 60
  Observations on Early Patterns ............................................................................. 90

CHAPTER 3  DANCING AT A DISTANCE: POST-WAR THROUGH MID-1950 ....94
  Strategic Setting: Cold War Onset And The Middle East .................................... 94
  Struggling For a Post-War Policy Toward the Kingdom ......................................... 97
  Elusive Pursuit: Dhahran, Palestine, And Military Assistance .............................. 102
  What Price Dhahran? ............................................................................................. 121
  Bridging The Gap: Short Term Renewal And Military Survey .............................. 127
  The Joint United States Survey Group to Saudi Arabia (JUSSGSA) ...................... 134
  After JUSSGSA: Still Playing For Time ................................................................. 156
  Observations on Post-War Patterns .................................................................. 165

CHAPTER 4  THE DANCE JOINED: MILITARY ASSISTANCE FORMALIZED,
  1950-1953 .............................................................................................................. 170
  Strategic Setting: Korean War, Stirrings of Revolutionary Nationalism, and
    Military Assistance ................................................................................................. 170
  Establishing Saudi Eligibility For Reimbursable Military Assistance .............. 172
  Hard Bargaining: Finding An Acceptable Quid Pro Quo For Future Access .... 181
  Devil In The Details: Reaching Closure on the Military Assistance Program .... 192
  Supply and Demand: The Growing Imbalance on Security ......................... 198
The Wheels Turn Slowly: Initiation of Military Assistance And Further Negotiations Over the MAAG ................................................................. 202
Reaching Closure on MAAG, Stalling Out on Grant Military Assistance ....... 215
Death of An Era, Birth of a Power Struggle .............................................. 217
Observations on the Early 1950s ............................................................... 221

CHAPTER 5 TROUBLE MOVEMENTS: MANEUVERING IN THE FACE OF INTERNAL STRUGGLES AND RISING ARAB NATIONALISM, 1954-1956 ................................................................. 224
Strategic Setting .................................................................................... 224
Early Days Under Saud: U.S. Military Assistance As A Test Of Support .... 226
Royal Guard, National Guard, and Regular Armed Forces ......................... 234
The Road to Dhahran Renewal: Paved With Conflicting Pressures ............. 240
Initial Negotiations on Renewal .............................................................. 264
The Suez Crisis and Dhahran ................................................................. 277
Saudi Balancing Act: Supporting Nasser, Relying on the U.S ................. 283
Observations ....................................................................................... 285

CHAPTER 6 ADJUSTING TEMPO: RESPONDING TO SHIFTING PRIORITY AND PARTNERS, 1957-1960 ................................................................. 289
Strategic Setting .................................................................................... 289
The King’s Visit and Opening Positions ................................................... 290
The 1380 Plan: Centerpiece of the Negotiations .................................. 298
Struggling for Closure ......................................................................... 305
Formal Agreement and Early Implementation ........................................ 311
The Building Crisis for Saud: Tensions Over Syria, Emergence of the UAR, and Palace Intrigue ............................................................... 320
Faisal’s Priorities and the Hiatus in Military Assistance .......................... 328
Caught in the Middle: USMTM’s Growing Military Difficulties and Mounting Political Role ................................................................. 335
Resistance to Faisal and His Reforms .................................................... 345
Observations ....................................................................................... 354

CHAPTER 7 U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE IN THE CRUCIBLE: CONFLICT IN THE YEMEN ................................................................. 359
Strategic Setting: Cold War With A Difference ...................................... 359
Early Days And Differences Under Kennedy .......................................... 362
Dust-Up Over Kuwait ........................................................................... 368
Next Steps on Dhahran, USMTM and Military Assistance ....................... 372
Outbreak of the War in the Yemen ....................................................... 379
Washington’s Response to Early Military Developments ......................... 385
Fighting From Weakness: Faisal’s Response .......................................... 389
Measured Reassurances From Washington ........................................... 393
Growing Saudi Pressure for U.S. Military Assistance ............................. 399
Further Escalation and New Diplomatic Efforts: The Bunker Mission ....... 407
Troubled Deployment: The Military and Political Complications
Surrounding Operation ‘Hard Surface’ .................................................... 415
Enduring U.S. Differences Over the Future of Hard Surface .................... 429
The Johnson Administration Inherits the Yemen Headache .................... 432
The U.S. Air Defense Survey ............................................................... 440
End of Hard Surface and Transition to Long-Term Military Assistance
Activities.....................................................................................................444
Observations ........................................................................................................459

CHAPTER 8  THE DANCE OF SWORDS IN RETROSPECT:
INTERPRETING THE CENTRAL MOVEMENTS .............................................466
Multiple Objectives Served by Military Assistance and The Tensions
Among Them..................................................................................................466
The Mutual Imperative to Retain the Equilibrium Between Closeness
and Placing Distance...................................................................................474
The Central Role of Saudi Internal Political Dynamics ...............................478
Dispelling Some Myths ...................................................................................479

APPENDICES .................................................................................................................482
Appendix A: U.S. War Plans and the Middle East: 1945-1950 ....................483
Appendix B: Agreements of June 18, 1951.....................................................487
Appendix C: Agreement between the United States of America
and Saudi Arabia on Mutual Defense Assistance, June 27, 1953 ..........499
Appendix D: Agreement Between the United States of America
and Saudi Arabia on United States Rights At Dhahran Airfield
and Related Matters, April 2, 1957...............................................................504
Appendix E: Saudi Arabian and United States Statements on Non-Renewal
of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement, March 16, 1961 ...............................506

BIBLIOGRAPHY............................................................................................................508
LIST OF MAPS

Map 2.1. African Air Routes ........................................................................................................... 50
Map 2.2. Saudi Arabia .................................................................................................................. 67
Map 3.1 Defense Needs of Saudi Arabia ..................................................................................... 143
Map 3.2 Recommended Dispositions Major Headquarters And Installations, Saudi Arabian Army ......................................................................................................................... 148
Map 3.3. Air Force, Troop Carrier Airfield Location And Facilities ........................................ 152
Map 7.1. The Middle East showing situation of the Yemen ...................................................... 381
Map 7.2. The Yemen .................................................................................................................. 382
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 JUSSGSA Proposed Saudi Arabian Army Personnel ........................................147
Table 3.2 JUSSGSA Proposed Saudi Arabian Navy Personnel ........................................150
Table 7.1 Proposed Assignment and Stationing of Combat Units ....................................451
CHAPTER 1

THE DANCE OF SWORDS

Saudi Arabia is strategically the most important nation in the Arabian Peninsula and the Arabian Peninsula is the most important area in the Middle East-Eastern Mediterranean region in view of its oil resources and its geographical position...it is capable of being the core, or hub, of U.S. action to resist Communist aggression from the north, east, or west.


The first responsibility of a Saudi monarch is to keep intimate relations with Washington, and the second is to do all he can to hide it.

—Mohamed Heikal, Illusions of Triumph

Introduction

It is axiomatic that U.S. security relations with other countries are characterized by both cooperation and tension over the nature and process of implementing security ties. In entering into any security arrangement, all states weigh the liabilities and advantages of such arrangements, engaging in a continuous effort to balance benefits and risks. Sensitivities to the balance can vary dramatically by country and circumstance. U.S. security relations with Saudi Arabia are an extreme, perhaps unique, instance of how security ties evolved under conditions in which sensitivities to those ties were always a dominant—oftentimes the dominant—consideration. Constraints on military cooperation and assistance were a constant and driving presence. Indeed these considerations were so strong they frequently overrode concerns over external military threats that the security relationship itself was designed to help counter. It therefore is an instructive case study
in the complexities of security ‘engagement’ under circumstances in which formal security ties and structures were not possible.

It is the thesis of this research that the imperative to retain the equilibrium between close security cooperation and maintaining distance was the central driving feature of U.S.-Saudi Arabian security relations. This imperative defined the objectives pursued by both parties, the relative importance attached to competing or conflicting aims among them, and the instruments chosen to advance the objectives. The binding pursuit of this equilibrium resulted in distinct patterns of behavior that help best explain a number of apparent inconsistencies or contradictions in the U.S.-Saudi security relationship. U.S.-Saudi relations have frequently been characterized as a “special relationship,” referring to the close ties over many decades despite the great differences in the two countries. But it is the deeper pattern of behavior throughout those decades that gives true meaning to the phrase. That deeper pattern, with its many intricate movements, is described here as the Dance of Swords.

Dance of Swords: The Genesis

The Sword Dance or ‘Ardha’ is the national dance of Saudi Arabia. It is used here as a metaphor for the intricate moves between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia in their military dealings. Both countries recognized from very early on the benefits of security cooperation and the need to develop not only political but military linkages. For the Saudis, such linkages and the ability to draw on them when needed was deemed essential to their long-term survival. Surrounded by more powerful and frequently hostile neighbors, and acutely aware of the physical vulnerabilities of their only recently consolidated kingdom, the Al Saud ruling family well understood the benefits of strong outside patrons. Despite ties with the British, the ruling elite also understood the need for a long-term military assistance relationship with the U.S. to modernize its own military forces.
For the U.S. the security ties were initially about protecting oil and later on also about exercising a broader political-military containment policy in the region. The general history is well known. By the early 1940s U.S. war planners already considered Saudi Arabian oil of major strategic importance to the U.S. During the next several decades the Kingdom was repeatedly elevated in the eyes of security planners, leading to President Carter publicly declaring Saudi Arabia a ‘vital’ interest in the late 1970s. The 1980s brought further U.S. affirmation of Saudi Arabia’s critical importance, now openly and explicitly extended to protecting the rule of the House of Saud, the so-called Reagan corollary to protecting Saudi Arabia itself. Underpinning these policy statements was a decades-long military assistance relationship of training, weapons transfers, and infrastructure development. The 1990s in turn moved the security relationship to center stage, from the domain of more distant and subtle political-military engagement strategies to large-scale direct defense of the Kingdom and the war with Iraq.

Yet from the beginning both parties also shared misgivings. The Al Saud constantly brooded over the political and military risks of security ties. This brooding was over far more than common concerns of avoiding situations in which the U.S. could unduly influence or control Saudi policies, but included fears over risks to the survival of the regime itself. At root were deep concerns over maintaining the regime’s political and religious legitimacy, and as part of that, strict sovereignty over the affairs of the Kingdom. Arab nationalism, a significant regional force throughout much of the fifties and sixties—and a serious political threat to the monarchy—further constrained the degree of tolerable security cooperation with the U.S. For its part, the United States always had ambivalent attitudes over its commitments to Saudi Arabia. While recognizing its strategic importance, Washington faced persistent political and military pressures for limiting its liability to the Kingdom. These mutual reservations exerted

1 According to the President the U.S. would not permit Saudi Arabia to become another Iran, i.e., allow the regime to collapse due to internal challenges.
tremendous influence on the resulting security architecture and on the approaches adopted by both parties.

This strategic condition led to a complex security dynamic. The U.S. desired security links to Saudi Arabia that supported Washington’s political and military objectives in the region. In order for the U.S. to acquire those links it had to pursue them in a way that recognized the severe constraints imposed on the Saudi leadership and design a security approach accordingly. Saudi constraints thus became U.S. constraints. Similarly, the Al Saud’s desire for U.S. security ties to meet their own objectives necessitated careful judgments as to what types of U.S. involvement were acceptable politically. The Saudis faced their own dilemma here. Any security ties to the U.S. involved considerable risks, while the alternative of no security involvement was strategically unacceptable. Furthermore, the U.S. was a superpower and as such had other options in the region, to include distancing itself from protecting the Kingdom or assisting its rulers. The Saudis accordingly faced real limits to their leverage in setting conditions on security relations with the U.S.

The history of the security relationship was also characterized by mutual distrust, the origins of which were many. Neither trusted the other’s judgment in pursuing security objectives. The Saudi leadership frequently viewed U.S. military proposals as exceeding what Riyadh could bear politically, and were frustrated at what they considered U.S. failure to appreciate this. Likewise, they questioned American judgment when Washington rejected Saudi military requests considered exorbitant and well beyond the ability of the Saudis to digest. By contrast, the U.S. often viewed the Saudi leadership as excessively cautious and unwilling to undertake the basic steps necessary to promote Saudi security. Inappropriate Saudi requests for military hardware reinforced U.S. views of the Al Saud’s inability to understand the complexities of military modernization and of the Kingdom’s own backwardness. American officials also were frequently agitated over the heavy role palace politics and personal agendas seemed to
play in negotiations, oftentimes appearing to take precedence over what the U.S. perceived to be Saudi (and U.S.) national security interests.

In addition to concerns over judgment, however, was a more general mistrust bred over intentions. The Saudis always were concerned over how various security ties—or the lack of—could be used by Washington to pressure the regime into doing America’s regional bidding at Saudi expense. Added to this was the chronic fear of the Al Saud that in the final analysis the U.S. was interested in protecting the oil resources of Saudi Arabia, not the ruling family. Security cooperation with the U.S. could therefore be viewed as a two-edged sword, one edge of which might later be used against the monarchy itself. This raised anxiety among the royals that the U.S. might lack the staying power in the region necessary to be a reliable ally, leaving the regime exposed in a crisis. The fact that the U.S. was a western power and to become a strong supporter of Israel simply added to the level of suspicion.

U.S. policy makers had their own misgivings about Saudi designs. Riyadh’s constant reference to political sensitivities as a barrier to closer military cooperation were frequently seen as largely manufactured in an effort to gain better negotiating leverage. For many in the uniformed military with responsibility for modernizing the Saudi armed forces, there was a deep frustration born of the constraints imposed by the Al Saud on the modernization process. The Royal Family, ever watchful over the threat an effective military force could pose to its rule, was viewed as placing its own parochial political interests above the long-term security of the state. Also of concern was the Saudi penchant to simultaneously negotiate military assistance programs with other countries,

---

2 Given that the Al Saud viewed the survival of their rule as synonymous with survival of the state, this American perspective appeared both naive and dangerous to the Royal Family. Less naive were concerns over the personal dynastic rivalries within the family afflicting the Saudi armed forces. As will be shown, these rivalries seriously impeded the ability of the U.S. to help professionalize the forces.
primarily the British, in an effort to play the parties off against each other to maximum Saudi advantage.³

Another key element in the mix was the role played by internal politics in determining larger policies. Neither side grasped the other’s domestic political system, a source of further discord. The Saudis had a hard time understanding why the U.S. Congress and American public opinion should exert any influence on Executive Branch policies toward the Kingdom. American officials meanwhile struggled to determine the inner workings of dynastic politics and rivalries within the House of Saud, a closed and byzantine system. It too was a form of checks and balances, acting as a brake on major policy deviations, including dealings with the U.S.⁴

Finally there were the deleterious effects of the great cultural divide. If Saudi Arabia the country was *terra incognita* to most U.S. officials, Saudi Arabian culture, customs, and religion were foreign in the extreme. The problem was compounded by the influential role a handful of individuals played early on in shaping American perceptions of Saudi Arabia and its monarch, oftentimes ascribing a power, prestige and progressiveness sharply at odds with the much more modest reality.⁵ This unfamiliarity and misperception was exceeded only by the Saudis lack of exposure and understanding of western and American ways. While the Saudis had considerable experience dealing with the British, and by the 1940s with a sprouting presence of U.S. private oil pioneers,

³ Throughout much of the period under study, the U.S. helped to invite this by pursuing policies in Saudi Arabia that were directly competitive with the British and designed to increase U.S. influence at London’s expense. The British were equally combative in their efforts to restrict the growth of U.S. political weight inside the Kingdom.


⁵ Malcolm C. Peck, *Saudi Arabia in United States Foreign Policy to 1958: A Study in the Sources and Determinants of American Policy* Ph D dissertation, Tufts University, April 1970. Among other harmful consequences, Peck argues the early inflated image of Saudi military strength led to misguided American beliefs in the ability of the Saudis to effectively absorb modern military equipment. See pp. 12-44.
this provided little foundation for serious long-term government-to-government relations. The marginal American diplomatic presence in the Kingdom throughout the 1930s and 1940s further contributed to the problem.

The effect of this mutual ignorance added to distrust. In negotiations over various military assistance activities the Saudis would tend toward general terms of agreement, leaving details to be worked out later. Verbal commitments carried great weight, and American requests for written documentation oftentimes were viewed as questioning the word and honor of those making the commitments. In the Bedouin ethos one’s word was considered sufficient to close the issue and overcome any later complications. This inexact method also permitted saving face, a highly valued Arab precept closely linked to personal honor. The more detailed and specific things became, the more risk that one party or the other might be forced to answer specifically and directly. This could result in a need to deny a request or have one denied—both very unattractive outcomes. In the words of a keen scholar of the Saudis, “Yes and no answers are avoided if at all possible, but infinite variations of ‘maybe’ are available.” The U.S. approach was far more direct, detail oriented, and formal, with emphasis on written documents and hard bottom lines, especially regarding military matters. Differences in the perceived level of discretion required (exacerbated by U.S. legal requirements for certain types of disclosure, at least

---


7 The U.S. recognized the Saudi government in 1931, but did not establish an official diplomatic presence in the Kingdom until 1942, a small legation at Jeddah. The number of Americans living in the Kingdom was considered too small and diplomatic relations too limited to justify a permanent presence. A consulate was later set up at Dhahran in 1944 largely to support Americans working for the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO), while the first U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, J. Rives Childs, was not named until 1949. For background see Kay Hardy Campbell, *The History of the United States Consulate General, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia* (Hingham, Massachusetts, 1988).

8 Early historical examples can be found in Saudi arms requests during World War II. These were cast in the most general of terms, e.g., “weapons and equipment for 100,000 men” but accompanied by statements suggesting they would take whatever was available. When pushed for more detail and precision on actual requirements, Saudi negotiators resisted, in part citing embarrassment should the requests be denied.

to Congress) further aroused suspicions. These cultural differences reinforced negative stereotypes of the other party as obtuse and unsophisticated, engaging in a subterfuge for traditional hard bargaining, or worse. The historical record reveals a complex picture in which all these elements were present.

All of this added up to a security relationship founded on a constant maneuvering to balance across the spectrum of often conflicting security considerations, and in so doing, maintain an equilibrium acceptable to both parties. What distinguishes the Saudi case is the extent to which concerns over the fragility of that equilibrium dominated the security calculus. The result was a perpetual “dance of swords” over security cooperation that drove the particular security assistance architecture and instruments chosen. Success was a choreography recognizing distinct plateaus of cooperation as its central theme, no matter how long or varied the movements. This interpretation best explains a number of apparent anomalies: Despite decades of security assistance relations and hundreds of billions of dollars spent by the Kingdom on defense—the majority on American contracts—the Saudis themselves remain militarily weak and the U.S. continually concerned over Saudi granting of military access in a crisis; despite extreme Saudi sensitivity to perceptions it was a pawn of the U.S. and of its own fears of U.S. intentions, it participated in a systematic, decades-long development of a vast military infrastructure largely designed by the U.S. and tailor-made for deployment of U.S. forces. Despite staggering differences in the two countries, vast changes in regional developments and

---

10 As Quandt again observes, for the Saudis “Secrecy is of the essence, and publicity is tantamount to betrayal of trust.” Ibid., p. 150.
11 As if the U.S.-Saudi cultural divide were not enough, over time a related divide and suspicion emerged between U.S. officials specializing in Arab affairs and other U.S. government policy and security analysts. The tension was most acute over issues related to U.S. policies on the Arab-Israeli conflict, though its roots were more intricate. One consequence was that those with the most specialized knowledge, language skills and ‘feel’ for their subject, and who were oftentimes the front line negotiators with the Saudis, carried both real and presumed policy perspective baggage. At times their expertise allowed them to dominate policy, while at others their interpretations became suspect by important policy sectors back in Washington. This bureaucratic dynamic introduced yet another layer of obscurity into the security assistance policy process. For an insightful history of the development of the ‘Arabist’ element of the diplomatic corps, their influence and the rifts created, see Robert D. Kaplan, The Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite (New York: The Free Press, 1993).
personalities, and near-constant tensions over regional policies, it was in that most politically sensitive and dangerous area of security cooperation that striking constancy and durability can be found.

This last point represents an important historical dimension of the analysis. The strategic conditions governing the security relationship—the need to balance the complex twin demands of attraction and distancing—existed from the very beginnings of U.S.-Saudi cooperation. The thesis of this research is that this pattern was largely set by the fundamental political-military characteristics of the two parties, and that the pattern has changed remarkably little over succeeding decades, despite vast changes in the geopolitical environment. In its fundamentals, it still governs U.S.-Saudi security relations to this day. That this strategic condition and pattern of behavior has prevailed despite dramatic changes in Saudi Arabia’s internal development and position in world affairs, and endured a host of major political-military crises throughout the region, attests to the deep-seated and powerful factors at work. Understanding the origins of these and the manner in which both parties orchestrated the resulting ‘dance’ is the central focus of this research.

As the historiography section will show, the existence of various tensions has been recognized and written about, as have descriptions of the numerous military assistance programs and activities between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. Missing is a structured history of how the tensions and the policies designed to manage them actually evolved, and how this evolution affected the security objectives and instruments of the two parties. Working through that history also permits clearer thinking about ends and means, and on that basis, making analytically sound judgments regarding the successes and failures of the security relationship.

**The U.S. Security Lens: Four Broad Objectives**

In its security relations with Saudi Arabia, the U.S. used the military instrument to pursue four broad objectives, two being essentially political and two primarily military.
These four objectives formed the core elements of the U.S. security approach to the Kingdom. As such, they also serve as the concrete focal points for tracing and interpreting the ebb and flow of U.S.-Saudi security engagement.

First and foremost was the political objective of increasing U.S. political influence with Saudi Arabia. This essentially meant garnering influence with the King, other senior members of the Royal Family, and a handful of key non-royal advisors. The locus for formulating and implementing this national-level political objective was primarily the National Security Council and Department of State. As U.S. commercial and national security interest in Saudi oil reserves grew, having good relations with the regime overseeing these assets became a fundamental objective of the U.S. government. For many senior decision makers, principally those at the State Department handling the Gulf region, this included expanding U.S. influence relative to the British. Also important was cultivating a Saudi regime supportive of broad U.S. policies in the region. With the advent of the Cold War this included the U.S. objective of containing political ideologies that could foster pro-Soviet or anti-western leaders and policies. Decisions regarding Saudi requests for military assistance were therefore calculated in terms of how such assistance would influence overall U.S.-Saudi political relations. Any military utility was derivative and of secondary consideration. This was especially true given that Turkey, Egypt, Iraq and Iran (later Turkey and Iran) along with the United Kingdom

12 Since its inception U.S. military assistance to other countries has served multiple purposes. Practitioners have long recognized that the security assistance process itself is driven by these multiple objectives and a myriad of bureaucratic forces, the principal bifurcation being the use of security assistance as political instrument and security assistance as military instrument. Organizationally this bifurcation is reflected in the Secretary of State having overall responsibility for security assistance policy and the Secretary of Defense overall responsibility for program management and administration. For a summary of the history of U.S. security assistance and its various uses see The Management of Security Assistance (Wright-Patterson AFB, OH: The Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management) Seventeenth Edition, May 1977, Chapter One, “Introduction to Security Assistance.” This is the training manual used by officers attending the DoD security assistance training program. For further perspectives of U.S. government officials on the purposes served by security assistance, and the wide range of opinions expressed, see Franklin D. Kramer, “The Government’s Approach to Security Assistance Decisions” in Ernest Graves and Steven A. Hildreth, eds., U.S. Security Assistance: The Political Process The Center For Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University (Lexington Books, 1985), pp. 101-124.
provided regional defense prospects against the Soviet Union far greater than anything Saudi Arabia could hope to offer.

A second political objective, and a direct corollary to the first, was to maintain and promote the security and stability of the rule of the Al Saud. As the importance of Saudi Arabia to U.S. national interests grew, so too did the need to protect the investment in the ruling authority there. The growing importance of Saudi oil, the regime's support for U.S. regional security policies, and the desire for some direct military access to the Kingdom combined to make promoting the stability of the regime a second national-level political objective. Military assistance and defense cooperation was used in this instance both to signal political support to the Al Saud and to provide concrete means for bolstering the regime. In terms of the latter, this included use of military assistance to provide infrastructure and specialized training directly relevant to strengthening the central state control of the Al Saud. Of all U.S. objectives, this was the most subtle in both policy statements and implementation.\footnote{The use of military or security assistance to bolster regimes by helping them develop the tools of a modern state was a recognized aspect of these programs. However, it was usually characterized as part of more general nation-state “development” activities. Building roads, communications, airfields and ports were an important means for strengthening centralized political control in underdeveloped countries, both by providing the population with an improved quality of life dependent on the central leadership and by providing that leadership with the physical means for exercising central governance. In the case of the latter, the use of military force to strengthen central control was heavily dependent on infrastructure and trained personnel, a point well understood by Saudi Arabia’s King Ibn Saud Abdul Aziz as he worked to consolidate his kingdom.}

Third was the military objective of developing a U.S. military capability for effectively operating over and from the Kingdom in peacetime, crisis and war. Initially modest in scope, as time went on this access represented a potentially critical supplement to U.S. regional operations. Pursuing this objective involved the development of appropriate infrastructures and working relationships with Saudi political and military authorities, as well as seeking base access rights, both formal and informal. This was principally the planning purview of the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint
Here the emphasis was on how best to employ U.S. military resources inside the Kingdom in ways that supported the direct use of U.S. military power. Accordingly, decisions regarding military assistance and its implementation had a much more direct military dimension and were mechanisms for advancing these essentially military objectives. Developing a militarily useful infrastructure inside the Kingdom certainly would ease the difficulties of any U.S. deployment there. Efforts at assisting the creation and development of a modern Saudi military would contribute to this as well by opening up personal and institutional entrees and networks inside a very closed society. These links to the military and their royal masters would help ease cooperation on security and military matters, constituting a "human" infrastructure to accompany the physical one. Viewed from this level, military assistance was a tool for better enabling U.S. military forces to operate in the region, and to establish and expand the foundations for the future projection of U.S. military power to the Kingdom should it be required. Military assistance provided the U.S. military with a "nose inside the tent," or in a word, "access." Actual improvements in Saudi military capabilities were a means to this end, a collateral benefit, and not a principal objective.

Fourth was the objective of creating a modern Saudi military force capable of internal security and limited self-defense against her immediate neighbors. This consisted of long-term efforts to train and equip Saudi forces. In-country military assistance teams were the key actors, along with their supporting defense commands, agencies and the Legation and Embassy personnel posted from the State Department.

14 Unlike post-war Europe or the Pacific, the Middle East/Gulf region did not have a major U.S. command tied to it as a primary area of responsibility throughout much of the period under study here. Consequently, regional commanders’ direct involvement in pushing military assistance efforts was far more limited. This in itself significantly influenced the process and setting of priorities.

15 This military objective was also the one most closely tied to U.S. war plans for the region in the event of a global war with the Soviet Union. The use of Saudi airspace and airfields in support of Strategic Air Command (SAC) nuclear operations was one of the factors underlying U.S. desires for continued access to Dhahran and other facilities. For a discussion of the early role of Middle Eastern air bases as staging areas for U.S. bombardment of the Soviet Union, see Michael J. Cohen, Fighting World War Three From the Middle East: Allied Contingency Plans, 1945-1954 (London: Frank Cass, 1997).
Here the emphasis was on developing serious Saudi military capabilities and professionalism over time. Doing so would serve the U.S. directly by obviating the need to intervene to protect Saudi Arabia in the event of smaller contingencies; by providing a local force that could reduce the total demands on U.S. forces in larger conflicts; or by serving as an initial defensive force until U.S. forces arrived in theater. A reasonably capable Saudi force could also help to protect critical installations in Saudi Arabia, including air bases, ports, and key oil facilities, again freeing up or at least reducing the early demands that might be placed on arriving U.S. forces.

All four objectives were pursued by the U.S. throughout the period under study. Consequently, there was a great deal of interaction between them. In many ways they were complementary. Helping the Saudis develop a self-defense capability, for example, was in part a quid pro quo for securing desired U.S. military access. It also was a means for bolstering the internal security of the regime. But at other times U.S. objectives were out of sync, weighed very differently in their importance by various sectors of the government, or even in direct conflict. These differences had their counterparts among Saudi officials, where individual cliques pushed their respective agendas in an effort to shape security relations with the U.S.

16 By way of example, the Nixon Administration described security assistance to Saudi Arabia as a means to permit the Saudis to defend themselves against certain threats (e.g., Iraq, South Yemen) and “as a way of avoiding our direct involvement in this kind of situation.” U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, New Perspectives on the Persian Gulf; Hearings before the Subcommittee on the Near East and South Asia. 93rd Cong., 1st sess., June 6, July 17, 23, 24, and November 28, 1973 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 33.

17 Multiple objectives could be served by the same security assistance tools. A case in point, the vast construction managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Saudi Arabia certainly improved Saudi military capabilities while also providing an infrastructure useful to potentially deploying U.S. forces. Furthermore, much of the Corps’ work was characterized as “part of a nation-building program” that served to help modernize the Kingdom, and by extension, the political strength of the Al Saud. The Corps actually became a strong trusted agent of the Royal Family in these efforts. For the nation-building perspective see the statements of Corps representatives in U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Activities of the United States Army Corps of Engineers in Saudi Arabia, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East. 96th Cong., 1st sess., June 25, 1979 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979).
**Constraints on U.S. Objectives**

In pursuing its multiple security objectives toward Saudi Arabia, the U.S. government (here meaning essentially the Executive Branch) faced a number of practical constraints. These constraints were as much a part of U.S. strategy as the objectives themselves. The two were in fact inseparable. Broadly construed, these constraints fell into two categories. First were those imposed on U.S. decision makers by factors beyond the direct U.S.-Saudi relationship, involving either other U.S. foreign policy or domestic considerations. Early in World War II, for example, were efforts to develop ties between the two governments through U.S. financial support to an economically strained King Abdul Aziz. These were rejected on the grounds that this was a British responsibility, along with Roosevelt's domestic political concerns of further arousing isolationist critics of his Lend-Lease policies. Similarly, in the 1950s and 1960s, U.S. policies supportive of the conservative monarchies were constrained by the recognized rise of popular Arab nationalism as the dominant force in the Arab world, and the openings this nationalism presented to the Soviet Union.

More generally in this regard, and spanning almost the entire U.S.-Saudi history, stood Israel. Since initially recognizing the state, the unwavering commitment of the U.S. to Israel’s security acted as an impediment to U.S.-Saudi relations, though certainly not an insurmountable one. All U.S. administrations since Truman faced domestic pressures to avoid any political or military actions that could jeopardize Israel's security, including limiting military assistance to Arab states that could potentially be used against Israel. Not only did this create political friction in Washington’s dealings with Saudi Arabia, it directly influenced the U.S. approach in defining Saudi defense requirements and in implementing proposed plans. This aspect became more pronounced once Saudi Arabia entered the realm of purchasing sophisticated technologies that could pose a threat.

---

to Israel (e.g., AWACS, F-15s), but was in fact a constraint from the earliest days of U.S. military support to Saudi Arabia.\(^\text{19}\) Adding to the problem was that once proposed major weapons sales were challenged on grounds they threatened the Jewish state, the sales were imbued with great weight by the Saudis as a symbol of the U.S. political commitment to the Kingdom, irrespective of the actual contribution to Saudi defense. Still, the history will show that the U.S.-Israeli relationship never proved a strategic roadblock to U.S.-Saudi security cooperation, but added another delicate movement to the dance.

The second set of constraints were those imposed on the United States by the Saudis themselves. These were directly related to the Al Saud’s perception of its interests, vulnerabilities, and the particular cultural lens through which it viewed security. The focus of this research is not on exploring in detail Saudi history and culture. At the same time, judgments regarding Saudi calculations on security matters obviously are a necessary part of examining the history of U.S. security relations with the Kingdom. The Al Saud’s unique perspectives on its security needs and constraints were a major factor in shaping the context for actual assistance measures by the U.S. Furthermore, the role and influence of Saudi decision makers in the formulation of U.S. security strategy toward the Kingdom cannot be understood without an appreciation of Saudi motives. Consequently, a brief review of these perspectives and the history underpinning them merit some discussion here. This general background will also help in interpreting the historical record of U.S.-Saudi military cooperation that follows.

**The Saudi Dimensions of Security**

Scholars of the subject broadly define Saudi foreign and security policy as historically driven by a bipolar world view dividing territories and peoples into two

\(^{19}\) Initial U.S. estimates in 1943 of the types and quantities of weapons to be delivered to the Saudis were in part determined by British concerns over potential diversions to Palestine, with the British pushing for strict limits. As the following chapters will show, dating from the late 1940s subsequent U.S. military modernization proposals for Saudi Arabia factored in potential risks to Israel.
distinct camps: *Dar al-Islam*, or those under divine Islamic law, and *Dar al-Harb*, those falling outside of God's law. Embraced in the first are not only Muslims, but other monotheist "People of the Book" including Jews and Christians. The latter encompasses non-believers, viewed as direct threats to Islam and by extension to the Islamic-based Saudi state. As one noted scholar has pointed out, this bipolar world view conformed readily with what would become the divisions of the Cold War, providing the conceptual foundation for long-term cooperation with the United States. In Saudi eyes, America fell within the domain of a "Christian nation" and as such was not innately hostile to Islam, especially when contrasted with atheistic Marxist-socialist ideologies clearly falling within *Dar al-Harb*. Thus in terms of the religious foundations of the Saudi state the U.S. (and the U.K. for that matter) were legitimate countries with whom to seek regular political and military relations.²⁰

This bi-polar religious world view was joined to Saudi Arabia's modern political history of avoiding colonization by western powers. Neither its tribal political, nor Islamic religious, institutions came under direct assault by the modernizing secular forces of Europe. Its social traditions and heritage remained unscathed, well insulated behind the desert's emptiness. As a result, there was no popular anti-colonial, revolutionary backlash facing the rulers. This experience, combined with the self-assurance of being the cradle of Islam, allowed the Saudis to avoid the xenophobic anti-westernism pervading much of the region. Accordingly, in its dealings with the West, the modern political history of the state bred a strategic outlook favorable to close relations with the U.S., even factoring in America's strong support for Israel.²¹

---


A third key driver of the Saudi strategic outlook was the ever-present quest for the physical survival of the House of Saud and the ability of the monarchy to exercise control over territory, security in its most elemental form. This was as much (or more) an issue of internal security as it was external threats. Under the stewardship of Abdul Aziz the paramount concern was keeping the newly consolidated Kingdom together. This meant maintaining and solidifying the rule of the Al Saud. As Adeed Dawisha succinctly puts it, "the Saudi rulers see their own permanence as an essential facet of the country's survival." The King faced the challenges of exerting control over recently conquered peoples quite different in outlook from his Najd base, as well as restraining the fierce independence of the various tribes and the centrifugal forces they represented. The defeat of the Hashemite rulers in the Hijaz, and their retreat to Transjordan and Iraq, furthermore insured a direct link between Saudi Arabia's future internal security and external threats from the north. Saudi suspicions regarding virtually all of its neighbors at one time or another has resulted in "a highly developed 'encirclement syndrome'," strongly reinforcing Saudi perceptions of security threats.

Adding to this already demanding security environment was the extreme difficulty of exerting central control over the Kingdom without the tools of a modern state. For much of the period under study, Saudi Arabia was still in the midst of state formation and operating with precious little (and frequently mismanaged) resources. It

---


23 For an excellent analysis of the competing forces of individual tribalism and centralization in the formation of the Saudi state, see Joseph Kostiner, "Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State Formation in Saudi Arabia," in Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, eds., *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 226-251. Kostiner notes that the late 1920s revolt of the Ikhwan against Abdul Aziz had as much to do with their desire to retain Saudi Arabia as a chieftancy granting the tribes great autonomy as it did with their often-cited religious zealotry. Despite the defeat of the Ikhwan by Abdul Aziz in 1930, the centrifugal forces of tribalism would endure for several more decades.

24 In the case of Iraq, the Hashemite threat was later replaced by that from radical republican regimes. For the Saudi focus on pursuing regional stability and countering 'radical' regimes as a means to enhance its own internal stability, see Dawisha, *Saudi Arabia's Search for Security*, pp. 7-8.

lacked well-developed institutions capable of managing the affairs of the state on a kingdom-wide basis. It also lacked the basics of infrastructure so necessary to consolidating political, economic and military control among its own population, let alone capable of deploying effective defenses against external aggressors. The well-grounded preoccupation with the practicalities of physical and political survival thus served as powerful incentives for the Al Saud to develop external security ties. The Royals needed major benefactors for the long haul. The growing commercial ties with American oil, combined with the modern expertise and political and military powerhouse represented by the U.S., made Washington the lead candidate.

But acting as a powerful counterweight was the Al Saud’s imperative to maintain political and religious legitimacy, both internally and externally. While it was an absolute monarchy, it did not command absolute power within the Kingdom. The Kingdom was founded on a historical alliance between family and religion in the mid-eighteenth century, between Muhammad ibn Saud, founder of the House of Saud, and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, founder of a conservative Islamic revival movement. That alliance remains central to the Al Saud's power base, and the Al Saud's ability to defend and promote conservative Islamic principles is fundamental to the legitimacy of the regime and its continued rule. In this sense issues of physical and political security are inseparable from religious considerations. In the Saudi context Islam is far more than a rhetorical subject for the ruling elite. It pervades social custom and interaction; it dominates images and attitudes; it motivates policies and is

---

26 This problem of external defense became increasingly worrisom to the Saudis as Trans-Jordan and Iraq began to develop motorized and mechanized capabilities, largely as a result of British military assistance.

27 While the most often cited limitation on the monarchy's independent exercise of power is the need to accommodate the views and goals of the senior religious authorities (ulema), the larger population is not an insignificant factor. Saudi scholar William Quandt notes that "Several thousand Saudis may take pride in belonging to the ruling Saud family, but the other 4 million to 5 million citizens of the kingdom identify themselves by tribe, family, and region, with the Arabic language and Islamic religion as their common denominator." Quandt, Saudi Arabia in the 1980s, p. 13.
used to justify them; and it embodies the system of values upon which the legitimacy of the regime rests.  

Relations with an outside power, especially one as influential and visible as the U.S., directly affects perceptions of legitimacy, and again with very high stakes for the Royal Family: “For a regime whose legitimacy cannot be taken for granted and therefore must be anchored in meeting the expectations of its population, the misconduct of foreign policy could be fatal.” Accordingly, all significant security decisions with the United States required deep consideration of the implications for the ruling family's authority.

Countering 'radical' political forces in the region was another facet of paramount importance to the Al Saud's survival. The rise of neighboring political forces from the left in the fifties and sixties were the most direct threat to the regime. This Arab radicalism was not only anti-colonial and anti-Western, but also "populist, activist, anti-monarchical, progressive, secularist, and frequently pro-Soviet Union." This threat was made concrete by the collapse of the Egyptian monarchy in 1952, the murder of the royal family in Iraq in 1958, and the victory of Egyptian-backed republican forces in ousting the conservative Imamate of North Yemen in 1962. Traditional monarchies were very much at risk. Throughout this turbulent period the Saudis faced the dilemma of how to combat this threat from radical nationalism while staunchly supporting the principle of

---


29 Quandt, Saudi Arabia in the 1980s, p. 2. Quandt notes the formative experiences and lessons of the late 1950s/early 1960s on Saudi leaders in this regard. The ideological challenge of Nasserism and the Egyptian involvement in the Yemen civil war posed direct threats to the regime, greatly compounded by the poor leadership exercised by King Saud.

30 Ibid., p. 18. It is worth adding that in the midst of all this the U.S. was seeking to improve relations with Nasser in the late 1950s, followed by the Kennedy Administration's 1962 recognition of the Republican regime in North Yemen. As Quant observes, these actions heightened Saudi fears over the reliability of the U.S. relationship. The Yemen episode and its impact on U.S. military assistance is addressed in detail in Chapter 7 of this dissertation.
Arab unity, a problem compounded by the festering Arab-Israeli conflict and American support for Israel.\textsuperscript{31}

These many factors also combined to affect the way the Al Saud considered the role of its own military forces, and by extension, to define the bounds of military modernization assistance sought from the U.S. The Al Saud’s mixed feelings toward military forces dates back to the founding of the modern Kingdom. The religiously motivated tribal forces of the Ikhwan, instrumental in Abdul Aziz’s early military successes and capturing of territory, ultimately challenged his leadership and had to be defeated by a separate, more conventional military force. Following its use for a final foreign venture to capture territories in Yemen in 1934, this second military force was also disbanded. Aside from not having the resources to maintain it, Abdul Aziz realized a standing army was a rival source of power. Military modernization brought its own particular set of demons; an increasingly effective military could help protect the Al Saud’s creation, but also be perilous for the creators. During the mid-1930s the King permitted elements of the then disbanded Ikhwan to regroup as a Bedouin militia (to become known as the White Army, the ancestor of today’s National Guard), in part to counterbalance the strength of the small regular army, a dynamic that continues to this day.\textsuperscript{32} And as several students of the region have noted, with the exception of a handful of ineffectual coup attempts from within the officer corps, Saudi Arabia is one of the few

\textsuperscript{31}The primary effect of the Arab-Israeli conflict from the Saudi security perspective was the potential for spreading political radicalism and expanded Soviet influence, both threats to Saudi conservatism. The Soviet political foothold in Egypt, for example, was perceived by Riyadh as directly resulting from Israel’s existence and the political forces unleashed by its presence in the region. Bruce R. Kuniholm, \textit{The Persian Gulf and United States Policy: A Guide to Issues and References} (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 1984), pp. 95-96, and Quandt, \textit{Saudi Arabia in the 1980s}, pp. 4-7.

\textsuperscript{32}The National Guard served another role at least as important as a military offset to the Army. The Saudi monarchy’s power has always rested on effective political alliances with other powerful groups inside the country. As part of this alliance-building, local tribal chiefs were granted authority over units garrisoned in their areas, with their sons serving as its officers. This was an important means for building allegiance and consolidating power in and of itself. On this point see Ghassane Salameh, “Political Power and the Saudi State,” \textit{MERIP Reports} (Middle East Research and Information Project) 10, no. 8 (October 1980): pp. 8-10. Salameh’s entire article is an excellent review of the elements of political power in the Kingdom, written in the aftermath of the 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque and Shi’a rioting in the eastern Saudi town of Qatif in 1979 and 1980.
Middle Eastern countries where the military has not played a central role in politics, not an accident of history. These attitudes of the Al Saud toward their military heavily influenced the character of U.S. military modernization efforts, affecting the size, organization, command structure, equipment, training, and garrisoning of forces.

In sum, security-related decisions by the Al Saud were heavily governed and framed by all of these considerations, acting as both incentives and constraints in security dealings with the U.S. Successful Saudi policy was all about balancing the tensions and contradictions among them. The need for security ties to Washington was well understood, but represented only one dimension of the much more complex Saudi security calculus. The U.S. link frequently exacerbated the Al Saud's position along the other security dimensions.

Both parties therefore labored under demanding conditions restricting the level of cooperation achievable. But worth reinforcing is the point that these constraints were central elements of the security relationship, and as such, understanding them is essential to understanding the larger story of how and why U.S.-Saudi security cooperation evolved as it did.

**Historiography**

A review of the secondary literature bearing on the subject of U.S.-Saudi security relations illuminates both the larger context in which these relations evolved and the various factors affecting the actual implementation of military assistance. This literature also is instructive in highlighting the contributions of previous works on the subject as well as their limitations. Not surprisingly, this material provides a diverse and often opposing set of interpretations on the objectives pursued in U.S.-Saudi security assistance relations and on the means used.

33 Worth noting however is that Arab nationalist and Nasserist ideas were influential in a number of these internal challenges, most notably the Saudi ‘free officers’ movement’ in the mid-1950s, modeled on its Egyptian predecessor.
The volume of material on general U.S. security planning and activities in the greater Middle East, to include the Gulf region and Saudi Arabia, is vast. Even the work focusing on U.S.-Saudi security relations is considerable, although the bulk of it is more policy-oriented and emphasizes developments since the 1973-74 oil embargo. The historiography presented here focuses largely on the works covering the historical period of interest, World War II through the mid-1960s. It is organized chronologically, based on the materials’ appearance within the flow of larger events.\(^{34}\)

Prior to the 1970s, the majority of existing literature centered on the Eastern Mediterranean region (predominantly Turkey, Israel, Egypt) and on various aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, only peripherally on the Gulf and Saudi Arabia. This was despite the already widely appreciated importance of Gulf oil to western security. From the standpoint of U.S. security policy, the overriding concerns were containing Soviet political and military influence in this sub-region, especially in Turkey given its key geography and role in larger NATO defense planning, and ensuring Israel's survival in the face of long-term Arab opposition. The Arab-Israeli conflict held a prominent place in the security literature with concerns that the cleavages it created could open up opportunities for Soviet political penetration of the area. Another focus was Arab nationalism as a force for change, in part stimulated by the Arab-Israeli conflict but principally the product of a weakening European grip over the affairs of states in the region. This provided aspiring new leaders opportunities to challenge increasingly exposed traditional regimes. But even in the coverage of these topics, with few notable exceptions, the Gulf and Saudi Arabia remained relatively obscure sideshows in the formal literature.\(^{35}\)

\(^{34}\) Not covered in this review is the large security literature on the Gulf from the 1970s onward. Most of this literature focused on current and future issues in protecting the Gulf, what prospective U.S. policies should be, and with few exceptions, did not go into historical depth for the period examined here.

\(^{35}\) Among the exceptions in this period is John Campbell’s *Defense of the Middle East*, first published in 1958. It explored the strategic implications of the Soviet threat to Middle East oil and U.S. defense
This early emphasis is not surprising, in no small part due to Britain's dominant political-military position in the Persian Gulf region throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the so-called "British lake." Certainly one can find a considerable British literature on security issues in the Gulf spanning this period, but the overwhelming emphasis clearly was on British interests and activities. And given the United Kingdom’s concentration on the coastal states of the Arabian Peninsula (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the Trucial states/U.A.E. Federation, Aden Protectorate), Saudi Arabia was not a principal focus, though it was frequently cited in terms of U.S.-British competition over oil and political influence with the Al Saud.\(^36\)

The growth in coverage on Saudi Arabia, particularly among American scholars, can be traced to the mid-1970s and the oil embargo. Still, the dearth of both scholarly and popular material on the Kingdom and on U.S.-Saudi relations during even this period was captured in a 1979 literature review. A major survey covering over a hundred books on political development and over 5,500 articles in major journals on foreign policy and Middle Eastern affairs for the period 1950-1976 yielded, in the words of the authors, an "academic Rub’ al-Khali" on Saudi Arabia, referring to the vast empty quarter of the Saudi desert. Six book references and 19 articles represented the totality of coverage for this period.\(^37\) Another scholar noted that as of the late 1970s, only two significant works existed on current Saudi society and politics and only one published study on U.S.-Saudi relations. The bulk of the remaining literature focused on economic and commercial requirements for defending the oil-producing regions from Soviet invasion. John C. Campbell, *Defense of the Middle East*, revised edition, Council on Foreign Relations (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960).


23
affairs. Popular journalistic coverage was equally sparse, and characterized as frequently containing "careless, shallow and erroneous" information about the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{38}

David E. Long's monograph \textit{Saudi Arabia}, one of the two works cited as a serious study of the Kingdom at the time, was heavily focused on the country itself, covering its geography, social development, history, internal politics and foreign and defense policies, all in a concise seventy pages. U.S.-Saudi relations receive only brief treatment, though Long's overview of the history of U.S. involvement in Saudi Arabia's defense developments is a very useful early synopsis.\textsuperscript{39} Far more comprehensive is the second noted work, the \textit{Area Handbook for Saudi Arabia}, prepared by the Foreign Area Studies of The American University and principally for use by U.S. government personnel. Then in its third edition, the \textit{Handbook}, compiled from openly available sources but including extensive access to U.S. government experts and data, unquestionably constituted the best single American published source on the essentials of the Kingdom. As in the previous two editions (1966, 1971) considerable attention was paid to the Kingdom's armed forces and internal security. By the 1977 edition the section on the armed forces had become rather extensive and detailed, reflecting the expansion in Saudi defense programs. Much more coverage was given to the evolving organization of the Saudi military, defense expenditures, equipment purchases, and training. The related discussion on military assistance by the U.S. was substantially expanded as well. Given that the purpose of the Handbooks was to provide a "convenient compilation of basic facts" for its government readership, the material was largely descriptive and not analytic or evaluative.\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
One other notable source among the historical literature from the 1970s is a dissertation by Malcolm Peck, *Saudi Arabia in United States Foreign Policy to 1958*. Peck traces the principal economic, political and military developments that led to a U.S. national interest in Saudi Arabia from World War II to the enunciation of the Eisenhower Doctrine. He is strongest in covering the period up through the war years, spanning the history of American oil interests and oil businessmen in getting the U.S. government involved for the first time directly in Saudi affairs. These commercial concerns were over the financial instability of the Kingdom, growing influence of the British, and the associated risks these posed to American investments. Combined with growing interest at the State Department in expanding U.S. post-war influence in the region, and mounting military concern over future supplies of oil, these efforts culminated in extension of Lend-Lease to the Kingdom in 1943.

Beyond purely military considerations over access to oil, U.S. involvement increasingly reflected direct political and economic competition with the British. Peck chronicles the U.S.-U.K. rivalry manifest in the military missions each country sent to the Kingdom, and over construction of the Dhahran airfield. He shows how oftentimes sharp disagreements on these and other related military activities in fact had little to do with military considerations, but issues of political influence with Riyadh, specifically King Abdul Aziz. Peck convincingly argues that however misplaced, Abdul Aziz’s image among U.S. leaders as a powerful Arab leader capable of wielding great influence in the region was well entrenched. Roosevelt, until his personal meeting with the king, was apparently convinced of Abdul Aziz’s ability and willingness to impose a settlement over Palestine on the Arabs. This dream, of course, quickly turned to ashes.

Peck’s dissertation is one of the earliest histories among otherwise sparse pickings attempting to outline the key factors driving U.S. policy toward Saudi Arabia and the already emerging confusion and tensions among objectives. It also provides insight into
the earliest political roles played by military assistance, most notably as a tool in the political competition with Britain for influence with the king.  

The more in-depth scholarly literature began to catch up with events by the early-to-mid 1980s. Much of it was policy oriented and prescriptive, but often included useful historical material. With the growing focus of research on issues of security, more attention was paid to military matters as well. Among the more comprehensive overviews of Gulf security to appear was Bruce Kuniholm’s *The Persian Gulf and United States Policy*. His work was a concise, insightful examination of the region's political history and dynamics combined with a survey of contemporary security issues facing the region and U.S. policies following the collapse of the Shah. In a section on Saudi Arabia, Kuniholm contends that U.S. policy makers frequently were puzzled by Saudi decisions on security matters because of a misunderstanding of Saudi priorities and constraints. These factors (notable among them the destabilizing effects of the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict) would not prevent Saudi requests for U.S. assistance in acute crises, but set serious limits on the type and scale of long-term security cooperation. A failure to appreciate this would have very negative consequences: "Any attempt to push the Saudis beyond what their instinct for survival tells them is acceptable, and we must remember that their interpretation of what is threatening to their survival is markedly different from ours, can only result in failure and damage to our common interests." Consequently, just as the Saudis had to balance among competing and shifting objectives in seeking to ensure its long-term survival, the U.S. had to design a security strategy that could work within these realities.  

---

James Noyes' *The Clouded Lens, Persian Gulf Security and U.S. Policy* exemplified analyses at the broad political-military level. A former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Near Eastern, African, and South Asian Affairs, Noyes emphasized the essential importance of regional political factors, both internal and external, in determining the most viable means of U.S. security assistance and direct defense of the Arabian Peninsula states. While addressing the military aspects of future Gulf security, Noyes focus was on much wider policy issues such as the impact of arms sales on the regional political-military balance, on the internal development of the Gulf states, and the types of U.S. military presence best suited to the prevailing political conditions in the Gulf.\(^43\)

This period of the early-to-mid 1980s is particularly interesting in that it illustrates how the greatly increased scale and open discussion of U.S. military activity in the region became the focus of attention. Largely absent was an appreciation of how this visible increase in military activity had already been heavily shaped and constrained by well-established historical patterns. Furthermore, in their fundamentals these patterns were not altered even by the traumatic events of the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the Iran-Iraq War.

Extremely detailed military assessments of the Gulf could be found in the two tomes of Anthony Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability* (1984) and *The Gulf and the West* (1988). These encyclopedic works became standard references on military matters in the region, containing extensive information on weapons systems, organization of the Gulf state military and security forces, strengths and weaknesses of the forces, and surveys of U.S. security assistance to the Gulf states. Each of the volumes included multiple chapters on Saudi Arabia alone. From the standpoint of historical reference, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability* contains five very useful

---

chapters covering the history of U.S.-Saudi military relations and Saudi military modernization from 1930 through the early 1980s. In that same volume Cordesman also neatly summarizes what he believes is the Saudi perspective governing its approach to security matters:

(1) maintaining its own internal security without external aid; (2) avoiding any formal pacts or treaties with the West that make Saudi Arabia seem to be a U.S. client in an area where its powerful neighbors had to fight for their independence from Western colonialism and regarded any such ties as a fundamental violation of Arab nationalism; (3) building up Saudi military forces, predominantly with U.S. military support, so that it can deter any threat other than the largest possible outside attack by a neighbor or an outright Soviet attack; (4) avoiding any formal U.S. presence or base in Saudi Arabia; and (5) relying on the U.S. to provide an ultimate security guarantee by deploying military power from outside Saudi Arabia in the event of a threat such as a Soviet invasion.44

Turning to the more historically-oriented literature of the 1980s, a growing body of works appeared on the region, including a number of important histories on Saudi Arabia itself. This work brought added dimension and insights to the subject, most notably a richer historical context for interpreting U.S.-Saudi relations and the decisions underpinning their respective security policies.

Two major books on Saudi Arabia's history and personalities were published during this period, Robert Lacey's *The Kingdom* and David Holden and Richard Johns' *The House of Saud*. Journalistic accounts in many respects (though Holden and Johns is the more exacting history), these two works succeed in providing a window into the inner workings and intensely personal nature of Saudi politics and decision making, especially in the period prior to the 1970s. Both also succeed in providing an all important 'feel' for the human side of the key personalities, their psychology and cultural orientation. These aspects are critical to understanding Saudi decisions but often neglected in more sterile histories, or appearing as wooden stereotypes. Lacey's work in particular is replete with portrayals based on extensive interviews with British and American officials who worked

closely with Saudi principals, as well as interviews with King Khalid ibn Abdul Aziz and several senior princes of the Royal Family. Details of particular events, interesting in their own right, occasionally provide revealing insights into larger matters. For example, Lacey recounts King Faisal's explosion at the reported remarks of the American Ambassador dismissing the U.S. military training programs in Saudi Arabia as a means merely to keep Saudi princes from causing trouble and of no practical military consequence. After ripping apart the written report of the conversation the King raged "These Americans will never understand us...They train us, then think we can only play in sand dunes!" While one must be careful not to over-interpret, episodes such as this capture a deep-seated source of Saudi frustration; a history of western patronizing, magnified in its cut by extreme Saudi pride and a well-concealed appreciation of Saudi deficiencies when it came to modernization.\footnote{Robert Lacey, The Kingdom (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981). Quotation from p. 467, and David Holden and Richard Johns, The House of Saud: The Rise and Rule of the Most Powerful Dynasty in the Arab World (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1981). Holden, who began the research on the book, was chief foreign correspondent of the London Sunday Times. He was murdered in Cairo in December of 1977 under mysterious circumstances.} It would be a mistake to overlook or disregard the effects of these personal feelings among the leadership when explaining Saudi military relations with the U.S. Pride and demonstrable equality were their own requirements.\footnote{The continuing importance of this (as well as the enduring sense of insecurity) comes through clearly in HRH General Khaled bin Sultan’s description of the role of the “parallel command” he headed during Desert Shield/Desert Storm and his numerous efforts to exercise at least equal control with U.S. General Schwarzkopf. See HRH General Khaled bin Sultan, Desert Warrior, (New York: Harper Collins, 1995).} Lacey, Holden and Johns helped to give life to these human aspects of the dance.\footnote{Western biographies of individual Saudi rulers are another important source for this. Three notable works are David Howarth, The Desert King: Ibn Saud and His Arabia (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), Gerald De Gaury, Faisal: King of Saudi Arabia (New York: Praeger, 1967), and Leslie McLoughlin Ibn Saud: Founder of a Kingdom (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993). No other biographies of Ibn Saud (Abdul Aziz) were written in English in the thirty years between Howarth and McLoughlin.}

Also valuable from this period is the work of Israeli social-historian Mordechai Abir, who explored the effects of modernization on the Kingdom’s governing power structure from the 1940s to the mid-1980s. One of Abir's major foci is the evolution of...
elites beyond the Royal Family and established religious authorities, a byproduct of Saudi Arabia's modernization. He evaluates the growth, characteristics, and political influence of these new arrivals. Interestingly, the military receives little more than passing reference. Between the various security checks and balances, the placement of royals in all key officer positions, the relatively favorable benefits to military personnel, and the extensive use of foreign advisers and troops, Abir concludes that the military is unlikely to pose a threat to the regime, nor emerge as a significant independent elite political pressure group.  

Two additional contributions on Saudi Arabia explored the history of the Al Saud's strivings both to secure its rule and to protect the larger Kingdom itself. Adeed Dawisha's monograph, *Saudi Arabia's Search for Security*, along with his related article "Internal Values and External Threats: The Making of Saudi Foreign Policy," were among the first pieces to systematically examine the Saudi approach to security issues. Dawisha described the historic and very close links between Islam, the legitimacy of the Al Saud's rule, and the classic state leadership concerns over protecting sovereignty. Added to this was the process of modernization, viewed as disruptive to the traditional foundations of the Saudi political system and a source of instability. His work helped to illuminate aspects of what could be called Saudi 'strategic culture' on security matters. While traditional state security concerns were a regular staple of Saudi Arabia's history, Dawisha's early work showed the ways in which these took on unique features of the Saudi experience and in turn uniquely shaped the nature of U.S.-Saudi security relations.  

---


Nadav Safran's *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, became one of the classic western studies on the subject. Safran's book covers the rule of Abdul Aziz, Saud, Faisal and Khaled, each reign addressed in terms of internal political dynamics, external security concerns, and consequent Saudi defense developments. He carefully works from the larger internal and external context of security considerations and events to then explain historical developments in the internal security and defense services themselves. Among the driving forces were Abdul Aziz's initial fears of simply holding the Kingdom together, and defending himself against the Hashemite threat. These were later followed by the trials with Arab nationalism and radicalism, the need to respond to the security implications of British withdrawal, and the impact of the October 1973 War. Substantial attention was given to U.S.-Saudi security relations, to include coverage of various U.S. military assistance activities in modernizing the Saudi armed forces. This coverage was especially useful by addressing the Saudi perspective. All in all, Safran's work remains essential reading and is drawn on considerably in the work here.  

Last are three books focused specifically on U.S.-Saudi relations, including security relations. Aaron David Miller's *Search For Security* is the single best historical treatment of the early years of the relationship. Drawing extensively on primary source material, Miller traces the evolution of U.S. involvement in the Kingdom and the interplay of commercial and strategic interests. His history centers on the nexus between the growing commercial interests of the California Arabian Standard Oil Company (CASOC) in Saudi Arabia, the desires of the State Department's Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (NEA) to expand U.S. political ties and influence with the Kingdom, and the American military's increasing concerns over the strategic importance of Persian Gulf oil. He very effectively chronicles how from among these three interests a U.S. national policy of economic, political and military support for the Kingdom emerged.

---

*Safran, Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security.*
This in turn served as the foundation for the relationship over the next several decades. The strength of Miller's history is in telling the story of U.S.-Saudi relations from a high-level policy focus.51

A more general history covering a much longer period can be found in Benson Lee Grayson's *Saudi-American Relations*. Essentially a diplomatic history, it covers major events and activities between the two countries up through 1980. Relying extensively on the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series for earlier relations, and more journalistic accounts for later years, the work is uneven in its depth of coverage. For the period up to 1949 there is considerable overlap with Miller's work and a less satisfying effort to synthesize the various elements of U.S. policy making. A chapter on “American Military Assistance” broadly covers the military activities of the U.S. in the Kingdom through 1953, while another on “Arms and Oil” outlined major weapons transfers and training programs for later years. A useful summary of U.S.-Saudi relations at the time of its writing, this volume is now dated.52

Though not a history per se, the many internal and external challenges facing Saudi Arabia were examined in an important book by William Quandt. In *Saudi Arabia in the 1980s: Foreign Policy, Security, and Oil* he combines a historical perspective on the Al Saud's efforts to maneuver the many pressures bearing down on the Kingdom with an assessment of the increasing challenges he envisioned in the next decade. Particularly noteworthy was his treatment of U.S.-Saudi relations and the influence he believed the U.S. could exercise in mitigating or exacerbating these challenges. On security matters, he stressed the frequent historical differences in priorities and approach between the two. For the Saudis, U.S. military assistance in the form of highly visible arms sales was in and of itself considered a strong deterrent to potential adversaries, reflecting a U.S.

51 Miller, *Search For Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1949*.
commitment without the negative consequences of any direct American force presence. In Saudi eyes, these arms sales and other military assistance reinforced the correctness of a strategy of keeping any U.S. military presence at a distance or "over the horizon." Similarly, the U.S. emphasis on striving for efficiencies and effectiveness in Saudi military modernization oftentimes resulted in recommendations for organizational changes and arrangements that entailed substantial internal political risk for the Al Saud. These were frequently rejected. The military assistance relationship was further aggravated by the recurrent gap between Saudi expectations of what military hardware they could expect from the U.S., and what in fact proved deliverable. This problem was compounded when U.S. officials were the source of these original expectations, only to be overridden by other U.S. considerations. Quant concluded that the "first order of business is to try to reach agreement on a military posture that makes sense for the Saudis and that the United States in good conscience can defend before Congress and the American public as meeting legitimate security needs." That this fundamental observation still held force after a 35-year history of military assistance spoke to the complexity and difficulty of the relationship.

The single best book on U.S.-Saudi relations covering the period from the 1930s through the early 1980s remains David Long’s *The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies*. Long produced a work both historical and analytic, examining the history along four dimensions: U.S.-Saudi Oil Relations; U.S.-Saudi Military Relations; U.S.-Saudi Economic and Commercial Relations; and U.S.-Saudi Political Relations. More than most, Long was able to effectively integrate political-military relations into a

---

53 U.S. military surveys proved to be a principal source of this problem. Pure military estimates of Saudi arms requirements for defense often far exceeded what could be delivered on politically. Aware of the survey recommendations, the Saudis then balked when the proposed arms were rejected by the U.S. Government.

54 Quandt, *Saudi Arabia in the 1980s*. For the material noted here see especially Chapter Nine, “U.S.-Saudi Relations,” pp. 139-159, quotation from p. 156.
coherent story, bringing the added dimension of being a diplomat practitioner. He comes closest to laying out the sources and dynamics of enduring mutual interests and cooperation, combined with the equally durable sources of tension, disagreement and suspicion. Arguing that “the underlying roots of ambivalence have remained remarkably stable” he summarized them as follows: U.S. ambivalence over how much of a commitment to the Kingdom it could live with without jeopardizing its policies supporting Israel; differences in how to respond to Arab radicalism, with U.S. efforts to strongly oppose it conflicting with the realities of Saudi Arabia as an Arab state; the Saudi balancing of its need for a strong outside protector with the imperative of maintaining its sovereignty and independence of action; and Saudi ambivalence about dependency on a superpower that was also providing vital support to Israel. In the area of military cooperation and assistance, Long’s chapter on U.S.-Saudi military relations provides a detailed yet concise history of major activities and programs, as well as providing context for the developments. It again is the single best chapter on the subject and essential reading.

A notable addition on the British experience in the Gulf, to include involvement with the U.S. for the period under study, is John Peterson's book *Defending Arabia*. An excellent and balanced history drawing on British official records, Peterson details the strategic rationale (oil plus air routes in support of the Imperial Empire) and the military operations of the United Kingdom dating from the early 1900s through the early 1970s. The bulk of attention is on relations with, and experiences in, the smaller Gulf shaykhdoms, the real source of British military presence on the peninsula. In its efforts to insure stability along the littoral, however, Saudi Arabia increasingly became a British concern. Initially this took the form of worries over Abdul Aziz’s desperate financial

55 Long was a Foreign Service Officer posted in Saudi Arabia and served on the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff.
situation and the instabilities this could produce. Later more political and military tensions became the focus, resulting from Riyadh's disputes with her smaller neighbors still under British protection. Peterson's rendition of the post-World War II history is also that of the U.S. supplanting British influence in the Kingdom, with Washington actively competing for influence and seeking at least commercial if not strategic advantage in Saudi Arabia at Britain's expense. But he does so with considerable attention to the complexities of the situation, including Britain's unwillingness to give up any political control despite her increasing reliance on U.S. economic and military power in the Gulf. Peterson includes chapters on the U.S. in Gulf security and American military options, but these are essentially prospective and focused on the 1980s. The real contribution is in his detailed history of British political-military activities and how these shaped both U.S.-British regional relations and Gulf security dynamics, to include the growing security role of Saudi Arabia.57

Turning to the relevant literature of the 1990s, most of it focused on the events leading up to the 1991 war with Iraq, the war itself, or evaluations of the political-military consequences of the conflict. Although of limited direct use for the historical period covered in this study, these perspectives on the conduct of the conflict and its aftermath are in fact quite revealing in what they convey about the larger history of U.S.-Saudi security relations. Therefore they merit inclusion.58

57 J.E. Peterson, Defending Arabia (London: Croom Helm, 1986). For an excellent companion military history of Royal Air Force operations in the region from 1945-1972 see Air Chief Marshal Sir David Lee's Flight from the Middle East (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1980). A publication of the Air Historical Branch of the British MoD, it includes detailed accounts of RAF operations covering the Buraimi Oasis dispute with Saudi Arabia, internal disturbances in Oman, the 1961 Kuwait crisis with Iraq, and the insurrection in the Aden Protectorate. For an excellent history of British strategic thinking, events and decision making leading up to its withdrawal from the Gulf, see Phillip Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-1968 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), published for The Royal Institute of International Affairs. Much less satisfying is J.B. Kelley’s Arabia, the Gulf and the West (Basic Books, 1980), a screed on Britain’s withdrawal and U.S. complicity in leveraging the U.K. out for its own cynical benefit.

58 It is interesting to note that despite the elevated profile of Saudi Arabia in the eighties and certainly after 1990, an historiography of American involvement in the Middle East showed that works covering the history of U.S. relations with Iran, Israel, and Egypt each still far outnumbered those handful of works identified on U.S.-Saudi relations. See Douglas Little, “Gideon’s Band: America and the Middle East since
A great deal has already been written on the events leading up to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, though it is much too early for any definitive history. The same is certainly true regarding U.S. and Saudi Arabian calculations in responding to that invasion. Following Iraq’s invasion, virtually all official accounts of the early days of August 1990 stress the Saudis’ strong desire to reach a diplomatic solution to the crisis. U.S. officials were convinced the Royal Family would engage in lengthy internal debate and seek to defer any American proposal of a military deployment. This was reflected in discussions leading up to Secretary of Defense Cheney’s meeting with King Fahd on August 6, and in the surprise—if not shock—expressed by U.S. officials when the King agreed to American troops on the spot. Past patterns certainly suggested a drawn-out and incrementally cautious opening up of the Kingdom to U.S. forces, even under the threatening conditions now posed by Iraq. Secretary Cheney’s sensitivity to historical Saudi concerns was directly addressed in his remarks to the King spoken on behalf of President Bush: American troops would stay only as long as the Saudis desired and that the U.S. was not seeking permanent bases.

As it turned out, the senior Saudi leadership, reflecting the long-held fear of American commitment in a crisis, was as much or more concerned about a small U.S. military gesture as they were the political consequences of a large deployment. Senior Saudi commander General Khaled bin Sultan argued that the real issue for the Al Saud was not whether to call on the United States for assistance—the answer was clearly yes—

---


59 Schwarzkopf relates for example how on the plane ride to Saudi Arabia he warned Secretary Cheney that the Saudis would likely proceed very cautiously and not provide an immediate answer. He also was not particularly hopeful regarding the outcome: “I felt sure that Fahd would need days to discuss these risks [of the regime coming under political attack by accepting American troops] with other members of the family before making up his mind, and that he would ultimately choose to involve us as little as possible.” General H. Norman Schwarzkoph, *It Doesn’t Take A Hero* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), pp. 303-305.
but rather “could the Americans be relied upon? Would they come in sufficient numbers and with sufficient determination to finish the job?” The result was a seeming incongruity between U.S. anxiety over how to make the proposed deployment not appear an overreaction, and Saudi agonizing over U.S. willingness to make the necessary commitment of forces. But such Saudi concerns were not new, and in fact grounded in a history of U.S. efforts to limit its security commitments to the Kingdom reaching back to the 1940s.

The accounts of the conflict also reveal the operational consequences of a history of severely limiting the degree of direct defense cooperation. A prime example, U.S. Central Command’s early contingency plans for a potential deployment to the Kingdom (prepared prior to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait) were not shared with the Saudis. The issue was considered too politically sensitive to broach with the Saudis in peacetime. Reportedly the first Saudi exposure to U.S. military plans for the defense of the Kingdom was the briefing by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell to Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar on August 3.

This lack of advanced coordination had important consequences on the early deployment of U.S. forces. The histories and personal accounts of the major participants constantly emphasize the ad hoc, uncertain, and oftentimes confused nature of much of this process. Almost all of the required activities down to the smallest logistical details had to be worked out in real time with the Saudis (oftentimes contentiously) and with virtually no pre-existing agreed-upon procedures.

---

60 Khaled bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior*, p. 26. Here is the paradox of a Saudi leadership determined to: 1.) keep the U.S. military at a distance in peacetime; 2.) aware of the importance to their survival of a U.S. willingness to come to their aid on a large scale in a crisis; and 3.) fears the U.S. may not in fact come.

61 This is not to discount bin Sultan’s efforts to present a favorable Saudi version of events. But the historical basis for the concerns is real nonetheless.


63 Accounts to this effect can be found throughout histories of the Desert Shield deployment phase. Further evidence is that a Host Nation Support agreement between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia was not formalized until November 1990. American soldiers began arriving in the Kingdom in early August.
The other striking feature of the American operational histories is the emphasis on setting up almost from scratch in the Kingdom. The critical role played by the country’s rich infrastructure and ability to provide host nation support to U.S. troops was of course widely acknowledged. But beyond this, the evidence of over four decades of security assistance is striking by its absence. LTG William Pagonis, head of logistics in Saudi Arabia, tells a story of managing the logistics of the U.S. buildup in the Kingdom as almost exclusively one of U.S. military activities supported by the extensive use of Saudi Arabian commercial and civilian infrastructure. It reads as though the U.S. was deploying rapidly to a country with which it had no prior history of military cooperation. General Schwarzkopf characterized the state of his military communications in Saudi Arabia in mid-August as “so anemic that we had to build a redundant, secure satellite-communications network from scratch.” Barely mentioned in various discussions of the buildup was the role of U.S. military advisors already in the Kingdom, in particular the roughly 300 soldiers and airman with the U.S. Military Training Mission Saudi Arabia (USMTM), established in 1953.

---

64 LTG William G. Pagonis, Moving Mountains: Lessons in Leadership and Logistics from the Gulf War (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1992). One important exception is Pagonis’ recognition of the great value of King Khalid Military City (KKMC) in the northeast, which served as a major logistics hub and support command for the U.S. But even here its historical links to the U.S. are unmentioned, described simply as “a large complex of military offices, barracks, warehouses, service areas, and commercial shops built in the 1980s for the Saudi military.” See p. 136.

65 Schwarzkopf, It Doesn’t Take A Hero, p. 314.

66 Pagonis praises the contribution of a few key individuals with USMTM backgrounds, but no organizational assistance is cited. No references to USMTM or prior security assistance programs appear in either Rick Atkinson’s Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993), or Gordon and Trainor’s The Generals’ War. For a description of USMTM’s activities during Desert Shield by a member of the organization at the time see Major Jim Dart (USAF), “USMTM: Point Guard on the Arabian Peninsula,” The DISAM Journal of International Security Assistance Management 14, no. 2 (Winter 1991/92), pp. 1-12. This is the only article that could be found on the subject. It describes a significant role played by USMTM in the early days of the deployment, to include acting as the initial cadre for setting up the CENTCOM Forward headquarters, establishing procedures at all USMTM-supported Saudi installations for the reception of incoming U.S. forces, and coordinating the use of the Saudi Arabian National Defense Operations Center to become the CENTCOM Headquarters, as well as the combined U.S.-Saudi War Room (the design and construction of which was previously managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers).
With regard to the role of Saudi Arabian military forces, their ability to provide at least a temporary shield while U.S. forces deployed—a minimal operational return reasonably expected from decades of military assistance and hundreds of billions in investment—failed to materialize. In terms of defense against air attack alone, despite a massive investment in an elaborate air defense network including American Hawk surface-to-air missiles, an integrated command, control and communications system (Peace Shield), AWACS and F-15s, one of the highest U.S. deployment priorities was getting in its own air defense, fearing there was little if any indigenous capability.

These brief examples get to the heart of the preeminent policy issue of U.S. military assistance to Saudi Arabia: How should the fifty-year history be evaluated in terms of its effectiveness? Desert Shield/Desert Storm can quite reasonably be viewed as the successful culmination point of that history. In an acute crisis Saudi Arabia was successfully defended, Iraq ejected from Kuwait, and a post-war containment policy put in place. All this was accomplished with astonishingly few coalition casualties, in no small part due to the close cooperation between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia once the crisis began. Measured against the single most important U.S. military objective, being granted rapid and fairly unconstrained military access to the Kingdom in a crisis, the contributions of decades of military assistance must be considered a singular success. The many years of military assistance activity instilled a familiarity, demonstration of American technical prowess, and level of basic confidence if not trust that assuredly influenced the Saudi decision. It is a compelling case.

It is also a very incomplete one. Another long-term objective of U.S. military assistance to Saudi Arabia was to modernize the Saudi armed forces to the point where they could exercise basic deterrence and self-defense against regional neighbors. Clearly this was not achieved. Nor was the less ambitious objective of creating a force capable of a credible initial defense while U.S. forces arrived. Furthermore, the extent to which the Saudis were forced to rely on the U.S. for its defense created additional internal political
problems for the Al Saud. The Royal Family came under renewed internal political attack, most seriously from the religious establishment and a new younger generation of Islamic opposition.\(^{67}\) Therefore when measured against the political objective of strengthening the internal stability of the regime, the need for this highly visible American protection was harmful.\(^{68}\) All of this raises legitimate questions on why the security assistance and cooperation investment did not yield more returns. The fact that despite this everything turned out well does not reduce the importance of the questions.

As a critical snap shot then, Desert Shield/Desert Storm revealed a great deal about the U.S. historical experience in using military assistance to achieve various long-term security objectives with Saudi Arabia. It also is a vivid illustration of the strategic pattern characterized here as the Dance of Swords. The mixed results encountered were, if not inevitable, the quite logical outcome of this well-established pattern. A close examination of the historical record in the following chapters bears this out.

**Organization and a Note on Terminology**

The evolution of U.S. military assistance to Saudi Arabia is explored both chronologically and thematically. Individual chapters are structured by time period. Each begins with an overview of the broad thrust of U.S. security policy toward Saudi Arabia in the larger context of regional security developments. This is followed by a focused examination of the historical record of U.S. deliberations and policy actions on security matters involving the Kingdom, to include deliberations with the Saudis. Specifically addressed is the interplay of the four political-military objectives and their concrete translation into military assistance to the Kingdom. Within this chronological

---

\(^{67}\) For background on the post-war sources of this discontent see Madawi Al-Rasheed, “Saudi Arabia’s Islamic Opposition,” *Current History* 95, no. 597 (January 1996): pp. 16-22, and Andrew Rathmell and Mustafa Alani, *Saudi Arabia: the threat from within*, Jane’s Intelligence Review, Special Report No. 12.

\(^{68}\) Islamic fervor and a willingness to directly challenge the Saudi government was certainly stimulated by the Kingdom’s palpable military vulnerability and dependency on the U.S. See R. Hrair Dekmejian, “The Rise of Political Islamism in Saudi Arabia”, *The Middle East Journal* 48, no. 4 (Autumn 1994): pp. 629-630.
narrative are thematic sections. The form this thematic organization takes for each chapter is a function of the events and material covered. Each section concludes with an assessment of how the objectives were pursued, of the constraints and tensions encountered across objectives (to include dealing with conflicting U.S.-Saudi priorities), and what this suggests about the forces driving the military assistance process.

Chapter 2 covers the time period 1942-1945 and traces early political relations, security developments and the initiation of military activities and assistance by the U.S. during the war years. Chapter 3 examines the years 1945 to mid-1950, covers the transition from world war to cold war and the first serious long-term plans and actions on military assistance. Chapter 4 takes up from mid-1950 through 1953 and focuses on efforts to formalize U.S.-Saudi military assistance through written agreements and establishing a regular military advisory group. The years 1954-1956 are covered in Chapter 5, a key stage of Arab nationalism and British decline in the region, all while the U.S. continued to seek containment of Soviet influence. Chapter 6 traces the period 1957-1960, and attempts to capture the effects of the internal power struggle and initial shift in decision making authority from King Saud to Crown Prince Faisal on U.S.-Saudi security relations. Chapter 7 examines the years 1961 through 1964, characterized as an era of Arab polarization and direct security threats to the Kingdom, most notably the war in the Yemen. It also was the period of greatest internal conflict between Saud and Faisal, culminating in King Saud’s removal from the throne. Chapter 8 summarizes the findings of the record from 1942-1964, and the relationship of those findings to subsequent phases in U.S.-Saudi Arabian security relations. It also addresses the historically important question (and enduring policy issue) of how to think about the role played by U.S. military assistance in the Saudi context and, on that basis, render some analytic judgments on the effectiveness of the enterprise.

On the topic of effectiveness, a very useful model can be found in the essay by Millett et al on analyzing the effectiveness of military organizations. In their analysis
they looked at military activity across four levels: political, strategic, operational and tactical. One of their fundamental observations is that measures of effectiveness and performance evaluations depend heavily on the level of organization being analyzed and its particular objectives. Consequently “one must assess military effectiveness separately at each level of activity.” Also described are tensions, conflicts and trade-offs among the levels linked to the insightful observation “that the prerequisites for effectiveness at one level may conflict with those at another.” The result is a much more complex appreciation of how one needs to define and measure military effectiveness.  

Certainly a similar type of evaluation applies to the political-military objectives pursued by the U.S. through its military assistance to Saudi Arabia. There is no singular answer to the question of how effective an instrument military assistance has been. The historical record provides the means for making more sophisticated assessments by revealing these many dimensions.

The time period 1942-1964 was selected for a number of reasons. First, it represents the period most accessible to primary documents and therefore amenable to the type of detailed historical analysis of the evolution of U.S. military assistance. Second, it spans the policies of five U.S. administrations and the rule of three very different Saudi kings. Third, there were a number of major regional developments during this period directly bearing on U.S.-Saudi relations. All provide a rich and varied context for tracing the evolution of U.S.-Saudi security relations and the resulting dynamics of U.S. strategy. This variation in decision makers and developments is essential given the intent of this history is to ultimately make observations on the general patterns of U.S. military assistance and security strategy that transcend unique conditions, personalities and events. The purpose of the final chapter is to offer some judgments in this regard.

---

A note on terminology is in order. Over the years both practitioners and academics have struggled to define and classify the many dimensions of U.S. military cooperation with other countries. The most commonly used term is “security assistance,” an umbrella designation encompassing a large and disparate number of activities including Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Military Education and Training (IMET), Peacekeeping Operations (PKO), Excess Defense Articles (EDA), Leased Defense Articles (LDA), Direct Commercial Sales (DCA) and a variety of non-military economic assistance programs designed to help offset the burdens of defense spending. The definitional problem is compounded by changes over time in accepted terminology and categories. Furthermore various parts of the government frequently interpret categories differently. Political needs to present a particular image of assistance can also effect what is included and where it appears in program accounts. In sum, when examining a lengthy period of activities in this area there is little to be gained and a great deal to be lost in striving for a definitional precision that does not exist. Indeed efforts to categorize get in the way of telling the broader story, an analytic liability more than an asset.

This definitional morass can largely be avoided by focusing instead on the objectives themselves and the instruments used, regardless of particular designations. This history is primarily focused on how military instruments were used, as opposed to economic or political ones, to support U.S. security objectives with Saudi Arabia. Of

---


71 For a synopsis of this history see The Management of Security Assistance, pp. 1-13 to 1-22.

72 As a case in point a “defense support” category was established during the 1950s under DoD cognizance that in effect was used for more general development and economic assistance to countries. This was done in part to link less popular foreign aid activities to defense-related programs. See Edgar S. Furniss, Jr., Some Perspectives On American Military Assistance (Princeton University, Center of International Studies, June 1957), Memorandum No. 13, pp. 4-5, 24-25.
those military instruments, long-term activities and programs based on formal negotiations and plans are most relevant and heavily covered. However, military activities resulting from crises or specific regional developments that fell outside of established assistance arrangements are included where they are deemed to have had a significant impact on overall security relations. One example is the deployment of U.S. aircraft and other military support to the Kingdom in 1963 in response to border incursions during the North Yemen conflict. This intervention directly contributed to subsequent U.S. involvement in the long-term design and construction of the Saudi air defense system. By examining the dominant long-term and crisis-response military assistance activities spanning the time period, the core patterns of policy behavior are captured.

Within the text the terms “security assistance” and “security cooperation” are used simply to imply the broad range of political, economic and military intercourse between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia designed to bolster basic security interests. “Military assistance” applies to the military component of this intercourse as defined above and is the focal point of the historical analysis presented here.
CHAPTER 2

THE DANCE BEGINS: WORLD WAR TWO AND EMERGING SECURITY TIES

_We Muslims have the one, true faith, but Allah gave you the iron which is inanimate, amoral, neither prohibited nor mentioned in the Qur’an. We will use your iron, but leave our faith alone._

— Abdul Aziz to William Eddy

Overview

The requirements to wage global war brought the U.S. and its military to the Middle East and Persian Gulf. The requirements of survival helped bring the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United States. The result was the initiation of a security relationship that would slowly grow during the war and bring U.S. military assistance to the Kingdom. It was also during these early days that the distinct features of military assistance in the U.S.-Saudi setting emerged, features that would form a pattern throughout subsequent decades.

From the outset the U.S. used military assistance to pursue the four objectives toward the Kingdom identified in Chapter 1. First was that of garnering political influence with the King and Royal Family. Second was bolstering the security and stability of the Al Saud regime. Third was securing U.S. military access to the Kingdom. Fourth was improving the military capabilities of the Saudi Arabian armed forces themselves. The pursuit of political influence was the dominant consideration in military assistance activities during this period, though the U.S. military had operational interests in the use of Saudi territory and airspace.
All of the objectives had to be pursued in the face of royal sensitivity to the extent and visibility of U.S. military assistance. The Al Saud constantly had to balance between cooperation with distancing. King Abdul Aziz al Saud clearly saw a need for U.S. military assistance and actively pursued it. But ever present was the King’s concern over political and religious opposition to military cooperation with the west and exploitation of this by his enemies. It was imperative that he always retain both the appearance and reality of absolute sovereignty. These considerations set practical constraints on how far and fast the Al Saud could go in allowing a U.S. military presence in the country. So too did concerns over how to grow a military that could effectively impose the King’s will and defend the Kingdom without threatening his rule. These same constraints, however, were also used cleverly by Abdul Aziz as points of leverage in his negotiations with the U.S.

Another major feature of this period was the rise of a U.S.-U.K.-Saudi triangular relationship. Early U.S. military assistance activities and the factors motivating them can only be understood in this larger context. The war years brought about a distinct shift in U.S. attitudes—and later British—on the relative roles of Washington and London in the affairs of the Kingdom and national interests there. Responsibility for the security of Saudi Arabia became an increasing source of competition between London and Washington.\(^1\) U.S. military assistance became a significant tool in that competition.

As part of this triangle, Abdul Aziz had to walk a careful line between his now expanding relations with the U.S. and his long history with Great Britain, “my friends the British,” as he frequently referred to them. London continued as the preeminent power in the Gulf, in a commanding position to influence his principal rivals the Hashemites in

---

\(^1\) One noted author divided the war years into two distinct phases. First, from 1941 to U.S. extension of Lend-Lease in 1943, was a period of U.S. support for the dominant British position in the Kingdom. “American interests were defined primarily by those of Great Britain” as part of the larger Allied war effort. Second, from 1943-1945, U.S. national interests came to dominate. Aaron David Miller, *Search For Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1949* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), p. xv.
Transjordan and Iraq, and the principal financial benefactor of the King. Any growing ties to the U.S. had to take these factors into account. Military assistance was no exception and became a source of tension between the three countries during the war years. Here again Abdul Aziz sought to exploit these tensions and his ‘vulnerability’ to advantage.

The World War II period provides insights into the origins of U.S. military assistance to the Kingdom. More importantly, the period illuminates the forces shaping the process of military assistance. Those forces and the patterns they produced would prove enduring. It is with this judgment in mind that the study now turns to the war years.

**The Strategic Setting**

As the Second World War transformed America's role in the world and its view of global relations, Saudi Arabia was among the profoundly affected. In the span of a few short years the desert kingdom moved from the relative obscurity of British novels and oilmens' maps to becoming a major strategic concern of the United States. While the discovery of vast oil deposits alone undoubtedly would have influenced future U.S.-Saudi relations, the forces unleashed by the war set a course of strategic cooperation far more powerful and enduring than commercial interests alone would have dictated. Accordingly any historical understanding of U.S.-Saudi Arabian security relations, and of the military assistance component of this, must begin with this critical wartime background.

The U.S. war effort in the Middle East theater consisted essentially of support to Britain in her northeastern Africa campaign against Rommel, general support to British forces throughout the Middle East, and the supply of war material to Russia via the

---

2 The British subsidized the King since World War I, first for his support against the Turks, later to back Britain’s position in the Gulf. This support continued throughout the Second World War.
Persian Gulf. U.S. involvement began in 1941 following the approval of Lend-Lease to Britain and Russia. The War Department established the United States Military North African Mission under Brigadier General Russell L. Maxwell based in Cairo, responsible for Lend-Lease activities to the British. To the east and with a much greater focus on providing supplies to Russia via the "Persian Corridor" was a second support organization, the United States Military Iranian Mission under Colonel Raymond A. Wheeler, headquartered in Baghdad. Both missions began functioning in November 1941.

With America’s formal entry into the war as a belligerent, demands on the U.S. military in the region grew and led to the establishment of the U.S. Army Forces in the Middle East (USAFIME) on June 12, 1942. Headquartered in Cairo and commanded by General Maxwell, this command absorbed both the North African and Iranian Missions. Its principal charter remained material support to British and Russian forces, although U.S. Army Air Forces attached to the command conducted extensive bombing and fighter operations as part of Britain's Egypt-Libya campaign. USAFIME would later have responsibility for U.S. military activity in Saudi Arabia.

Following the Allied victory at El Alamein in November 1942 and the launching of Operation TORCH in western North Africa, USAFIME became a secondary combat command in support of Mediterranean operations. It also supported the expanded activities of the Persian Corridor re-supply effort, now increasingly born by the U.S.

---

3 This mission was established following the simultaneous invasion of Iran by Britain and Russia in August 1941. The invasion was triggered by Iran's official neutrality in the war, Teheran’s prohibition on use of its territory for resupply to Russia, and Reza Shah Pahlavi’s refusal to expel German advisors. The Anglo-Russo occupation led to the abdication of Reza Shah in favor of his son Muhammad Reza in September and the opening up of Iran as a supply route to Russia.


5 The original U.S. Military Iranian Mission was changed to the Iran-Iraq Service Command on 24 June 1942 and subordinated to HQ/USAFIME. On 13 August 1942 with the greatly expanded Services of Supply (SOS) Plan, the Iran-Iraq Service Command became the Persian Gulf Service Command (PGSC), still under USAFIME. As its responsibilities and the need for greater local decision making authority grew, the PGSC was re-designated the Persian Gulf Command (PGC) on 10 December 1943. The Commander PGC was no longer responsible to USAFIME, instead reporting directly to the War Department through the
As the war increasingly shifted to the European and Pacific theaters, the military value of the Middle East and Gulf was principally that of logistics base and lines-of-communications. Construction activities and war material continued to flow into Iran. The Air Transport Command (ATC) regularly used its now well-established air routes to Africa, the Middle East and Asia that originated with Lend-Lease in 1941 (see Map 2.1). With the final victories over Germany and Japan, attention moved to closing down these Lend-Lease pipelines, returning troops from the theater to the U.S., and shutting down the commands.

In the larger scope of U.S. Middle East and Gulf operations Saudi Arabia’s role was in fact marginal. Yet a combination of commercial, political, military and long-term strategic interests emerged during this period that would transform relations.

**Saudi Arabia Emerges As A U.S. Strategic Interest: Oil and Overflight**

Throughout much of the early war period, certainly prior to direct U.S. entry into the war, the U.S. government considered the Middle East in general and the Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula area in particular to be the security purview of Great Britain. Although Saudi Arabia was exceptional to the U.S. in commercial terms with the California Arabian Standard Oil Company (CASOC) holding the oil concession there, the

---


In an interesting example of airfield cooperation and division of responsibilities, the Engineering Branch of the Persian Gulf Command (PGC) provided the British with plans for the modification and expansion of those various RAF fields in the Gulf region which the Air Transport Command also used. A PGC officer was stationed at each of these fields in an advisory/liaison capacity only, as any actual construction was to be carried out by the British. In its listing of airfields used by the PGC, none were located in Saudi Arabia. V.H. Pentlarge, *History of the Persian Gulf Command*, Vol I, Administrative History, Chapter 8, Section 6, “Notes on PGC Air Fields and Air Service Responsibility,” and Part III, “Construction,” Headquarters, Persian Gulf Command, U.S. Army, Office of Technical Information (Washington D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, undated).
American government looked to Britain for the political and certainly physical protection of the Kingdom. The first significant effort to engage the U.S. government in Saudi security affairs is instructive in this regard. Initiated not by Washington nor by American strategic considerations, and containing no military assistance dimension, it was an effort by CASOC to convince the U.S. government to come to the financial assistance of Abdul Aziz. The war had cut sharply into the King’s income as both duties on imports and pilgrimage revenues dropped. This loss, combined with serious financial

---

7 A subsidiary of Standard Oil of California (SOCAL), CASOC would be renamed the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) in January 1944.
mismanagement, lead to rather dire predictions of domestic instability and even regional chaos. Even if the King were able to weather these storms, CASOC officials worried that there was little administrative apparatus or even concern for the Kingdom’s future beyond Abdul Aziz. In the absence of a more stable, less personalized source of administration the successor regime could prove very fragile.

Not surprisingly CASOC was driven by financial considerations. By 1940 CASOC officials were already being pressed hard by the King to increase royalty advances. As both near-term dollar costs and longer-term fears of its future operations in the Kingdom mounted, CASOC officials became increasingly convinced of the value of direct financial assistance to the King from the U.S. government. Working directly through the President and the receptive audience at the State Department's Division of Near Eastern Affairs (NE), CASOC and other oil industry representatives developed a number of proposals in 1941 for securing direct government assistance to the King. These initial efforts failed in significant part due to Roosevelt's view that Saudi Arabia was still essentially a British concern, despite his recognition of growing U.S. economic interests in the Kingdom. It is worth noting that arguments for the strategic importance of Saudi oil were non-existent at this time.

After this decision in August 1941 to not extend financial assistance to the Kingdom, supporters of the King and of closer U.S.-Saudi ties looked for other avenues. This first took the form of a proposed agricultural mission to the Kingdom. The original

---


9 An excellent history of these early efforts at securing economic support for Saudi Arabia can be found in Aaron David Miller, *Search For Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1949* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), Chapter 2, pp. 32-44. For original documentation on the debate within the U.S. government and the decision to not extend support at the time see the Foreign Relations of the United States series (hereafter referred to as *FRUS*), 1941, *Vol III, The British Commonwealth, The Near East and Africa*, pp. 624-646.

10 Irvine H. Anderson, *ARAMCO, The United States and Saudi Arabia: A Study of the Dynamics of Foreign Oil Policy 1933-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 33. As the author notes this was not surprising given that the U.S. remained a net exporter of petroleum, concerns over depletion were not widespread, and the full extent of Saudi reserves were unknown.
genesis for this came from earlier discussions between Abdul Aziz and Karl S. Twitchell, a private sector engineer and an old hand in Saudi Arabia who by now was also the King’s informal representative in the United States.\textsuperscript{11} A long time proponent of Saudi Arabia's commercial and strategic importance to the U.S., he also proved adept at garnering advocates inside the Division of Near Eastern Affairs. At the behest of the King, Twitchell had been researching agricultural and engineering techniques used by the U.S. Department of the Interior. This was brought to the attention of Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, who in turn raised the possibility of sending a team of technical experts to the Kingdom with Secretary of State Cordell Hull.

With the President's previous decision to reject direct financial assistance the agricultural mission took on new importance. While falling well short of hoped-for monetary support, a government-sponsored agricultural mission to Saudi Arabia could convey U.S. interest in the Kingdom’s future and help soften the financial aid blow. The Division of Near Eastern Affairs argued this would serve as a significant show of goodwill to the King and assist in keeping the door open to state-to-state diplomacy.

Following entry into the war, Washington’s strategic calculations as to Saudi Arabia's political and material value to the U.S. became more pronounced. However, despite the growing appreciation of the role of oil in military operations and in national military power, calculations focused on protecting the long-term commercial economic interests of the American oil concession. This meant supporting Britain's dominant political position in Saudi Arabia which the Administration had no intention of challenging. Early U.S. assistance policies were therefore coordinated with Britain and focused on economic aid to alleviate the financial crisis of the King. It was hoped this would reduce the prospects for internal instability posing the greatest immediate threat to the oil concession. The U.S. continued to resist any direct financial assistance, but a

\textsuperscript{11} Twitchell was involved in the initial discussions with Abdul Aziz over oil concessions dating back to the early 1930s, resulting in the original concession to SOCAL/CASOC in May 1933.
small portion of the funds provided to Britain through Lend-Lease were in fact designated for Saudi Arabia. These U.S. contributions were in part motivated by the desire to assist Britain in its payment of subsidies to the Kingdom, subsidies that were coming under mounting pressure from the Foreign Office.

Yet as time wore on it became increasingly clear that separating economic from political interest and influence was not possible. The Division of Near Eastern Affairs was both at the forefront of this recognition and the principal advocate of expanding U.S. political clout. For some time the Division had been suspicious of British motives and uncomfortable with U.S. deference to London. Its now well-developed distrust of the British was taking greater hold among decision makers.¹² And as U.S. government financial assistance grew, so too did the desire to ensure it would effectively contribute to U.S. interests. This meant more active involvement in the Kingdom's financial management affairs, a principal focus of the Division. In the absence of such involvement, it was argued the internal situation might never stabilize and the concession never be secured. Accordingly, the King's dependence on Great Britain in this area had to be broken. Adding to this activist line were growing expressions of concern that Great Britain’s position in the region was weakening. Its diminishing ability to secure the Gulf was now viewed as threatening to U.S. interests there. These converging developments set the stage for a U.S.-U.K. competition for political influence with the King and began the shift in security interests and ties to Saudi Arabia. U.S. military assistance would soon become part of this competition and an important instrument in fostering links to the Saudi leadership.

¹² For background on the sources of distrust toward the British, including the role played by CASOC see Miller, *Search For Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1949*, pp. 50-51. At a higher level, the emerging U.S.-U.K. competition reflected sharp differences between “British ideas of ‘colonial development and welfare’ and American conceptions of ‘independence,’” the latter posing a direct threat to Empire. See Wm. Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 183.
Additional impetus came from direct military considerations once the U.S. became a belligerent. Considerations over Saudi oil now began to take on strategic significance. These emerging strategic interests, however, remained only vaguely defined, as did arguments regarding the importance to the allied cause of Abdul Aziz’s political stature as a leader in the Muslim World. More concrete were emerging operational military factors involving the potential use of Saudi airspace and territory to support U.S. global transport operations. In early 1942, the first U.S. military interest was expressed by the Army Air Corps. The Air Corps wanted to explore opportunities for establishing airfields in Saudi Arabia to support its ferrying operations. It was presumed that the Saudis would expect a quid pro quo for granting any such base rights, and the proposed agricultural mission now represented an element in this calculation. Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles made explicit this connection between the goodwill engendered by the mission and potential future U.S. military requirements in the Kingdom in his request to President Roosevelt seeking approval for the project.\textsuperscript{13}

Here was the earliest example of the linkages between the political and military domains of evolving U.S. policy toward Saudi Arabia. The agricultural mission was initially set up without any military considerations, as a way to stay in the political influence game and indirectly support the oil concession. Once the operational military dimension arose, however, the agricultural mission also became an instrument for helping to open up this possibility. The mission can therefore rightly be seen as the first U.S. government-sponsored activity aimed in part at gaining military access to the Saudi Kingdom. It also established an early precedent for linking U.S. military access requirements to some type of quid pro quo to the Saudis. U.S. military assistance soon became a most sought after form of compensation.

The President’s formal approval of the agricultural mission came on February 13, 1942. With an estimated March arrival in the Kingdom, it was to be composed of two government technical experts under the direction of the head of the mission, Karl Twitchell. In late February Acting Secretary of State Sumner Welles informed Minister to Saudi Arabia Alexander Kirk of the War Department's intent to attach an officer to the trip for purposes of conducting an airfield survey.\textsuperscript{14} In a March 23 communication to the War Department, State noted that upon learning of War’s interest in airfields in Saudi Arabia it had taken certain steps, to include dispatch of the agricultural mission, "to ensure the most favorable possible reception of a request for air facilities." State then requested concrete guidance from the War Department regarding the air facilities it desired, noting that this was necessary for upcoming negotiations between Minister Kirk and Abdul Aziz on the issue. State also solicited the War Department's views regarding extending Lend-Lease aid to Saudi Arabia, then under consideration by the Administration.\textsuperscript{15}

The State Department’s approach was two-pronged. It clearly wanted to assist the War Department in its military interest in Saudi Arabia, but also enlist the War Department’s support for Lend-Lease, a potentially powerful political lever. Arguably if the U.S. military had real operational requirements in Saudi Arabia, this would justify extending Lend-Lease. The goodwill of the King would become an increasingly important commodity in very concrete terms. This illustrated the use of potential U.S. military requirements to help push the larger political objective of helping the King, thereby enhancing U.S. political influence. The State Department’s most pressing concern was the precarious future of American oil interests and Washington’s very

\textsuperscript{14} Kirk was Minister in Egypt but also accredited as nonresident Minister to Saudi Arabia.
limited political leverage inside the Kingdom. This was the threat to be countered and emanated more from London than any Axis power.\textsuperscript{16}

However the War Department's reply of April 11 was noncommittal on all counts. While noting that air routes across Saudi Arabia would reduce ferrying distances for short-range aircraft between Khartoum and Karachi, and provide a more secure route than the present one from Cairo, the specifics of field selection would have to await an on-site survey. More interesting politically, the War Department also advocated that the British Chiefs of Staff be responsible for any negotiations with the Saudi Government: “Since Saudi Arabia lies within the area of British military responsibility, it is felt that any agreement with the Government of Saudi Arabia for the installation, operation and defense of air staging fields in that country should be negotiated by the United Kingdom.” And while the War Department had no objections to any financial aid to the Saudi government, it did not favor Lend-Lease assistance in the form of war material.\textsuperscript{17}

At this stage of affairs the War Department's interest in attaining military access to Saudi Arabia was not particularly high if measured by its willingness to push the matter and back it with resources. This is not surprising given the many other demands then being placed on the War Department and Lend-Lease war supplies. Also, the operational military value of having air access to Saudi Arabia was in fact quite limited. The South Atlantic/Middle East air bridge route served three principal functions. First was to support British forces in northeast Africa (Egypt-Libya campaign) and then more broadly Operation Torch and the wider North Africa campaign. Clearly this did not require transit further east than Cairo. Second was to provide transit routes for supply lines to British forces in the Gulf region and to supply Russian forces via the Persian Corridor. But here the overwhelming volume of supplies moved by sea. Air transport as

\textsuperscript{17} Stimson to Hull, 11 April 1942, 890F.7962/5, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
required was by established routes from Cairo to British-controlled airfields in Iraq at Lydda and Habbaniya, from there on to Basrah or Teheran. Third, the air bridge provided air routing on to India and the Far East. Existing air routes were run from Basrah to Karachi, or to Karachi via routes running from Africa across the southernmost portion of the Arabian Peninsula, the Aden Protectorate and Sultanate of Muscat and Oman. In none of these instances was it necessary or even beneficial to traverse Saudi Arabia. Finally, it was readily apparent that the War Department was still deferring to the British Ministry of Defense on military matters involving Saudi Arabia. There was no indication of any desire for a direct U.S. undertaking, let alone anything suggesting a purposefully competitive venture aimed at challenging British influence.

In submitting guidance to Minister Kirk on this issue, Welles pushed a more political and unilateral approach. He suggested that while the War Department's view of the British Chiefs of Staff as negotiators "seems broadly logical in view of the division of the war effort," careful thought should be given to the alternative of direct U.S. negotiations. Citing independent U.S. Army supply operations in the region and more significantly "the important political factors which would undoubtedly occur to the Saudi Arabs in connection with a proposed British military establishment in their country, the question arises whether, if the plan for obtaining airfields is to have a reasonable chance of success, it should not be put forward and worked out purely and simply as a United States project." As author David Long observes, the State Department was out in front of the War Department in promoting a U.S.-only military effort toward the Kingdom. Indeed at this stage the military factors were clearly being pushed more by the diplomats for political ends than by the military to meet operational needs.

---

18 The one apparent exception was the ability to reduce the length of the legs between Khartoum and Bahrain, Basrah and Karachi by flying over central Arabia. This would result in a reduction of 713 miles over the then-present route through Cairo, Lydda, and Habbaniyah.


In the absence of definitive guidance from the War Department, and given the hesitation of the State Department to pursue airfield access under British auspices, the issue was not raised by Minister Kirk when he presented his credentials and the Agricultural Mission to the King on May 11. No War Department officer accompanied the mission as originally planned. However in a separate conversation with the Saudi Finance Minister, a non-Royal but influential figure named Abdullah Suleiman, Kirk was able to broach the topic indirectly. He was surprised to hear the Minister say that there was no objection to U.S. overflight of Saudi Arabia or even bases on the eastern coast so long as specified zones were excluded.\footnote{Kirk to Hull, 19 May 1942, FRUS, 1942, Vol IV, The Near East and Africa, p. 570.} This statement was especially interesting in light of Saudi Arabia's continuing status as a "neutral" in the war and non-recipient of U.S. Lend-Lease.

The State Department quickly passed this information on to the War Department. In June War suggested that State explore obtaining permission to overfly central Saudi Arabia for non-stop flights by the Army’s Air Transport Command (ATC) from Khartoum to Bahrain and Basrah, as well as possible landing fields for short-range aircraft.\footnote{The Army's Ferrying Command was renamed the Air Transport Command in June 1942 and given sweeping responsibilities to ferry aircraft, personnel, material and mail throughout all theaters, as well as controlling, operating and maintaining facilities on all air routes outside the U.S. falling under Army Air Force responsibility. For the early history of ATC see The Army Air Forces in World War II, Vol. One, Plans and Early Operations, January 1939 To August 1942, Chapter 9, “The Early Development of Air Transport and Ferrying,” pp. 310-365, Office of Air Force History (The University of Chicago Press, 1948).} Barring significant financial assistance to the King as well as protection against Axis attack, Secretary of State Hull was pessimistic of any success. But Minister Kirk and the Chargé d'affairs in Jeddah, James Moose, were more hopeful and Hull instructed them to pursue the issue.\footnote{On 1 May 1942 the United States opened a legation at Jeddah with James Moose appointed as resident Chargé d'affairs. Kirk remained as Minister based in Cairo. The resident Chargé d'affairs was not elevated to Minister status until July 1943. Jeddah was Saudi Arabia’s diplomatic capital.} In recognition of Britain’s political weight, Kirk recommended that they coordinate their activities with the resident British Minister,
highly regarded by the Saudi leadership. Following a series of joint meetings involving the British Minister, Moose, the Saudi Finance Minister and Foreign Minister representative Shaykh Yusuf Yassin, the King stated that he would not object to nonstop flights across Saudi Arabia along designated routes. 24 But in revealing early anxiety over sovereignty and domestic opposition to any western military presence in the Kingdom, the King required that the planes either fly over singly or in small groups and as high as practicable. Furthermore only overflight, not landing rights, were to be permitted. And in the first example of the Saudis efforts to have “plausible deniability” when it came to U.S. military activity, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs added that the King not only “wished to observe the utmost secrecy with regard to the matter” but also “under certain circumstances he might find it necessary to deny that permission to fly across Arabia had been asked or granted, or even to request an expression of regret over ‘violation’ of Saudi territory.” With these caveats approval was granted on August 29, 1942. 25

American involvement in defense of the Kingdom remained outside the U.S. purview—and U.S. military interest. Just as with raising fears of internal instability, the earliest concerns over the physical protection of the Kingdom again came from CASOC. In 1942 these oil representatives expressed growing worries over the vulnerability of the oil fields and installations at Dhahran owing to the fact that only Saudi Arabians

24 Moose’s memoranda of these July meetings are interesting not just in terms of the substance of the negotiations, but in Moose’s observations regarding the difficult personality and dealings with Sheikh Yusuf Yassin. Moose later commented that Yassin’s value to the King “appears to consist of pointing out all the reasons why a given course should not be pursued. Shaikh Yusuf is against practically everything.” Moose to Hull, 29 July 1942, 890F.7962/26, and Moose to Hull, 20 September 1942, 890F.00/78 PS/VGG, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia. Yassin was a Syrian who settled in the Kingdom in the early 1920s. He became a key adviser to the King and more influential than many Saudi princes. As later chapters will show, he also was a major antagonist in U.S.-Saudi relations.

25 Moose to Hull, 29 August 1942, FRUS, 1942, Vol IV, The Near East and Africa, p. 575, and Moose to Hull, 8 September 1942, 890F.7962/34, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia. Such “plausible deniability” would also be useful in dealing with challenges from any Axis powers given Saudi Arabia’s neutral status. But internal and local regional criticisms were the dominant considerations of the King.
equipped with rifles were available for protection. 26 Yet the War Department stated quite clearly that it had "at present no plans to send any forces or equipment to the region." 27 Nor according to the State Department had the War Department developed any "matured plan for taking over the defense or operation of Dhahran." 28 Informal plans were being considered for the denial and destruction of the Saudi fields in the event of imminent military threat (as well as those in Bahrain), but even here the planning effort was modest. With the region still considered an area of British military responsibility and in the face of many more urgent demands, the War Department saw little reason to make protecting the Kingdom—or even narrow American oil interests there—a priority. By the end of 1942 then U.S. political and military interest in Saudi Arabia was growing, but direct military involvement in the form of any military assistance remained non-existent.

**Beginnings of the Military Assistance Relationship**

Abdul Aziz was constantly searching for ways to strengthen his regime. Among them was building up the perception, if not the reality, of having powerful allies. In doing so, he unquestionably placed greatest emphasis on securing financial assistance for the Kingdom. Second was his interest in the delivery of material goods, to include military hardware. Once U.S. Lend-Lease was extended to Saudi Arabia, military assistance would become a major aspect of U.S.-Saudi wartime relations. The first negotiations on military arms and training assistance well illustrate the multiple objectives being pursued by the U.S. and the constraints operating on all parties.

By early 1943 the State Department concluded that U.S. interests in Saudi Arabia could not be advanced without extending Lend-Lease to Riyadh. As the U.S. military

---

26 Memorandum of Conversation, 16 April 1942, 890F.6363, STANDARD OIL COMPANY/139, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
desire for access grew, the strategic importance of Saudi oil was also now gaining acceptance throughout the U.S. government. In January the Secretary of State, writing to Lend-Lease Administrator Edward Stettinius, concluded that it would become "difficult to obtain additional privileges from the Government of Saudi Arabia unless we are prepared to furnish certain direct assistance." Stettinius in turn sent a memorandum to President Roosevelt recommending that Saudi Arabia be deemed vital to the defense of the U.S. and hence eligible for Lend-Lease. This the President did on February 18, 1943. It was also decided that any aid extended would now be direct from the U.S. to Saudi Arabia. This latter development was quite significant. Prior to this time U.S. economic support for Saudi Arabia was provided directly to the British under Lend-Lease, who then channeled it to Saudi Arabia in conjunction with British assistance. State Department personnel, especially those in Saudi Arabia, considered this practice detrimental in that it undervalued the American role in Saudi eyes and conveyed subordination to British authority. Now the U.S. could compete for influence on an even footing. Military assistance would soon be at the center of this new competition.

Despite this direct line of request, the Saudi Government's initial plan to seek U.S. arms under Lend-Lease was first vetted through the British in April. Upon being informed of this, the State Department apprised both the British and Saudi governments that any future Saudi requests for U.S. military supplies should come directly through U.S. authorities. In July, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs Shaykh Yusuf Yassin submitted a request to both the British and U.S. Legations that included rifles, tanks, armored cars, planes, and antiaircraft guns, along with repair gear and technicians to instruct Saudis in use of all this equipment. The request was of a very general nature,

---

simply listing equipment with no description as to how that equipment would be utilized or why it was needed. Nor did it include numbers.  

The King's military capabilities were a hodgepodge. An estimate by the U.S. Legation in Cairo done in 1940 described the forces as follows: A standing or uniformed Army of about 2,500 men, trained by ex-Turkish officers and reportedly not highly regarded by the King; 100,000 bedouins that could be mobilized from local tribes under conditions of war; equipment consisting of outdated rifles, machine guns and field pieces from British, Italian and Polish sources; and one dozen mostly commercial aircraft based at an Italian-built airfield in Jeddah with ten native pilots under the direction of a Russian. The Saudis did not have a navy, air force, or ship-based coast guard. As to the quality of arms existing in 1943, “All military equipment now on hand would doubtless be considered junk in any western country.” Along its northern frontier Saudi Arabia’s motorized military equipment was estimated at about a dozen station wagons, a dozen trucks, and about an equal number of armored cars.

When pressed on quantities of weapons required Shaykh Yusuf replied that any number available could be used, but that equipment for a war strength of 100,000 men was needed. Given that the State Department estimated the size of the Saudi Arabian Army at 2-3000 uniformed soldiers, with tribal forces in the range of 40-100,000 men, it must be assumed that Shaykh Yusuf’s reply included all of the tribal forces as well as the regular army, excluding the King’s personal bodyguard.

32 The list of military aid and equipment requested is in Moose to Hull, 9 July 1943, FRUS, 1943, Vol IV, The Near East and Africa, p. 873.
33 Cairo Legation's No. 2021, 11 March 1940, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
35 Moose to Hull, 31 August 1943, 890F.24/57, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
37 Kirk to State Department in response to War Department request for information on Saudi military, 28 November 1942, 890F.20/6, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
This broadly written request was forwarded by each legation to their respective governments and then placed before the Joint Anglo-American Munitions Assignments Boards. In the deliberations that followed the British Foreign Office made clear its concerns over providing any armaments to Abdul Aziz above those "strictly necessary for the maintenance of internal order." Citing past British efforts to control weapons in the region, London expressed reservations over political uncertainty in the Kingdom following Abdul Aziz’s death, fears of alarming neighboring countries, and potential diversion of weapons to Palestine. The British concluded that for 1943 a maximum of 50 light reconnaissance vehicles, 500 light machine guns, and 10,000 rifles and ammunition be provided.\footnote{U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom Frederick Winant to Hull, 3 August 1943, \textit{FRUS}, 1943, Vol IV, \textit{The Near East and Africa}, pp. 885-886.}

The U.S. government was meanwhile seeking more precise information on Saudi Arabia's military requirements, the Saudi request itself clearly being insufficient. Nor were British recommendations alone adequate for determining appropriate U.S. responses, either materially or politically. The War Department therefore tasked the Commander, USAFIME, with gathering more detailed military information. USAFIME in turn submitted a request for greater specificity from the Saudis. In response Moose quickly cabled the Minister in Cairo pointing out that "neither Shaikh Yusuf nor anybody in the Saudi Arabian Government is competent to make out a list of the material which they need." In Moose's view this should be done by a U.S. military officer. In addition to bringing military expertise to the Saudi assessment, this would also insure any proposed deliveries would not create "a military disequilibrium between Saudi Arabia, Trans-Jordan and Iraq." Further efforts to push the Saudis themselves on specifics would likely result in excessive estimates, requests for unneeded items, and errors of omission.
Moose strongly recommended that this be conveyed to USAFIME Headquarters in Cairo.  

Following discussions between the Legation at Cairo and USAFIME Headquarters, Major General Ralph Royce, Commanding General USAFIME, dispatched Colonel Alton Howard to Saudi Arabia on September 15 for a five day assessment. This was to be based largely on existing information provided by the American and British Legations there. Given the sketchy knowledge of Saudi military capabilities, a serious military survey of Saudi requirements was estimated to require months, clearly something that would not be undertaken at the time. Consequently, Colonel Howard's visit was a very superficial first estimate. He recommended equipment and training for one 3,000-man motorized brigade and twelve airplanes, along with appropriate training instructors. He also advised that a formal survey be conducted by a U.S. military mission in support of future military assistance to the Kingdom under Lend-Lease. This last recommendation was already under consideration at USAFIME. In a meeting with the King on October 1, Moose raised the issue of inadequate knowledge on Saudi armed forces and the proposed solution of a military mission to the Kingdom, which the King immediately approved.  

Though unclear at the time, this was an important first step in the process of institutionalizing U.S.-Saudi military assistance activities.

The King’s internal security system at the time consisted of a multi-tiered structure based on political allegiance and four forces: an essentially land-based Coast Guard, the Regular Army, the Police Force and Camelear Scouts. Each town of 1000 or more population was governed by Amirs personally selected by the King for their complete loyalty to him. These Amirs had direct responsibility for maintaining law and order in their areas. Depending on the size and importance of the territory, each Amir

---

had under his command a specified number of forces drawn from the four categories. Upon alert of a disturbing event such as unauthorized movement of a tribe, the Amir could independently use his Coast Guard troops and Camelear Scouts to rectify the problem. In the event these forces proved insufficient, he was required to call on the King via wireless to request the King’s approval to call out the local Regular Army unit under his command, as well as request Regular Army forces from other districts if required. Based on the seriousness of the disturbance, the King would decide at what point command should shift from the local Amir to central authority, most likely one of the King’s sons. In extreme cases, Bedouin Nejdi tribesmen could also be mobilized.\footnote{Nils E. Lind, “Organization for Law and Order in Saudi Arabia,” American Legation, Jidda, Saudi Arabia, 10 November 1945, in Ibrahim al-Rashid, ed., \textit{Saudi Arabia Enters the Modern World, Part II} (Salisbury, N.C.: Documentary Publications, 1980), pp. 9-14. This is one of the earliest American descriptions of the structure and functioning of the Kingdom’s internal security system.}

In another dispatch Moose opined that “the King is genuinely worried over the small size of his forces” and “talked with complete frankness, not in the tone of an absolute sovereign, but like a man who sees his entire life’s work threatened, and who is seeking a way to protect it.” Moose reported that in accepting an invitation from the United States for a visit by a member of the Royal Family, Amir Faisal was elected to go “because conditions were such that neither the King nor his successor to the throne [Amir Saud] should leave the country.” These internal fears, combined with the threat from the Hashemite family, posed in Moose’s eyes very legitimate security problems for the King which the U.S. should respond to. He also argued that while Britain had been far more responsive than the U.S. to date both in supplying arms and financial assistance, the King preferred American to British assistance. If the U.S. failed to take advantage of this opportunity in arms, U.S. prestige and American interests would suffer to the British. In a clear effort to tie arms assistance to overall political relations he concluded “It is therefore suggested that the question of arms for Saudi Arabia be considered not as an isolated problem, but as an aspect of the general problem of supply for Saudi Arabia.
which offers an opportunity to the United States to improve its position in Saudi Arabia.”

Meanwhile considerable discussion and debate ensued between the U.S. and U.K. over the specifics of armaments deliveries. In particular, the U.S. was keen to insure that whatever was finally provided to the King, the U.S. Government would contribute its fair share relative to the British. This was another effort to convey the equal standing of the U.S. to the King and avoid a situation in which the British trumped U.S. political influence by providing the lion’s share of material. The two governments finally agreed to hold off on any deliveries of armaments pending the findings of the upcoming military survey, though the British continued to hold fast to their earlier estimates.

With the King’s earlier approval, on October 27 the War Department authorized General Royce to put together the military survey mission. He himself headed up the mission which arrived in the Kingdom on December 11. In discussions with the mission the monarch stated that he currently had a “Regular Army” of approximately 8,000 men, a "Semi-regular" Army of about 15,000 and an "Irregular" Army of approximately 50,000 based on the tribal troops that could be raised under conditions of national emergency. His principal stated need was to structure his regular army of 15,000 men into a modern infantry division. This would serve his three defense requirements of general security, possible internal uprisings, and protection of CASOC oil operations in the Eastern Province. These regular forces, along with the semi-regulars, would be deployed at major points throughout the Kingdom, principally in the Hefaz area, and in Riyadh, Jeddah, Mecca, Medina, Taif, Hail, Abha, Najran and Hejaz (see Map 2.2). As part of this defense plan the King also requested modern rifles for immediate issue to his semi-regular Army troops and modern rifles for his irregular army to be held in reserve.

---

Map 2.2. Saudi Arabia

This plan, in the King's view, would ensure that neighboring states would not be able to field a ground force larger than his. He also requested six transport aircraft and four bombers, to be piloted by American crews pending Saudi training. Road construction was also sought to help provide mobility to his troops along major lines-of-communication.

The U.S. mission concluded that for purposes of internal security a Regular Army force of 11,000 men would be required. It also judged that this 11,000-man force represented the maximum increase in size realistically possible given the challenges of absorbing modern equipment and training, and would take an extensive period of time to accomplish. The mission recommend that aircraft not be supplied at the time, nor did it endorse the Saudi request for an ammunition plant, citing the lack of skilled manpower and the limited supply needs of the Saudi Arabian Army in this regard. As to the King's request for "essential" road construction and improvements to strengthen his North-South (Abha to Jauf) and East-West (Acqair-Riyadh-Jiddah) strategic lines-of-communication, the mission conceded the importance of this but recommended no further action pending War Department indications that it would support such a large undertaking. The mission also strongly recommended that any arms and equipment supplied by combined British and American sources be compatible, that the calibre of any jointly supplied weapons be the same, and that vehicles be provided from one source only. Finally, the survey team strongly recommended that a training mission be sent to Saudi Arabia to insure effective use of any equipment provided. Without this it urged that no equipment be sent at all. In closing, the report of the survey team emphasized the sense of urgency for moving forward with a program and the larger political ramifications of not doing so:

44 Brigadier General Gilbert X. Chevers to Commanding General, Army Service Forces, "Saudi Arabian Request for Military Equipment" (Royce Mission report), 5 January 1944. Copy attached to Olmsted to Alling, 4 February 1944, 890F.24/2-444, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia. In an earlier meeting with Moose on October 2, the King remarked that if he had the resources he would create a force of 30,000 regular Army troops located in garrisons, with most of these deployed along the northern border areas. See Moose to Hull, 25 October 1943, 890F.24/70, RG 59.
Prompt action cannot be too heavily stressed. King Ibn Saud indicated early in the mission that he had received many promises but nothing material has developed. If prompt action and some deliveries are not made immediately as a result of this mission, the mission has done more harm than good.\textsuperscript{45}

The U.S. military assessments were clearly raising expectations in Saudi Arabia. Pressure was building to actually deliver assistance to the King. As events in 1944 would bear out, so too were tensions with the British over delivering this military assistance.

In a separate enclosure from Moose to Secretary of State Hull, the Minister emphasized the role U.S. military assistance would play in internal security and in fostering the rule of the Al Saud:

The primary aim of arms for Saudi Arabia is the maintenance of order. Although armed force or a threat thereof is necessary to keep order in Arabia at any time, the present age of the King (63) and his physical condition make it entirely likely that any armed force now organized and equipped will be a factor in the orderly succession to the throne of Saudi Arabia, and so will serve to maintain the present government and dynasty as well as to preserve public security.\textsuperscript{46}

U.S. military assistance was therefore being pushed not only as a means to stabilize the current situation and ruler, but the longer term survival and rule of the Royal Family.

In the interim the U.S. and U.K. continued to debate both the aggregate armaments that should be provided the King and the proportions supplied by each. These proportions became increasingly symbolic as part of the larger political rivalry. Even under assumptions of a 50-50 split in support, for example, some Americans noted “that if the policy is to maintain US-UK equality in assistance to Saudi Arabia, the U.S. should

\textsuperscript{45} Chevers to Commanding General, Army Service Forces, "Saudi Arabian Request for Military Equipment" (Royce Mission report), 5 January 1944.
\textsuperscript{46} Moose to Hull, enclosure attached to summary of the American Military Mission to Saudi Arabia, 12 January 1944, 890F.20 MISSIONS/4, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
furnish a greater proportion of arms to balance other categories of assistance furnished by the U.K.”  

**Initial Deliveries and Training**

Following the December 1943 Royce survey, the War Department issued an instruction to USAFIME on February 15, 1944 to establish a United States Military Mission to Saudi Arabia under its headquarters. In a March 30 USAFIME Directive a team of eight officers and four enlisted men was established with the following responsibilities:

(a) Supervision of receipt and handling of U.S. military equipment for Saudi Arabia

(b) Instruction of Saudi Arabian personnel in the care and use of Allied arms and equipment

(c) Furnishing of such advice to the Saudi Arabian Government as it may request relative to organization and training of its military forces

(d) The liaison between this headquarters [USAFIME] and the Saudi Arabian Government

That same month the first-ever U.S. provision of military hardware to the Kingdom took place. A token delivery of small arms was made, followed by a major delivery from U.S. Army authorities in Cairo on March 20 under the direction of Headquarters, USAFIME. This consisted of 1,667 rifles and 350,000 rounds of ammunition. This hardware was turned over to the Saudi government for storage at Jeddah pending the arrival of the U.S. Military Mission to instruct the Saudis in its use and maintenance. To insure Anglo-American equality in deliveries, the British Army supplied similar quantities at the same time via the British Legation.

---

47 Memorandum of BG Cheves (Chief of Staff, USAFIME), 6 December 1943, attached to Ogden to Alling, 22 December 1943, 890F.24/90, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.


The delivery of armaments was an important political and military signal of support to the King from both Washington and London. But the armaments themselves were far less significant than the training teams that would soon accompany them. These teams represented potential long-term ties to the Saudi government and presence in the country. As such, the military training missions quickly became an even more important tool than the arms themselves in the larger political competition between the U.S. and the U.K. for influence.

This was well illustrated in a row over training programs even before any teams arrived. Around the time of the initial delivery of U.S. armaments, the British Foreign Ministry informed the U.S. State Department that it was considering a request from Abdul Aziz to furnish military advisers to organize and train a modern Saudi Arabian army. The British went on to explain that this was not incompatible with proposed U.S. efforts, as the Americans would remain for only a few months to train the Saudis in the use of delivered American weapons. Upon their departure the British mission would assume long-term for responsibility of modernizing the Saudi armed forces. This attempt to sharply circumscribe the U.S. military role in the Kingdom—and the influence so derived—was rejected by U.S. representatives who reminded the British that no time restrictions had been placed on the U.S. Military Mission.  

But despite this flurry of military assistance activity, the State Department unquestionably saw U.S. principal interests as lying in the economic arena. The Division of Near Eastern Affairs and its successor, the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs focused heavily on the precarious Saudi financial situation. This was still considered the greatest threat to American oil interests. It was also Britain’s greatest point of

---

51 The Division of Near Eastern Affairs (NE) became the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (NEA) in 1944.
leverage over the King.\textsuperscript{52} In an effort to maintain overall cooperation with the U.K. while protecting these principal interests, Washington sought to sharpen the division of labor between the economic and military spheres. In so doing it was willing to continue deferring to Britain on military affairs. At the time the two countries were engaged in a joint Anglo-American financial assistance program to Saudi Arabia to bolster the internal security of the regime.\textsuperscript{53} The British were making it increasingly clear that their subsidies were going to be cut back, and that the U.S. should be willing to assume at least half of the bill in the future. As one Foreign Office official put it, “after all, it’s American interests, and not British, who are getting Saudi Arabian oil.” But if London advocated this sharing of subsidies, giving up its hard-earned influence with the Saudis was another matter entirely.\textsuperscript{54} Separating these was now becoming impossible in the escalating influence game.

This tension could be seen in an April 1944 British proposal for a joint Anglo-American military mission to Saudi Arabia to be headed by a British Officer. The War Department was not opposed to the British plan given that London still had primary military responsibility in the Near Eastern region.\textsuperscript{55} The State Department, speaking for the U.S. government, endorsed the British proposal it being recognized that the British have primary military responsibility in that area. However, the Department's and the War Department's approval of the Foreign Office's suggestion is contingent upon the Foreign Office's acceptance of the viewpoint that, in view of preponderant American economic interests in Saudi

\textsuperscript{52} Miller, \textit{Search For Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1949}, p. 84. Since 1941 Britain subsidies provided nearly 90 percent of the requirements of the King. See Miller, p. 106.

\textsuperscript{53} The program was in effect for 1944 and 1945. During this period approximately $3 million in assistance was provided through this particular program, divided equally between the U.S. and U.K. See memorandum from Secretary of State James Byrnes to President Truman, 31 January 1946, \textit{FRUS}, 1945, Vol VIII, \textit{The Near East and Africa}, p. 999.


\textsuperscript{55} Memorandum of Conversation, 29 April 1944, 890F.20 MISSIONS/9, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
Arabia, any financial or economic mission [to Saudi Arabia]...should be headed by an American.\(^{56}\)

The Foreign Office was not to be so readily cornered. Following much diplomatic parrying between the Office and the State Department the two governments were unable to reach closure on this issue.

Back in Saudi Arabia, U.S. diplomatic representatives were opposed to any removal of the U.S. Military Mission. The Chief of Mission, Colonel Garrett B. Shomber, had formally been presented to the King on April 23. Moose expressed fear of a “grave weakening of American standing and influence with King Ibn Saud if United States Mission now withdrawn and British led Mission replaces it.”\(^{57}\) As to Britain’s offer of military assistance Moose wryly remarked; “Experiences of all countries surrounding Saudi Arabia ...seem to indicate that Saudi Arabia will need protection against British sooner than it will need British protection against third nation.” He went on to note that

On more than one occasion King has asked why United States cannot pursue policy in Saudi Arabia without passing through intermediary of British. Change in military mission now will make King believe that American policy in Saudi Arabia is subordinated to British policy and that British can at will take over any American project. Result will be loss of confidence in American plans or assurances and less favorable position for United States to defend American interests when required.\(^{58}\)

The end product of this suspicion was a collapse of the joint military mission concept. Individual British and American military missions were sent instead.

The U.S. Military Mission team itself arrived in Saudi Arabia in mid-June 1944, formally designated "The Provisional Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment U.S. Military Mission to Saudi Arabia." The Chief of Mission was Colonel Shomber. The

---


\(^{58}\) Moose to Hull, 4 May 1944, 890F.20 MISSION/12, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
team proceeded to its training site location at Taif, in the Hejaz, setting up a training camp of tents there by the end of the month.\(^{59}\)

As per the original Directive, the team had responsibility for training a cadre of Saudi officers. The first Saudi Arabian Officers Training Class began in July. A Saudi group of about 50 students received instruction in small arms, first aid and sanitation, signals, transportation, and engineering. A reading of the field reports written by Colonel Shomber reveals initial training problems related to language barriers, widespread illiteracy even among senior Saudi officers, unfamiliarity with U.S. weapons and equipment, and the generally limited state of modern skills. He reported that 35 out of 50 student officers had never fired a weapon and that many could not drive an automobile. This necessitated that courses be approached in a very elementary manner. However student morale was rated as high and Shomber reported that senior Saudi leaders had extended "every consideration and courtesy" to the mission.\(^{60}\)

In the midst of this training effort further tensions arose with the British. On July 25 General Giles, now Commanding General USAFIME, and Minister Resident Moose met with King Abdul Aziz in Riyadh. After presenting the King with a gift of four Thompson machine guns for the King’s bodyguard and an album of photographs from the previous visit of General Royce, Giles raised the issue of securing a direct air route from Cairo to Bahrain or Dhahran, shortening the then current Cairo-Habbaniyah-Abadan-Bahrain route by 212 miles.\(^{61}\) The King was evidently not inclined to discuss the matter directly, instructing Moose to raise it through the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He did however make the point that the British would certainly learn of the War

---

\(^{59}\) A British Military Mission was also garrisoned at Taif to train Saudis in British Lend-Lease equipment. Shomber described the relationship between the two missions as "very friendly" and cooperative.

\(^{60}\) Shomber’s Progress Reports of the Military Mission to Saudi Arabia are in *Foreign Service Posts of the Department of States* (RG 84), Saudi Arabia, Jidda Legation and Embassy Confidential Files, 1944 and 1945.

\(^{61}\) Despite earlier statements of approval in 1942 to use Saudi airspace, this did not come to pass. And now the U.S. was also asking for landing rights at Dhahran.
Department’s desire, and asked what his response to any British inquiry should be. Both Giles and Moose stated that they would inform their British counterparts of American plans, and that the King should feel free to discuss it with them frankly. Clearly the King had some concerns.  

Four days later Moose submitted a formal request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on behalf of General Giles. It asked permission for U.S. military authorities to make an aerial and engineering survey in Saudi Arabia to assess the feasibility of establishing a direct air route between Cairo and areas in the vicinity of Dhahran. The engineering survey was to include exploring potential sites for construction of an air base there.

**Heightened Frictions**

The Saudi response was troubled. The King’s advisers raised serious problems with the proposed air routes. Requests came in for many more details on the proposed operation, including whether planes would land, their numbers and specific flight paths. American diplomats attributed this surprisingly negative response directly to the British. London was seeking to persuade the King to reject U.S. requests for an air facility, arguing it was unnecessary. In the words of Secretary of State Hull, “A covert contest which begins to assume unpleasant proportions is prevailing over airfields in the Middle East,” signaling “a reversion to a dog-eat-dog policy” by the British.  

---


64 Hull to Winant, 17 October 1944, *FRUS, 1944, Vol V, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, pp. 666-667. Another factor troubling the British was the future implications of a U.S. airfield for commercial aviation and international routes. A U.S. proposal for “Fifth Freedom” aviation privileges at Dhahran once it went commercial was viewed in London as a thinly veiled cover for penetrating the British market. Not putting too fine a point on it, the British representative in Jeddah later referred to these U.S. efforts as “diplomatic gangsterism in the service of an unscrupulous economic imperialism.” For a history of the role commercial interests played in the U.S.-U.K. dispute over the Dhahran airfield see James L. Gormly, “Keeping the Door Open in Saudi Arabia: The United States and the Dhahran Airfield, 1945-46”, *Diplomatic History* 4 (Spring 1980): pp. 189-205.
As these tensions with the British mounted, the State and War Departments reached closure on how best to insure what were now increasingly termed U.S. national interests in the Kingdom. Secretary of War Henry Stimson summarized the national military aspects as follows: “Both from a long and short range point of view the most important military interest in Saudi Arabia is oil and closely following this in importance is the right to construct airfields, the use of air space, and the right to make aerial surveys in connection therewith.”

Reinforcing the military significance of oil, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal later stated that “it is patently in the Navy’s interest that no part of the national wealth, as represented by the present holdings of foreign oil reserves by American nationals, be lost at this time. Indeed, the active expansion of such holdings is very much to be desired.”

All of this clearly reflected a much more muscular approach to direct dealings with the Kingdom and an intent to forcefully assert U.S. influence and interests relative to the British. In the specific case of an expanded U.S. military mission, Secretary of State Hull had already written Stimson supporting an extension of the current mission at Taif beyond its then anticipated January completion. Among the reasons he cited was its success relative to the British military mission. He endorsed the view of the American Minister in Saudi Arabia that London was currently “strengthening its comparatively ineffective Mission, and the Government of the United States ought to maintain the lead which it has at present.”

The War Department also concurred with State’s perspective that “one continuing mission of a permanent character is to be preferred to separate missions of a temporary character.”

---

66 Forrestal to Stettinius, 11 December 1944, FRUS, 1944, Vol V, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, p. 756. Due to poor health Cordell Hull resigned as Secretary of State in late November 1944 and was replaced by then Undersecretary of State Edward Stettinius.
continuous U.S. military assistance presence inside the Kingdom deeply involved in all aspects of modernizing the Saudi armed forces.

In Saudi Arabia U.S. Minister Eddy was now firing repeated cables to the Secretary of State expressing the King’s growing frustration at the perceived lack of support from the U.S. Given this experience the monarch was placing greater confidence in the British. In a long meeting with Shaikh Yussuf Yassin, now Deputy Foreign Minister, Yassin relayed the King’s belief that the U.S. government seemed intent on allowing Britain to define America’s interests in the Kingdom. He added that under these circumstances the U.S. would certainly understand why “Saudi Arabia must not reject the hand that measures its food and drink.” His Majesty, according to Yassin, while fully recognizing that neither the U.S. nor he wished to break with the British, was looking for a way out of this confining relationship. What were the possibilities?  

Later Eddy wrote that the situation was reaching a dangerous point; “the favor of the King is at stake and his patience at low ebb.” This was especially worrisome as the British had already intervened with the King to oppose both the proposed U.S. Army airfield at Dhahran and an American-controlled direct radio link between the two countries. Eddy saw these efforts as “proved incidents where British are attempting to damage or limit American interests.” In other correspondence he remarked on the King’s fears that Britain could pressure him economically, with no assurances of how the U.S. would respond. “It is obvious that he awaits clear evidence that the United States will act independently of British controls and dictation before he will risk a suicidal move in that direction himself.”

---

72  Remarks of Eddy quoted in Murray to Stettinius, 6 December 1944, 890F.24/11-244, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
cross it was captured in a confidential statement to Eddy from the Saudi Foreign Ministry:

American requests such as airdrome at Dhahran depend upon British concurrence. King sees no reason why he should be expected to act in Anglo-American disputes. If British concur in American airdrome at Dhahran, King will have no objection.”

The equally apparent message was that if the British did object, the King would have no choice but to do so as well.

Eddy reported in equally negative terms on the U.S.-U.K. military missions. He argued that circumstantial evidence supported a “confidential source which asserts British are making a determined effort this week to prevent American ascendancy of prestige in Saudi Arabia especially because of success and popularity of US military mission at Taif compared to ineffective British mission....British are said to want to close out their mediocre mission but wish Americans to close theirs at same time. Saudi Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs privately admits such pressure.” Eddy attributed the Saudi delay in renewing their request for continuance of the U.S. Military Mission to this pressure. In sum, he contended that a failure to deliver needed assistance would result in a serious political defeat at the hands of the British.

However true this might be, it is also safe to assume that Abdul Aziz understood the value of playing off both parties against each other. Stimulating concerns and frustration over the motives of the other party was an effective way to make the most of a weak hand. Regardless, significant shifts were certainly underway.

Additional U.S. momentum came with plans to greatly expand financial assistance to the Kingdom. In a memorandum to the President on December 22, the Secretary of State submitted a series of proposals for extending long-term financial

---

73 Eddy to Hull, 3 November 1944, 890F.24/11-344, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
74 Eddy to Stettinius, 30 December 1944, 890F.20 (MISSION)/12-3044, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
assistance to Saudi Arabia beyond current Lend-Lease authority. U.S. strategic interests in Saudi Arabia's oil and the wartime needs of the military for facilities were among the principal reasons cited for the proposed actions. Competition with the British was also a not-too-subtle justification: “If such help is not provided by this Government, undoubtedly it will be supplied by some other nation which might thus acquire a dominant position in this country inimical to the welfare of Saudi Arabia and to the national interest of the United States.” Several specific actions were proposed. First was a Presidential request for appropriations to meet urgent Saudi financial needs (estimated by the Secretary of State at $43 million over a five year period). Second was Presidential guidance to the Export-Import Bank to make a commitment in principle to extend loans to finance long range development projects. Third was guidance to the military that it give immediate consideration to projects providing "interim assistance by means of such measures as the construction of airfields and related installations, the dispatch of training missions and equipment, and the construction of strategic roads, together with other facilities." All of these proposals were also endorsed by the Secretaries of War and the Navy.\(^75\)

Interestingly, despite all of this proposed future aid, military assistance was at the time the only immediate source of support to the King. The much greater and important financial assistance package could not avoid Congressional involvement, despite the State Department’s efforts to work around this. With the risk that financial support to Saudi Arabia could easily be viewed as indirectly subsidizing ARAMCO, the process could prove long and difficult, as in fact turned out to be the case. Under these circumstances the military assistance provided through existing Lend-Lease offered a interim fix and bridge.\(^76\)

\(^75\) Stettinius to Roosevelt, 22 December 1944, \emph{FRUS}, 1944, Vol V, \emph{The Near East, South Asia, and Africa}, pp. 757-758.

\(^76\) Miller, \emph{Search For Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy}, 1939-1949, pp. 126-127.
Following their previous discussions on methods for assisting Saudi Arabia, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) submitted a memorandum to the President on February 22, 1945 proposing direct financial assistance to Saudi Arabia beyond Lend-Lease. SWNCC estimated the requirement at between $28-57 million for the period 1945-1950. Two broad forms of assistance were advocated: 1.) those that the War Department could immediately provide, namely the construction of roads, the provision of a military mission, and the construction of military airfields, specifically an air base at Dhahran; and 2.) longer-range direct financial assistance derivative of oil revenue arrangements. In this memorandum the War Department, while noting its interest in the geography and air routes over Saudi Arabia, stated that it was Saudi Arabia's oil that was of most value to the armed services. War also stated that the Military Mission and the road construction were not regarded as necessary for prosecution of the war. Consequently they would not be pursued unless the Department of State deemed them "advisable and in the national interest in order to assist in the accomplishment of other important objectives."

The air field at Dhahran, on the other hand, was considered a wartime necessity by the War Department. A mid-point was still required between Cairo and Karachi for servicing transport aircraft and for resting crews. Given the anticipated level of use of the field (2000 landings/month), the reduction of 216 miles per flight between Cairo and Karachi was estimated to result in 432,000 air miles saved every 30 days. The air base at Abadan then being used by the Persian Gulf Command for this purpose was not properly

---

77 The State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) was established in December 1944.
78 A detailed summary of what the War Department stated it could undertake in each of these areas is found in a memorandum to the Assistant Secretary of War, attached to SWNCC 19, 7 February 1945. This includes a preliminary estimate of the size and composition of the proposed U.S. Military Mission to Saudi Arabia, along with a proposed organizational chart. Records of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC), 1944-1949.
79 Enclosure to SWNCC 19, 7 February 1945, Annex B, Air Field at Dhahran (Ras Tanura), and Report by the Ad Hoc Committee of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (circulated as SWNCC 19/1) 22 February 1945, FRUS, 1945, Vol VIII, The Near East and Africa, pp. 852-853. The State Department did make a finding that the Military Mission and road construction were in the national interest.
located, while the air base at Bahrain was considered unsuitable for expansion due to poor foundation conditions. It was also under the control of the RAF Transport Command. In a clear shift from earlier acquiescence to the British on military matters inside the Kingdom, The Commanding General of the PGC expressed a clear preference for a U.S. facility in Saudi Arabia. Likewise, the Army Air Forces made it known that "joint tenancy of the Dhahran air field with British forces would be most undesirable."

While these internal policy deliberations were taking place, the major political event in U.S.-Saudi relations of 1945 was the meeting between President Roosevelt and Abdul Aziz aboard the U.S.S. Quincy on the Great Bitter Lake. This historic meeting on February 14 helped to solidify both the national and personal links between the two countries and leaders. Beyond the orchestrated efforts at comity with such an undertaking, Roosevelt and Abdul Aziz truly enjoyed each other's company and developed a personal bond as a result. In policy terms, the most meaningful discussion was on the issue of Jewish refugees and Palestine. The King was quite clear that the refugees should be provided with living space in the Axis countries, that the Arabs viewed Jewish immigration to Palestine as a grave threat and would resist Jewish occupation of Arab lands by all means possible. According to Colonel Eddy, who

---

80 Enclosure to SWNCC 19, 7 February 1945, Annex B, Air Field at Dhahran (Ras Tanura), and Report by the Ad Hoc Committee of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (circulated as SWNCC 19/1) 22 February 1945, FRUS, 1945, Vol VIII, The Near East and Africa, pp. 852-853.
82 This occasion also tuned into another case of U.S.-U.K. competition and jockeying for position. After also meeting with Prime Minister Churchill in Cairo the King was returned to Saudi Arabia by a British cruiser considerably larger than the U.S.S. destroyer Murphy that transported the King to Bitter Lake. This was seen as a clever political move by the British to outdo the Americans. The sense of rivalry is well captured in Eddy’s commentary on the trip, which while aimed at demonstrating British strivings, was equally revealing of U.S. efforts at besting their British colleagues. Eddy to Stettinius, 3 March 1945, 890F.001 ABDUL AZIZ/3-345, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
83 Background on this and the meetings in general are in Eddy’s account F.D.R. Meets Ibn Saud (New York: American Friends of the Middle East, 1954).
84 Acting Secretary of State to Minister in Egypt Tuck, 3 February 1945, FRUS, 1945, Vol VIII, The Near East and Africa, p. 29 Roosevelt had prior direct knowledge of the King’s strong feelings from his special envoy to the King Lieutenant Colonel Harold B. Hoskins. In July 1943 Hoskins met over the course of a week with Abdul Aziz on the Palestinian issue. The King was adamant in his hard line against a Jewish
served as interpreter to the meetings, President Roosevelt repeatedly pressed the monarch “complaining that the King had not helped him at all with his problem.” His Majesty was unmoved. There the matter rested for the time with Roosevelt’s promise on Palestine, later conveyed to the King in writing, that the American Government desired “that no decision be taken with respect to the basic situation in that country without full consultation with both Arabs and Jews.” Roosevelt added that he would take no action “which might prove hostile to the Arab people.” This pledge was to take on great meaning, later becoming the source of frequent Saudi reference in questioning U.S. reliability and backing of stated commitments.

Beyond Palestine the King raised concerns to the President over the U.S. government’s long-term interest in Saudi Arabia and whether such interest would outlast the war. He directly linked these concerns to his future relations with the British, asking "What am I to believe when the British tell me that my future is with them and not with America...that America's political interest in Saudi Arabia is a transitory war-interest...and that Britain alone will continue as my partner in the future as in the early years of my reign"? While raising these apprehensions, the King also proved adept at invoking praise for Roosevelt at the expense of British leadership. Following the President’s visit Abdul Aziz remarked to Minister Eddy that “The contrast between the President and Mr. Churchill is very great. Mr. Churchill speaks deviously, evades understanding, changes the subject to avoid commitment, forcing me repeatedly to bring him back to the point. The President seeks understanding in conversations; his effort is to make the two minds meet; to dispel darkness and shed light upon the issue.” However

homeland there. He also rejected Roosevelt’s request that he meet with Jewish Agency leaders, specifically Dr. Chaim Weizmann, to discuss proposed solutions. For detailed reporting on this see Hoskins’ 31 August Memorandum in FRUS, 1943, Vol IV, The Near East and Africa, pp. 807-810

85 Eddy, F.D.R. Meets Ibn Saud, pp. 34-35.
heartfelt these sentiments may have been, they also revealed the King’s practical skill at seeking to generate a useful tension and create personal opportunity between his two benefactors.

During this same period and following discussions between the U.S. Joint Chiefs and their British counterparts over the issue of the Dhahran air field, London indicated that it would not oppose the U.S. project. Pending formal notification of this to the King, the American Legation was authorized by Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew to open negotiations with the Saudis on air field construction and postwar rights to use of the field. As part of the negotiations, the State Department approved the Legation's earlier recommendation that the offer of a military mission and road construction be made outright and not contingent on successful conclusion of the Dhahran airfield project.

The British Minister in Jeddah informed the Saudi government of London’s position in early May. With this approval secured, Minister Eddy and Colonel Voris H. Connor of USAFIME left for Riyadh on May 9, 1945 to present formally the offers of U.S. assistance to the Saudi government and to negotiate the construction of an airfield at Dhahran. Following a meeting with the King, official approval for construction of the air field came from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs three days later. The King granted permission to build the airfield at Dhahran, its use by U.S. military forces for a period of three years dating from the end of the war, and most-favored nation terms for U.S.

---

88 The Joint Chiefs memorandum to the British Chiefs of Staff outlining the importance of the Dhahran airfield is in *Military Aid and Bases in Saudi Arabia*, SWNCC 19/5, 19 March 1945. An extract of the Combined Chiefs of Staff document endorsing the U.S. proposal is in 890F.248/4-1845, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia, and the official British Legation endorsement to the Saudi government in *Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State* (RG 84), Saudi Arabia, Jidda Legation and Embassy Confidential File 1945-1949, Box 1.

89 Road improvement and construction was to involve a route between Dhahran and Riyadh of approximately 290 miles, followed by similar War Department improvements on the route Riyadh-Jeddah. Acting Secretary of State Grew to Eddy, 3 May 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, Vol VIII, *The Near East and Africa*, pp. 886-887.

90 This became known as the Connor Mission.
commercial airlines using the field once opened to civil aviation. He rejected out of hand the U.S. request for sixty year military use of the airfield as inconsistent with the Kingdom’s sovereignty and certain to inflame popular suspicions of foreign domination. Even the three year post-war period was initially rejected. The Saudis also stipulated that all field and fixed installations associated with the base were to pass to Saudi government ownership immediately at the end of the war. Regarding the road building offer, the King wished this deferred until a survey team could first come and work with him on proposed routes. The King also requested an additional week to consider what services a military mission might provide.

In the midst of this growing momentum, a series of sharp setbacks took place. The first occurred in June and involved the offer of financial assistance to the King. Between the need for extensive hearings to Congress on the Lend-Lease budget and the scope of the request for Saudi Arabia, the ability to provide near-term assistance in 1945 was now postponed. To a country in desperate need of financial assistance, the call for more “forebearance” while details were worked out was a hard pill to swallow. It was equally hard for Minister Eddy, charged with conveying this latest turn of events to the King. The offers of support provided by the United States Army now became the only short-term source of assistance. Aside from the serious blow this represented to the scale of potential assistance provided to Abdul Aziz, concerns arose in Eddy’s mind that the King would now reject even this help due to “criticism by reactionaries against the ‘infiltration’ of the land by foreign military.” The argument as put forth by Eddy was that the King could accept U.S. uniformed military personnel on Saudi soil and the domestic criticism it would likely invoke only if he could simultaneously announce U.S. civilian economic assistance.

91 Eddy to Stettinius, 13 May 1945, 890F.248/6-1345, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
A second constraint soon entered the picture as well. This had to do with construction of the air field itself. With Germany’s surrender in May, the War Department decided to re-deploy troops from the European to Pacific theaters largely via the United States instead of through Asia. This reduced the wartime military value, and hence justification, for the Dhahran airfield. The War Department concluded that any expenditure of funds for construction based on military necessity was now "of doubtful legal validity." There remained, however, general agreement among the Departments concerned (State, War, Navy) that construction of the airfield "would be in American national interest." They recommended to the President the project be undertaken on this basis. A State Department memorandum to President Truman outlined the justifications for continuing the project. These were the increasing importance of the American oil concession, the need to strengthen the political integrity of Saudi Arabia externally as a means to protect that concession, and the civil aviation benefits to be accrued by U.S. carriers. The Dhahran air field project would be a symbol of U.S. government long-term interest in Saudi Arabia and hence serve to strengthen political ties between the two countries. By contrast, not going forward would send a strong negative signal to the King, reinforcing his already serious concerns over the reliability of the U.S. commitment to his Kingdom. President Truman approved the recommendation on June 28.  

In early July, Eddy informed the State Department that the King had indeed decided to turn down the offer of a U.S. military mission and the construction projects and pilot training offered by the Connor Mission. Three reasons were cited by the King. First were his concerns over “growing objections from my more dissident and fanatical subjects” to a U.S. military presence within the interior. Second was exploitation of this American military presence by his Hashemite enemies with claims that he was a puppet of foreign governments and who “would defame me as a weakling whose internal affairs

---

are managed by a foreign army.” Third, Britain objected to the military mission.\textsuperscript{95} The King still approved construction of the Dhahran air field on the grounds that he could not be similarly criticized for supporting the war efforts of an ally (Saudi Arabia had declared war on Germany and Japan in March). Furthermore, the military presence for this would be very restricted geographically, and far from the holy cities and the interior. The King also was adamant that he could not accept army personnel in uniform performing the construction. He argued that to do so would provoke fears among his ignorant population of a military occupation.\textsuperscript{96}

However State Department officials considered British objection the most significant factor. Taken aback by the King’s rebuff, they believed other explanations lacked in credibility given the King’s repeated requests for such assistance over the last two years. It represented a "reversal of policy that apparently can be explained only in terms of British pressure." Eddy himself believed the King’s fears over internal political “fanaticism” were real and justified, but agreed that the decision "was decisively influenced by British pressure which King admitted."\textsuperscript{97} “I am convinced,” he added, that “British do not want US to build Saudi army or air force, preferring in future themselves to ‘rescue the land’ if disorder arose as they have rescued Syria and Lebanon.” He

\textsuperscript{95} Eddy to Byrnes, 8 July 1945, Enclosure III, 890F.20 MISSIONS/7-845, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia, and Vice Consul at Dhahran (Sands) to Byrnes, 4 July 1945, FRUS, 1945, Vol. VIII, The Near East and Africa, p. 920. James Byrnes replaced Stettinius as Secretary of State in July 1945.

\textsuperscript{96} This aspect of the negotiations over uniformed construction personnel is described in a State Department history of U.S.-Saudi relations written by Mr. Nils E Lind, a member of the U.S. Legation at Jeddah. This history is a useful “period piece” for American perceptions at the time as well. See Memorandum on U.S. Relations with Saudi Arabia, 15 May 1946, 711.90F/5-1546, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Political Relations of States, pp. 10-11. Also useful in this regard is a separate Department of State history on U.S.-Saudi relations focusing on the war period, divided into five sections on Political Background, Aviation, Petroleum, Financial Assistance, and Health and Culture. See Department of State Paper Covering US-Saudi Arabian Relations, 11 April 1947, 711.90F/4-1147, RG 59.

\textsuperscript{97} A few months earlier Eddy himself reported an incident in which the King was directly challenged by a tribal leader accusing him of selling land to foreign “unbelievers” and failing his responsibility as protector of the holy places and Muslim traditions. The reference was apparently to the activities of the American Agricultural Mission. Eddy opined that these types of internal pressures were “partly responsible for the reluctance of the King to open up the country more rapidly to aviation.” Eddy to Stettinius, 4 December 1944, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State (RG 84), Dhahran Consulate, Confidential File 1944-1945, Box 1.
viewed this as yet another chapter in the story of British opposition to "any US activity in Saudi Arabia which gives even appearance of political or military precedence." 98

In the midst of this latest turbulence the King’s son, Foreign Minister Amir Faisal Ibn Saud Abdul Aziz, traveled to the United States for official discussions on U.S.-Saudi relations. 99 A long-planned trip, he met with the Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew and the State Department’s Director of the Office of Near Eastern and Africa Affairs (NEA), Loy Henderson. The parties covered a wide range of topics, including future financial assistance. Grew asked Amir Faisal to bear in mind and pass on to his father that the Administration could not expend funds on assistance to Saudi Arabia until these were first approved in law by Congress. This process took time and required patience. What most mattered was that the U.S. Government remained strong in its friendship and commitment to the Kingdom.

Interestingly, despite this obvious play for time by State Faisal instead focused on the sources of delay and restrictive responses by the Saudis. He explained that many of the guarded steps taken by his father toward U.S. involvement in the Kingdom were prudent responses to internal and external limitations. The King was permitting American citizens access and activities “of a nature which he had been unwilling to permit the citizens of any other great power to carry on.” His Majesty had to be cautious to not go too far too quickly and strengthen the hands of his enemies. He could not appear to place the sovereignty of Saudi Arabia at risk. Nor could he needlessly offend his friends (i.e., the British). By way of example he cited reactions to the recent U.S. Military Mission in Saudi Arabia. Both within the Kingdom and in the larger Arab

99 This was Faisal’s second visit to the U.S. He and his brother Amir Khalid traveled to America in October 1943 in the first visit of royal family members to the U.S. They met with State Department officials to discuss U.S.-Saudi relations and were also received by President Roosevelt. Benson Lee Grayson, Saudi-American Relations (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1982), pp. 31-32.
World rumors spread that the mission was the first step in a new American imperialism and military occupation in the region.\(^{100}\) In a second meeting the following day he reiterated Saudi Arabia’s need to move cautiously in carrying out American suggestions.\(^ {101}\) Sensitive to these issues, American officials discussed ways in which the number of American soldiers remaining in eastern Saudi Arabia could be reduced after the war, a major concern of the King. In the case of the Dhahran air field, one idea presented to Amir Faisal was that rather than having the U.S. Air Transport Command run Dhahran for the proposed three year post-war period with soldiers, the commercial firm Trans-World Airlines (TWA) might perform this function.\(^ {102}\)

On August 5, 1945, the formal proposed agreement for construction of the air base at Dhahran was presented to Abdul Aziz. Following some minor changes to better signify the sovereignty of Saudi Arabia in the enterprise (e.g., insisting that the Saudi flag fly over any inland navigation posts operated by Americans) the King approved the agreement and it was signed by Acting Foreign Minister Shaykh Yusuf Yassin on August 6. The air field was to be constructed under the authority of the Commanding General, United States Army Forces in Africa-Middle East Theater.\(^ {103}\)

Minister Eddy attributed the rapid acceptance of the King to the recent U.S. decision to provide substantial financial aid to Saudi Arabia for 1945, well above that to be contributed by the British. This compared with previous periods of negotiation in

---


\(^{103}\) The text of the agreement as compiled by Minister Eddy can be found in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol VIII, *The Near East and Africa*, pp. 946-949.
which U.S. financial assistance was uncertain. And despite the delays in dealing with Congress, Washington was now also committing to longer-term peacetime financial assistance.  

With the ink barely dry, the U.S. dropped the first atomic bomb over Hiroshima. Following the destruction of Nagasaki three days later and the Japanese surrender, the War Department again was forced to revise its position; Dhahran could no longer be justified in terms of the war effort. The Army, which already was beginning construction, stated its willingness to continue the project “if the State Department will take the entire responsibility for its construction on political grounds.” In a memorandum submitted to the SWNCC on August 23, the War Department requested that justification be based "upon the broader considerations involving the national interests of the United States." It further maintained that it could not use existing war funds for the effort and would need specific Presidential and Congressional authorization to do so. Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson made the case to the President that Dhahran "should be completed by the War Department at its own expense as implementation of United States national policy." President Truman endorsed this position on September 28 with the proviso that Congressional approval be secured for any funds going for air base construction. 

Despite the end of the war, Dhahran still had military value. The U.S. continued to rely on Abadan air field for its flights, now to include demobilization, but this was expected to end shortly with the decision to withdraw armed forces from Iran in early 1946. The plan was to re-route this traffic through Dhahran as soon as feasible. But these military grounds alone were clearly insufficient. In order to justify finishing the

---

105 State Department Office Memorandum, Jenkins to Sanger, 7 September 1945, 890f.00/9-745, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
construction the U.S. would have to demonstrate its *peacetime* value to the *national* interest. In the transition to peace Dhahran would have to become both a political and military gateway into the Kingdom.  

While Dhahran’s future remained uncertain, far less so was growing U.S. responsibility for post-war financial support to the Kingdom. The joint Anglo-American supply programs were effectively over, as the British announced that it no longer made sense to pursue this as a joint venture given the relatively small sums Britain could now provide. Plans were drawn up on the assumption that the U.S. would furnish all financial assistance for the next five years in the form of loans. While Britain would remain the major military and political power in the Gulf for many years to come, this critical transition meant that Saudi Arabia’s future security—financial as well as military, internal as well as external—now was increasingly gravitating to Washington. So too would the growing challenge of tending the relationship against the backdrop of Cold War and the Palestine crisis. U.S. military assistance would be at the center of this vortex.

**Observations on Early Patterns**

World War II brought a transformation in U.S. interests and involvement in Saudi Arabia. From a narrowly focused concern largely limited to commercial oil, by the end of the war the U.S. had a significant commitment to the Kingdom’s political, fiscal and military security. Highly circumscribed political involvement gave way to a spectrum of

---

108 This also meant seeking to conclude a bilateral Air Transport Agreement with the Saudi government, to include full Fifth Freedom traffic rights. Exercising their continuing influence the British asked the King to reject Fifth Freedom, which he ultimately did. American carriers did receive “most-favored nation” status. Gormly, “Keeping the Door Open in Saudi Arabia: The United States and the Dhahran Airfield, 1945-46”, p. 198.


110 Indeed as the year ended Abdul Aziz renewed his anxiety over the Hashemite threat from Iraq and Transjordan to Washington, fearing that Britain would not prevent an aggression by his northern neighbors. He called on the U.S. to inform Britain of Washington’s great concern for the territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia. Eddy telegram, 31 December 1945, referenced in *FRUS*, 1946, Vol VII, *The Near East and Africa*, p. 738.
ties that included a substantial military component. By the end of 1945 the U.S. was actively pursuing military assistance to build political influence with the King and purchase access for its military operations. Directly related to this, the U.S. was undertaking at least rudimentary activities to bolster the effectiveness of the Saudi Army, primarily to improve its internal security function of holding the Kingdom together, but also laying the groundwork for a self-defense capability against neighboring threats.

During this period, U.S. policy toward Saudi Arabia did not evolve methodically. As one author described it, the development of U.S. national interest during this period “was not systematic, orderly, or coordinated” and “proceeded often haphazardly and on the basis of inadequate or distorted perceptions.” Yet despite this, discernable patterns emerged.

As the wartime period shows, it was initially difficult to get the U.S. involved in Saudi affairs. Once the U.S. established security interests and ties, however, concerns over instability and the regime’s longevity became an inescapable feature of U.S. involvement. The original U.S. motives for providing military assistance were a mix of seeking political influence (directly with the King and relative to the British) to protect the oil concession and later to gain access for military operations. But from the outset pursuing these objectives tied military assistance rather directly to bolstering the security of the regime. Indeed it became the principal mechanism for strengthening the rule of the Al Saud. First, it did so by beginning to provide basic assistance in infrastructure development with various surveys, air field development proposals, and road construction. Over time these would help the Al Saud net the Kingdom together and exert more effective central control. Second, was the direct assistance to his military forces, the embryonic training and equipping to improve the King’s internal security for the King, and to a lesser degree, self-defense against the Hashemites. Finally, the act of

providing military assistance itself represented a sign of U.S. political commitment to Abdul Aziz, strengthening his standing both internally and among his neighbors. While the U.S. was concerned about regime stability, it was primarily the Saudis who pulled for American military assistance to counter this threat. Any ‘push’ from Washington was largely the result of satisfying Saudi requests to achieve other desired objectives, most notably local and regional political influence and military access.

But it is certainly also true that for Abdul Aziz a too close—or too visible—security relationship with the U.S. involved great risks. Military assistance was very much a two-edged sword when it came to insuring regime stability. Therefore the Saudis sought to closely control the degree and conditions of American involvement. Calculations by the King had to take into account not only the reactions of his own people and surrounding enemies, but also those of the British. The imperative was to strive for that equilibrium that would prove a driving feature of the Saudi approach, and become a central feature of the security relationship.

Another pattern was Abdul Aziz’s efforts to both stimulate and exploit the competition between the U.S. and U.K. to further his interests. No doubt the debate will continue over what and who was responsible for the Anglo-American competition, how much it was driven by misperceptions rather than a clear-headed understanding of reality. What is clear is that this political competition was real and that military assistance became an instrument in that competition. Abdul Aziz proved adept at using the sense of competing interests to his advantage.  

A final pattern to emerge was the symbiotic relationship between pursuit of U.S. political and military objectives toward the Kingdom. The State Department, specifically

\[112\]

For three interesting views articulating the British perspective and the negative behavior of the Americans see Barry Rubin, *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1941-1947* (London: Frank Cass, 1980), Chapter 4, J.E. Peterson, *Defending Arabia* (London: Croon Helm, 1986), pp. 111-118, and Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951*. In a theme common to all, Louis argues that it was the British who felt threatened by American aggressiveness in Saudi Arabia. He goes on to note that he found “no evidence in the British archives of any attempt to persuade or coerce Ibn Saud to abandon the Americans in favour of the British,” p. 186.
NEA, consistently viewed military assistance as a political instrument, pushing it even when its military viability was questionable. Once the Kingdom became of operational military interest, State strongly promoted and supported these efforts, often pushing them harder than the military itself. As for the military, as its operational interests grew military assistance became a means for gaining access to Saudi airspace and territory. While gaining such access was itself of course a political process, the objective was fairly narrow, concrete and bounded in time. This was made clear as the military itself questioned justifications for Dhahran and accompanying military assistance activities as the war wound down. But the initial military assistance ties, while developed as transitory wartime expedients by the military, also began to take on a certain professional momentum and move toward increasingly structured and longer-term designs. Simply put, the military dimension of military assistance increasingly carried its own weight and policy influence. While still nascent by the end of 1945, and as the next chapter will show slow to involve in the post-war period, military assistance ties were now joined for the duration. The next challenge lay in continuing the dance in the face of a radically altered post-war world, the emergence of Cold War, and more acutely, the vexing problem of Palestine.
CHAPTER 3

DANCING AT A DISTANCE: POST-WAR THROUGH MID-1950

*I have given to the Americans all my wealth. I want two things: I want them to strengthen me and to deal with me as the British are treating my enemies. I do not want to use just words.*

— Abdul Aziz to American military representatives, April 1948

**Strategic Setting: Cold War Onset And The Middle East**

In its broadest cast, U.S. strategy for the Middle East in the immediate post-war years had four interrelated objectives. First were efforts to influence the allegiance and political direction of the many underdeveloped states of the region. With the changes wrought by the World War, the rise of nationalist pressures, and emerging fears of Communist expansion, U.S. security policies sought to ensure that these states did not fall under Soviet ideological influence. Second was the objective of physically barring Soviet military power from the region, directly and through any proxies. Third was protecting access to the region’s oil. Fourth was the U.S. desire for air bases in the region to launch strategic strikes—conventional and nuclear—against the Soviet homeland in the event of war. A later, fifth objective became protecting Israel, which added another layer of complexity and tension.

In pursuing these objectives the U.S. found itself operating in a complex regional environment. To begin with, despite its eclipse as a global power Great Britain remained the dominant political and military authority throughout the region. Britain’s close ties to the Gulf would continue even after much of the justification based on lines-of-
communication for Empire effectively ceased with the August 1947 transfer of power to India and Pakistan. On the Arabian Peninsula itself Britain remained committed to the defense of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the Trucial Coast, Oman and Muscat. As the Cold War unfolded and the U.S. began developing its security strategy for the region, Britain’s role continued to be central. But Washington’s attitude toward this role was clearly conflicted. On the one hand, given its increasing global responsibilities the U.S. welcomed this contribution of extensive political expertise and military presence from its closest ally. On the other, it viewed Britain’s colonial legacy as an increasing liability in the ideological struggle with the Soviet Union. In the particular case of Saudi Arabia British regional influence also continued to be seen as an impediment to expanding U.S. commercial oil interests. The challenge was to strike a balance that protected U.S. national interests without jeopardizing the larger Anglo-American partnership, both globally and specific to the Middle East region.

A second complexity was the endemic political instability of many of the countries throughout the region as they entered the post-colonial period and struggled as independent entities. This triggered the growth of nationalist movements with their emphasis on independence from the great powers. The region soon found itself divided between those Arab states seeking alignment with the West and those stressing a nonaligned status. Even among those states seeking close ties with the U.S., these

---

1 Indeed despite these dramatic changes, at the time no strategic reappraisal of British defense requirements east of Suez took place. The imperial outlook continued to hold sway, both as a deeply ingrained and now encrusted *raison d’etre* and as a matter of pragmatic politics. As one senior British official then put it, reappraisal was “too fundamental to be practical politics.” For an excellent review of the factors at play during this phase see Phillip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez 1947-1968*, Royal Institute of International Affairs (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 10-22.

2 This is nicely captured in a policy paper by George F. Kennan in 1948: “we must do what we can to support the maintenance of the British of their strategic position in that area [the Middle East]. This does not mean that we must support them in every individual circumstance...It does mean that any policy on our part which tends to strain British relations with the Arab world and to whittle down the British position in the Arab countries is only a policy directed against ourselves and against the immediate strategic interests of our country.” Emphasis in original. *Review of Current Trends U.S. Foreign Policy*, Policy Planning Staff Paper PPS/23, 24 February 1948, in *The State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers, 1948*, Vol. II (New York: Garland Publishing, Ins., 1983), pp. 116-117.

political conditions fostered an almost constant ambivalence and need for caution in dealings with Washington, especially on the security front. This became even more pronounced with the partitioning of Palestine and the creation of Israel. All acted as important elements in determining how far, how fast, and how visibly military cooperation could progress. Local regimes always evaluated external security ties in terms of effects on their positions relative to regional rivals and their own internal stability. For them the larger Cold War competition only had meaning as it influenced these immediate, concrete concerns. Saudi Arabia faced profound challenges in navigating among these many factors.

The short transition from the end of World War II to the onset of the Cold War also brought major changes in U.S. national security policies and organizing for defense. The future role and execution of military assistance in U.S. foreign policy was no exception. Peacetime military assistance became a recognized—if bureaucratically contentious and initially fragmented—instrument in supporting the U.S. security strategy of forward defense and collective security. The crises over Greece, Turkey, and Iran; the formal enunciation of the Truman Doctrine; and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization all elevated its importance. This forced the Administration into a more centralized and coordinated approach, with Congress enacting legislation to match.


5 During the early postwar period several pieces of important military assistance legislation were put into place. Though preceded by Congressional authority to provide military assistance to the Philippines in 1946, the first major piece of postwar security assistance legislation was the Greek-Turkish Aid Act of 1947 (PL 80-75). This was rapidly followed by the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949 (PL 81-329) aimed at all of western Europe and the newly created North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The 1949 act also established a statutory basis both for granting military aid and for cash-purchase Foreign Military Sales (FMS), and created the Military Assistance Program (MAP), the formal mechanism for training and arming foreign militaries. Further refinement and consolidation came with the Mutual Security Act of 1951 (PL 82-165), placing military and economic aid under one statute and under one administrative organization, the Mutual Security Agency. See Clarke et. al., Send Guns and Money: Security Assistance and U.S. Foreign Policy, p. 9, and Richard F. Grimmett, “The Role of Security Assistance in Historical Perspective”
The bulk of this effort was aimed at bolstering western European security. But the postwar crises over Soviet troops in Azerbaijan and Moscow’s demand for joint control of the Dardanelles Straits quickly brought Cold War and containment to the Near East. Iran and Turkey became the key “Northern Tier” states and received the bulk of U.S. regional military assistance.  

Abdul Aziz’s Saudi Arabia, while well recognized as a strategic oil prize, remained geographically distant, underdeveloped, and largely on the periphery of containment. Military assistance from the U.S. would remain for him—and his American advocates—an elusive pursuit.

**Struggling For a Post-War Policy Toward the Kingdom**

The vast consumption of petroleum by the modern engines of war definitively established oil as a strategic asset. This pivotal role of petroleum in wartime now meshed with the need to fuel western Europe’s peacetime recovery and post-war fears over declining U.S. reserves. At the close of World War II the U.S. was producing over 66 percent of the world’s total crude oil. Estimates conducted in the mid-to-late 1940s placed U.S. proven reserves at between 20-23 billion barrels, while speculative estimates of Saudi reserves exceeded 100 billion barrels. In 1948 the U.S. became a net importer of oil for the first time. The American oil interests in Saudi Arabia clearly were growing in national as well as commercial importance. Yet as Aaron Miller observed, the value of Saudi Arabian reserves was recognized as a long-term asset in dealing with these future

---

6 For an official U.S. military view of how military assistance fit into the larger framework of American and western defense by the late 1940s, and the criteria to be applied in prioritizing recipient countries see Military Aid Priorities, SANACC 360/11, 18 August 1948, Records of the Office of Secretary of Defense (RG 330), Office of the Administrative Secretary, Correspondence Control Section, Numerical File, CD6-4-3.

challenges, not a pressing one, especially now that the war was over. As a result
“formulating postwar policy in Saudi Arabia based on wartime interest in petroleum was simply not within the grasp of policy makers.” Adding to the difficulties, any proposed subsidies to the Kingdom faced hurdles from Congress and domestic petroleum producers who viewed this as little more than government support to foreign oil. As to operational military importance, the U.S. armed forces attached limited weight to the Kingdom. Strictly military requirements therefore could not serve as the basis for directed policy either. Palestine simply magnified the complexity of developing a coherent approach.

This was the puzzle facing the State Department’s Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (NEA), continuing as it did to be at the forefront of pushing official ties with Saudi Arabia and fostering long-term cooperation. With the end of the war its primary instrument, Lend-Lease, was no longer viable. Peacetime alternatives had to be found to keep the momentum.

But the war’s end also alleviated several of the principal issues driving the State Department’s wartime policies. The King’s most pressing problem, financial survival, improved with the end of hostilities. Peace brought a return of the Hajj pilgrims and their subsidies, while Saudi petroleum production grew. This combination eased many of the earlier concerns over the Kingdom’s solvency and the potential instability it might produce.

While certainly not disappearing, the heated wartime competition with the British also diminished substantially. Pledges of mutual support were made and the ARAMCO

---


9 Oil revenues went from $10 million in 1946, to $53 million in 1948, to $57 million in 1950, to $212 million in 1952. Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 61. As Safran notes, while even this growth did not prevent chronic financial problems due to mismanagement and profligacy, “the Kingdom was never again to be politically endangered by lack of the minimal financial means necessary to lubricate the nexus between the ruler and the tribal chiefs.”
concession was now considered secure.\textsuperscript{10} In the domain of security affairs the U.S. government supported Anglo-Saudi security cooperation as in the best interest of Anglo-American strategy for the region. London itself had no desire to let any local competition interfere with larger Anglo-American cooperation in the Middle East. Furthermore the Foreign Office had a very interesting post-war perspective on British interests in Saudi Arabia. To them it now appeared “inevitable” that America would achieve economic dominance there regardless of any British opposition. But like reasoning during the war, they argued that this would not diminish Britain’s political clout with the King; “Ibn Saud is convinced that we are the only great Power who has the real interests of the Arabs at heart….He therefore regards us as the only Power to which the Arabs can safely look for help and guidance until such time as they are strong enough to stand by themselves. This is the cardinal point of Ibn Saud’s policy.” By pulling the U.S. into the region, heavy American economic involvement in Saudi Arabia was viewed as a strategic asset far more than a liability, for Abdul Aziz would maintain his political loyalty to the British. London’s policies therefore “should allow, and even encourage, the Americans to ‘penetrate’ Saudi Arabia to their heart’s content.”\textsuperscript{11}

But as these wartime challenges receded new ones emerged. The two most prominent were the growing sense of Soviet threats to the region and the potential for instability and polarization arising from developments in Palestine. The State Department argued the importance of tangible post-war ties to the Kingdom on these grounds. It pushed the Cold War military value of Saudi Arabia—oftentimes more than

\textsuperscript{10} A case in point, a Department of State April 1947 memorandum argued that American and British oil interests and opportunities for free development in the region were so extensive “that there is little logical basis for political conflict with the British in the development of oil in these Arab lands.” Cited in Miller, Search For Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1949, p. 148.

\textsuperscript{11} Foreign Office appraisal, Thomas Wikeley, Anglo-American Relations in Saudi Arabia, November 1945, cited in Wm. Roger Louis, The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 192-193. What is intriguing about the British perspective is that London’s understandable focus on the commercial oil concession as the vehicle of American penetration and influence, combined with its contented view of Abdul Aziz’s enduring dependence on Britain in strategic matters, diminished the importance attached to evolving political and military ties with the U.S. government.
the armed forces themselves—while continuing to invoke the critical role of Abdul Aziz in the Palestine crisis. State had its work cut out for it. Despite the significant progress in wartime assistance and the Dhahran airbase agreement, government ties remained relatively frail, with the King correctly still questioning the U.S. commitment to his security. Shortly after the war ended, President Truman terminated Lend-Lease excepting wartime commitments already made to certain countries, among them Saudi Arabia. But even with this authorization to complete military Lend-Lease commitments, in aggregate this material fell well short of anything required for developing even a modest self-defense capability.

The other post-war military link, the Dhahran Air Field, already had come under strain with the end of the war and American questions over its peacetime justification. From the Saudi perspective the provisions of the wartime agreement were deemed unsatisfactory to peacetime conditions, and specifically, to the level of military assistance so far provided by the U.S. While the war created military ties, they in fact remained anemic. Under the circumstances, troubles over Palestine could undo these military ties entirely.

But on the issue of Palestine the King proved adept at balancing his harsh criticism of Washington’s support for a Jewish homeland with parallel efforts at expanding security ties to the U.S. As the record will show, despite many strong protestations both public and private, Abdul Aziz never wavered in his efforts to gain more military assistance from the U.S. His imperatives to further strengthen his internal control, stave off his enduring sense of threat from the neighboring Hashemites (and related fears of British co-conspiracy), and staunch religiously-based anti-communism

\[12\] Byrnes to Truman, 31 January 1946, 890F.24/1-3146, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia. At the bottom of Byrnes memo requesting this approval the President wrote “Approved 1-31-46; Proceed as suggested” with his signature affixed.

\[13\] Official exchanges between Abdul Aziz and President Truman over Palestine, most of which remained secret at the time, can be found at the Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 170.
would trump acting on his anti-Zionism in this area.\textsuperscript{14} To this was added “a very realistic notion of his own limitations in affecting events beyond his own realm,” what would become a recognized hallmark of the conservative Al Saud approach to diplomacy.\textsuperscript{15} Again turning a perceived liability into an asset, Abdul Aziz used Washington’s support for a Jewish homeland and Israeli state not as a reason to rebuff the U.S., but as another source of bargaining leverage. While the King’s sensitivity to and sharing of hostile Arab opinion was undoubtedly genuine, this did not preclude its simultaneous use in his dealings with the U.S. to gain further support to meet his core security objectives. Viewed from this vantage point, the U.S.-Israeli-Arab tension provided another complex movement in the U.S.-Saudi dance; it certainly was not a call to halt the music.

Externally Abdul Aziz’s paramount security concern remained the Hashemites. The King’s fears over this threat grew in the post-war period due to a number of developments. Britain, while still a protector, was viewed as engaging in a series of regional policies that undermined the Kingdom’s security. These policies were largely the product of British efforts to bolster its sagging position in the region in the face of its own need to reduce commitments and accommodate the rise of local nationalism. This led to new treaty agreements in which London granted full independence to Iraq and Transjordan in exchange for continued military access. This independence, in Saudi eyes, undermined if not nullified the traditional Anglo-Saudi arrangement whereby Britain controlled any Hashemite irredentism in exchange for Saudi good behavior toward the smaller Gulf Shaykhdoms. A key case in point, the British announcement of a complete troop withdrawal from Iraq in 1947, followed by a 10-year treaty of friendship between Iraq and Transjordan, left the Saudis feeling highly exposed. Proposals for

\textsuperscript{14} This is not to deny that Zionism and Israel’s creation exacerbated threats to the Kingdom. With the growth of Arab nationalism this was certainly true. But most of Abdul Aziz’s dominant security concerns existed independent of Israel, a point oftentimes lost.

\textsuperscript{15} Peck, \textit{Saudi Arabia in United States Foreign Policy to 1958: A Study in the Sources and Determinants of American Policy}, p. 204.
regional security groupings such as a Greater Syria simply added to Saudi anxieties over encirclement. This combined with growing Saudi suspicions of British motives toward the Kingdom, to include a punitive dimension linked to the King’s efforts to establish closer relations with the U.S. All of this added urgency to the imperative of getting substantial and binding commitments of support from Washington.

**Elusive Pursuit: Dhahran, Palestine, And Military Assistance**

Against this strategic backdrop, the narrow issue of the Dhahran Air Field became the concrete focal point in determining future U.S. military assistance to Saudi Arabia. Negotiations over the facility and its use during this period became inextricably linked with Saudi efforts—and corresponding State Department exertions—to acquire significant long-term military assistance. The ensuing dance is instructive in revealing the multiple motives at work on both sides and the continuation of earlier patterns of behavior, despite the politically wrenching issue of Palestine.

As the previous chapter noted, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia concluded a formal agreement on the Dhahran Air Field on August 6, 1945. With the Japanese surrender the original military justification for the expenditures became invalid. This led to a revised agreement granting the U.S. Army exclusive rights to maintain and operate facilities at Dhahran for a period of up to three years from the date of the air field’s completion (instead of the original date, that of a Japanese surrender). At the end of this period, operation of the field would be turned over to an American commercial company approved by both governments. That company would in turn operate the field until January 1, 1956 or until such earlier time the Saudis themselves could do so. The intent

---

16 Safran, *Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, pp. 62-63. U.K.-Saudi tensions were further reflected in Saudi reopening of territorial disputes with Oman and Abu Dhabi in the late 1940s over the Buraimi oasis. Protectorates of Britain, London responded by creating a frontier force, the Trucial Oman Levies, aimed at defeating any Saudi military attempt to occupy territory there.

17 In terms of command relationships, post-war responsibility for the Dhahran Air Field originally was Headquarters, U.S. Forces in Europe. In November 1947 this shifted to Headquarters, U.S. Air Forces in Washington, and in December 1947 to Air Transport Command (ATC).
of this latter change was to insure that Dhahran could continue operating for the Saudis as a civilian air field after the U.S. Army’s departure. In so doing it also served to further justify U.S. government funding of construction by providing a link to American commercial air interests. The agreement was to run from March 15, 1946 (the estimated date of air field completion) to March 15, 1949, at which point it could be renegotiated as necessary.

These proposed U.S. changes were transmitted to the Saudi Arabian Government on December 20, 1945. On January 2, 1946 the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs accepted the revisions, but included in its response a statement expressing the Saudi desire “that the Army authorities, who would be operating this field, would give to Saudi Arabian subjects during this time the broadest possible training in the operations so that they would be prepared to run and administer the airfield when the time came for them to take it over.” This proviso, accepted by the U.S., would prove to be an important early—and revealing—post-war case of the many challenges ahead in U.S. military assistance training to the Saudis.

The politically explosive issue of Palestine was meanwhile gathering force. By early 1946 President Truman supported the idea of admitting 100,000 Jewish refugees and the easing of land restrictions on Jews in Palestine. The Arab reaction was predictably hostile, met with demands for an independent Arab state in Palestine. Abdul Aziz, consistent with his past positions, was deeply opposed to the refugees and any prospect of a binational state. The fact that the Truman Administration was supporting the Zionists was especially upsetting, given the previous pledges of President Roosevelt.

---

18 As noted in Chapter II, the U.S. also requested full Fifth Freedom traffic rights. For revised sections applied to the original agreement and their intent see documentation in FRUS, 1945, Vol VIII, The Near East and Africa, pp. 983-985.


Unquestionably this reflected his genuine feelings on the matter. But an early notable example of the King’s two-track approach was his message to President Truman, delivered through General Giles with the request for utmost secrecy. According to Giles the King expressed his “great hope and faith in the US and declared that he would always remain our friend although on occasion his pronouncements in regard to the Palestine question might indicate otherwise.” Summoning up the now-common theme of expressed fear and negativism toward the British, he reiterated his suspicions that on the Palestine problem London’s “interests were both selfish and restrictive in character” and were “secretly friendly to the Jews.”

Personal anger over U.S. policies also did not get in the way of a visit by Crown Prince Saud to Washington in January 1947 to seek U.S. assistance. Notably, particular concern was expressed less over Palestine than over proposed efforts to create a Greater Syria with Transjordan. Saud also brought his father’s message that Saudi Arabia wished to rely exclusively on the U.S. as a trusted partner for economic and technical assistance. Saud was looking for a U.S. commitment for long-term loans instead of the international finance options then being discussed. He specifically requested a $50 million development loan to cover projects, one of particular interest being the King’s railroad venture.

---

21 As conveyed by Giles and transmitted via Ambassador in Egypt Tuck to Byrnes, 1 October 1946, FRUS, 1946, Vol VII, The Near East and Africa, p. 748. Giles was then acting in his capacity as Regional Director for TWA.

22 The King’s letter to the President of 7 January 1947 was quite effusive in its tone, thanking him for “a priceless opportunity” for his son to visit the U.S. and meet with the President, and that the Crown Prince would carry a message of his country’s “desire to strengthen the bonds of friendship and mutual good understanding.” Letter in Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Harry S. Truman, Official File, Box 1373.

23 Memorandum of Conversation, 17 January 1947, FRUS, 1946, Vol VII, The Near East and Africa, p. 1329-30, and memo of Dean Acheson to President Truman, 18 February 1947, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 170. By all accounts Abdul Aziz was fixated on building a railroad from the Persian Gulf to Riyadh, rejecting American government and commercial analyses that motor transportation was preferable and less expensive. The King had his reasons. The picture of motor transport in the Kingdom painted by Parker Hart of the American Consulate was not a pretty one. He characterized past Saudi efforts to develop automotive transportation as “a dismal history of breakdowns, thefts and waste; mechanically untrained drivers and garage men, with no eye for maintenance, ‘supervised’ by weak-willed, indolent or corrupt administrators at Riyadh, Jiddah and Mecca; unauthorized passengers paying to divert vehicles from supply routes for personal gain or at the improper command of some prince or official.” This all resulted in the King exploding with rage that “Trucks are my enemies!” and his hard push for a railroad. See Hart’s report, “Highway Statistics For Dhahran
Additional grounds for believing that Palestine would not derail U.S.-Saudi relations came from the American Minister, but with words of caution. Minister Childs continued to believe that the King would not jeopardize his ties to Washington over Palestine and would resist radical measures against the United States being pushed in Arab quarters. As to hostile opinion within the Kingdom, Childs considered this “so negligible that the King’s will is practically all that counts in the determination of foreign policy of Saudi Arabia.” Externally, however, the monarch had to be sensitive the radical wing of the Arab League as exemplified by Iraq and Syria.  

Childs felt the King was exposed here, and that U.S. policies could well “weaken the influence of the King in the Arab world” and in the long run weaken and undermine “the strength of our best friend, the ruling family of Saudi Arabia.”

As the U.S. and Saudi governments continued to work around Palestine, the pressure soon increased. London announced in February 1947 that after failing to arrive at an acceptable solution between Arabs and Jews, it would return the Palestine mandate over to the United Nations. Effectively this meant drawing the U.S. directly into the conflict, with all that implied for its efforts to create a Middle East strategy conducive to countering Soviet penetration. This was made all the more difficult given President Truman’s support for Zionist goals. The State Department consistently argued that support for a Jewish state would prove fatal to U.S. influence in Saudi Arabia and

Consulate District,” Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State (RG 84), Dhahran Consulate, Confidential File, 1946-1949, 20 October 1946, Box 7. Additional details on the horrors of the Saudi transportation system, in particular the Royal Garages then responsible for government motor transport, are in Childs to Byrnes, “Recent Changes in the Saudi Arabian Transport System,” 14 August 1946, 890F.70/8-1446, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia. While these details may appear as minutia, as Childs laments they were “of the first importance in that they reflect the difficulties of the Saudi Arabian Government in regulating its wholly inadequate transport system, affecting every corner of the far-flung national economy, and in revealing the corrupt and inefficient administration of national affairs in general.” They also had important implications for Saudi military development, as motorized forces would be at the center of ground force modernization efforts.  

Childs felt the King was exposed here, and that U.S. policies could well “weaken the influence of the King in the Arab world” and in the long run weaken and undermine “the strength of our best friend, the ruling family of Saudi Arabia.”

As the U.S. and Saudi governments continued to work around Palestine, the pressure soon increased. London announced in February 1947 that after failing to arrive at an acceptable solution between Arabs and Jews, it would return the Palestine mandate over to the United Nations. Effectively this meant drawing the U.S. directly into the conflict, with all that implied for its efforts to create a Middle East strategy conducive to countering Soviet penetration. This was made all the more difficult given President Truman’s support for Zionist goals. The State Department consistently argued that support for a Jewish state would prove fatal to U.S. influence in Saudi Arabia and

Consulate District,” Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State (RG 84), Dhahran Consulate, Confidential File, 1946-1949, 20 October 1946, Box 7. Additional details on the horrors of the Saudi transportation system, in particular the Royal Garages then responsible for government motor transport, are in Childs to Byrnes, “Recent Changes in the Saudi Arabian Transport System,” 14 August 1946, 890F.70/8-1446, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia. While these details may appear as minutia, as Childs laments they were “of the first importance in that they reflect the difficulties of the Saudi Arabian Government in regulating its wholly inadequate transport system, affecting every corner of the far-flung national economy, and in revealing the corrupt and inefficient administration of national affairs in general.” They also had important implications for Saudi military development, as motorized forces would be at the center of ground force modernization efforts.  

The League of Arab States was established in Cairo in March 1945.

weaken the King, making him vulnerable to extremist demands.\textsuperscript{26} The Joint Chiefs of Staff also made it known that resulting antagonism from a Jewish homeland could well jeopardize U.S. strategic interests in the region, including oil.

While this high diplomacy played out, more mundane implementation of the Dhahran Air Field agreement got underway. In response to the revised Dhahran agreement obligating the U.S. Army to train Saudi nationals to operate the airfield, efforts to assemble a formal training program began.\textsuperscript{27} Formally known as the Saudi Arabian Training Mission,\textsuperscript{28} it was authorized 8 officers and 20 enlisted personnel to be handled entirely by U.S. Army personnel in cooperation with an Arabian liaison officer. Field activities began in early April 1947.\textsuperscript{29} From the outset there were misgivings over the ability of the Mission to put together a viable program at the very time the political importance of doing so was deemed to be high. The Commanding General, Air Transport Command, and the Commanding General, Army Air Forces, had previously made their view known that the Saudis would be “completely unable to operate Dhahran airfield” by the end of the designated three year period.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{26} Miller, \textit{Search For Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1949}, p. 209. The degree of intensity and animosity between those at State pushing this view and the President himself is well captured in Truman’s own memoirs on the issue of Israel. \textit{Memoirs by Harry S. Truman}, Vol II, \textit{Years of Trial and Hope} (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1956), pp. 164-165.

\textsuperscript{27} For the draft training program and proposed training agreement as drawn up by the Air Transport Command (ATC) see \textit{Proposed Training Program of Saudi Arabia Subjects to Enable The Saudi Arabian Government to take over Operation, Maintenance and Control of The United States Army Air Base at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, Payne Field, Cairo, Egypt}, August 1946, in \textit{Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State} (RG 84), Dhahran Consulate, Confidential File, 1946-1949, Box 4.

\textsuperscript{28} The U.S. military presence at Dhahran now had two official designations: the 1414th Air Base Squadron, responsible for actual operations at the air base, and the 1414th Training Squadron, responsible for implementing the Saudi training program.


\textsuperscript{30} Secretary of War Patterson to Acting Secretary of State, 3 October 1946, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
with the appropriate qualifications for advanced training in the U.S. was privately described by those with in-country experience, including U.S. military officers and TWA pilots, as “fantastic.”" 31 But Childs now stressed the political importance of the training program “as an excellent means of contributing to the friendly relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia when those relations are sorely tried, as they are today by the question of Palestine.”" 32

Following a series of meetings at Dhahran and Cairo in April on the program, a summary report to the Assistant Secretary of War For Air provided a rather dismal evaluation of the situation on the ground. Referring to Lieutenant Colonel Dale Seeds, the first Director of the Saudi Arabian Training Mission, the report pointedly noted that “under present conditions he is defeated before he begins. It would be impossible in a brief report to detail the astonishingly inadequate conditions at the Air Base. To expect Lt. Col. Seeds to inaugurate a training program with his present staff and under present conditions is unreasonable.” 33 A follow-up report provided a more detailed summary of the status of the Dhahran base. The report stressed the very poor physical plant at the air base, noting that the original World War II plan for spending $10 million to create a facility capable of supporting 2,000 men was revised downward to $3 million and a base complement of 500 men, predicated on short-term occupancy. As a result, the report considered physical deterioration of the facilities now so bad that the air base would

31 Childs to Byrnes, 10 January 1947, 890F.796/1-1047, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia. Though perhaps apocryphal, but reflecting the view of many westerners, a few years earlier a pilot with Pan American landing in Riyadh related how the assembled Arabs’ first question to him was “Is it a male or a female?” George A. Brownell, “American Aviation in the Middle East,” The Middle East Journal 1, no. 4 (October 1947): p. 409.
32 Childs to Marshall, 23 April 1947, 890F.796/4-2347 CS/A, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
33 Comments from report by Harry Snyder, attached to 29 July 1947 Memorandum to State Department from Lt. Colonel Taylor, 890F.796/7-2947, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia. Snyder, a retired military air force officer at the time, would return to the service to become commander of the program’s Training Squadron at Dhahran.
likely be inoperative within six months. It called for an immediate infusion of $700,000 and another $3 million for long-term future construction.\footnote{Symington to Marshall, 2 December 1947, 890F.796/12-247 A/LAA, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia. Major extracts of the report “Saudi Arabian Training Program,” by Colonel Harry R. Snyder and Ken Weidner were requested by Marshall and are enclosed in this memo. The Air Force would request $1.5 million for additional construction of facilities at Dhahran, to include a training school, in 1948. The State Department strongly endorsed this expenditure, arguing that a failure to support development of the Dhahran Air Field and the training program there would send a strong and embarrassing negative political message to the King, at the time under pressure from his neighbors. Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs Merriam to the Bureau of the Budget, 25 February 1948, FRUS, 1948, Vol V, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa Part 1, p. 225. The $1.5 million was in fact later approved. See 890F.7962/4-248, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.}

More than an operational evaluation, this report also contained a political-military analysis for why effective implementation of the training program was so critical. It professed that Saudi Arabia was “key to the entire Moslem World” and at the center of Islam’s leadership was Abdul Aziz. Alienation of the Islamic World (here clearly meaning the King as its leader) would put the U.S. at great risk, it being “in a position to throw control of the greatest known oil resources in the world...into the hands of the Russians….Thus the continued friendship and cooperation of the Saudi Arabian Government becomes absolutely essential to the continued economic welfare and military security of the United States.” In terms of command relations, the report stressed the importance of direct control from Washington headquarters and the Department of State inasmuch as the air base and training mission “together constitute a diplomatic mission.” Reinforcing this perspective, the report went on to note that “the primary objective of both Airbase and the [Training] Mission is the promotion and maintenance of good relations between the Governments of the United States and Saudi Arabia; that the secondary objective is the training of Saudi Arabian nationals in the operation and maintenance of the Airbase.” Taking it one step further, it observed that the original 50 Saudi student candidates were reportedly hand-picked by the King from influential families; the King’s personal interest in their success was therefore high. The U.S. should share this high interest, as many of the students would “unequivocally become the future.
ministers and officials of Saudi Arabia.”35 Here was the juxtaposition of the questionable ability of the Training Program to meet its stipulated operational goals with the imperative to make a go of it in order to meet the primary political objectives.

As the training program struggled in the field, the U.N. vote on Palestine now rapidly approached. Abdul Aziz made yet another appeal to President Truman, imploring him “before this last opportunity is missed to review as quickly as possible this dangerous situation which has resulted from the support your Government has lent to Zionism against the interests of the Arab peoples.” This U.S. support was “an unfriendly act directed against the Arabs and, at the same time, is inconsistent with assurances given us by the late President Roosevelt.” He added that “Without doubt, the results of this decision will lead to a deathblow to American interests in Arab countries and will disillusion the Arabs’ confidence in the friendship, justice, and fairness of the United States.”36

The King’s pleadings proved of no avail. With the U.S. vote in favor of partitioning Palestine on November 30, 1947 (and later U.S. recognition of Israel in May 1948), the monarch felt President Truman had personally betrayed him by violating the word of his presidential predecessor not to take any action “which might prove hostile to the Arab people” on the issue of Palestine. The feeling was so strong that Foreign Minister Prince Faisal encouraged his father to break diplomatic relations with the U.S., advice the King quickly rejected.37 In spite of earlier American preparations to evacuate Saudi Arabia, locally the situation was considered to be relatively safe and stable.38

38 This included contingency planning with ARAMCO both to evacuate its personnel and for use of its aircraft in any evacuation effort. For correspondence on evacuation measures see Osborne to J. MacPherson, Vice President, ARAMCO, 25 October 1947, and MacPherson to Henderson, 23 and 24
Shortly after the vote Childs telegraphed that “I do not anticipate any overt action on part SAG [Saudi Arabian Government] or population against United States or our interests as result decision.” While stressing the bitterness of the Saudi government over the vote, “I do not feel that we have any reason for immediate concern as far as regards Saudi Arabia unless and until there may be deliberate, Government-controlled campaign to incite the population, such as is not now apparent or anticipated.”\(^{39}\)

A few days later the Minister was informed by Faud Bey Hamza, a close advisor to the King, that he had been ordered by His Majesty to tell Childs that he might hear many alarming rumors; he should pay them no mind and not misinterpret them as any change in policy toward the United States. By way of example, the King had partially mobilized the Saudi Army and instructed the Amir responsible for the Dhahran area “to send sufficient troops into the Dhahran area to be capable of coping with any disturbances. His Majesty was determined to prevent any such [disturbance] particularly as they might be directed against American interests.”\(^{40}\) Childs subsequently cautioned against asking for the Saudi Government’s permission to station a USN destroyer at the port of Ras Tanura, as “It would be difficult if not impossible convince King such assignment not motivated by our apprehensions his inability maintain law and order Saudi Arabia including protection American lives and property.” This would be construed as a lack of confidence in his authority. He added that Abdul Aziz “has affirmed his intentions not to permit any demonstrations in Saudi Arabia.”\(^{41}\)

---


\(^{40}\) Childs to Marshall, 8 December 1947, 890F.00/12-847, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.

\(^{41}\) Childs to Marshall, 20 December 1947, *Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State* (RG 84), Dhahran Consulate, Confidential File, 1946-1949. The deployment of the destroyer was also linked to concerns for American citizens in Bahrain.
In the midst of these events the King called in Minister Childs to express two pressing security concerns: the menace posed by Russia and her communist propaganda, and the threat from the Shereefian Family (the sons of Hussain now ruling in Iraq and Tranjordan). This conversation more than most revealed the King’s approach to the U.S. in relation to the issue of Palestine. After remarking on his “position of preeminence in the Arab world” and on that basis his need to make “common cause with other Arab states” over the issue of Palestine, he stated that “I do not anticipate that a situation will arise whereby I shall be drawn into conflict with friendly western powers over this question.” Childs then records the King’s straightforward questions to him: “Leaving aside wholly the question of Palestine...His Majesty wished to know how and in what manner he might rely upon the United States.” As part of this line of inquiry, the King also wished to know if an understanding existed between Washington and London “by which the United States recognized Said Arabia as being within a British political zone of influence.” These probes were used to get at the real issue on his mind, the vulnerability of his northern border with Iraq and Transjordan. Now more than ever at risk from Communist machinations and the intrigues of the Shereefian families, he told Childs of his pressing to need to protect this border, noting it was also the area through which the American-sponsored Trans-Arabian pipeline (TAPLINE) would soon pass. But he had neither the troops nor arms to do so. Therefore he wished to know “precisely to what extent might the Saudi Arabia Government count upon assistance from the United States Government in this respect since the threat was one not only involving Saudi Arabia but also vital American interests.” Could he rely on the U.S. to resist those incursions? He impressed upon Childs that these questions were of such gravity the Minister should take

TAPLINE began as a U.S. Government-sponsored proposal in early 1944, supported by the military as a project of the Petroleum Reserves Corporation. For a number of reasons U.S. sponsorship never materialized and the project later became a commercial venture of Standard Oil of California/ARAMCO. Construction of the pipeline began in the summer of 1947. For a discussion of U.S. Government involvement in the initial pipeline project see Miller, Search For Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1949, pp. 94-100.
them back in person to the President and Secretary of State. The King was looking for something on the order of equipment for two motorized rifle divisions and fifty military aircraft.\footnote{Childs to Secretary of State Marshall, 4 December 1947, \textit{FRUS}, 1947, Vol V, \textit{The Near East and Africa}, pp. 1335-38.} This all with the vote for partition occurring less than a week before. Abdul Aziz’s priorities were clear.

The State Department’s response was to assure the King that “there exists no understanding of any kind between the US and Great Britain acknowledging all or any part of Saudi Arabia or any other Arab country as being a British zone of political or economic influence.” As to the threats from Transjordan and Iraq, in an effort to allay the King’s concerns (and to sidestep the request for arms) State remarked that “Govt of US cannot conceive of situation arising under which Hashemite states would attack Saudi Arabia merely because King Ibn Saud continued to be friendly to United States and to private American companies doing business within borders of his country.” Responding to the King’s request for arms more directly, State reiterated the U.S. Government’s earlier decision that the “US should for time being refrain from exporting arms and munitions to Palestine and neighboring countries.”\footnote{Acting Secretary of State Lovett to Childs, 12 December 1947, \textit{FRUS}, 1947, Vol V, \textit{The Near East and Africa}, pp. 1338-40.} It hastened to add that this decision “should not in any way be taken as an indication of any lessening of friendship on part of US towards Saudi Arabia” or the U.S. policy of unqualified support for the Kingdom’s territorial integrity. If Saudi Arabia were attacked, “the US through medium of UN would take energetic measures to ward off such aggression.”\footnote{Britain and the U.S. began suspending arms shipments to the region in late 1947 as the situation in Palestine deteriorated. With the outbreak of war in May 1948, the U.S. supported a formal U.N. arms embargo (adopted by the Security Council on 29 May 1948) which lasted until 11 August 1949. This included Saudi Arabia. After the lifting of the embargo the U.S. continued to adopt an export policy limited to those weapons necessary for internal order and self-defense, with Israel receiving the bulk of such deliveries.} Minister Childs initially
reported these positions to Crown Prince Saud, who accepted the explanation of the current U.S. decision on arms, but hoped that this policy would change in the future.\textsuperscript{46}

Not so his father. A day later the King provided his response, certainly more forceful than his son’s on the issue of arms. He expressed his considerable disappointment at the U.S. decision not to make them available, especially in light of the vital mutual economic and security interests the two countries shared—the protection of the oil fields and now the TAPLINE. He needed a mechanized force to protect these assets and intended to continue to ask the U.S. for the military assistance to do so. The King also recounted his repeated assurances to the U.S. that any military assistance would never be used against America or for aggression against others. With this, he asked Washington to review its policies so that these legitimate defensive goals could be attained.\textsuperscript{47}

This diplomatic parrying over arms was now inextricably linked—at least in the King’s mind—to continuing negotiations over renewing U.S. rights at Dhahran, then scheduled to expire in March 1949. Provision of U.S. military assistance as well as a declaration from Washington that it would come to his support against any aggression became part of the conditions laid down by the King for continued access to Dhahran. Childs, writing in January, believed that the U.S. “may be approaching, if we have not already passed, a decisive stage in our relations with Saudi Arabia.” He argued that Washington’s vote had rekindled doubts in Riyadh about the reliability of the U.S. as a partner and one to be preferred over Abdul Aziz’s traditional ally Britain.\textsuperscript{48} This latter point was particularly poignant as Great Britain was working on a Anglo-Saudi treaty at the time, to include British use of Saudi facilities in time of crisis or war, as well as


Meanwhile in correspondence with the U.S., Abdul Aziz accused Britain of agitating the Iraqis against the Kingdom and that an Anglo-Iraq treaty then under negotiation was designed to drive a wedge in U.S.-Saudi relations by placing pressure on the King. The monarch wanted a clear statement from the U.S. regarding its willingness to assist the Saudis in preserving their sovereignty. The King’s son Amir Faisal added that Saudi Arabia’s refusal to conclude a treaty with the British might well result in additional London-inspired pressure from the Hashemites. It was these threats that the King wished to counter and desperately needed U.S. military assistance to do so.

Endeavoring to make the best of a difficult situation, Minister Childs recalled Washington’s assurances of support for Saudi Arabia’s territorial integrity. Faisal quipped that his father was seeking something more practical.\footnote{Conversation cited in \textit{FRUS}, 1948, Vol V, \textit{The Near East, South Asia, and Africa} Part 1, pp. 215-216.} More subtle pressure came from Minister of Defense Prince Mansour. During a March visit with Crown Prince Saud aboard the U.S.S. Valley Forge, he informed Childs of various British offers of military equipment. He recounted as to how his father had asked for his views on these offers. Mansour told Childs that he had “recommended to His Majesty that no action be taken, as he was strongly of the opinion Saudi Arabia should standardize its military equipment and should seek, above all, to obtain such equipment from the United States.” Childs appended the view that while the Saudis were quite appreciative of any U.S. armed forces that might defend the Kingdom, “it is for them a question of \textit{amour propre} [self-esteem]
to build up their own military potential in a manner which may enable them to deal themselves with the maintenance of internal order and security and the defense of their territory from neighboring Arab states.”

In the face of this renewed insistence from the King and British efforts to reach a security agreement with Riyadh, Director of NEA Loy Henderson turned to Secretary of State Marshall. “It is now obvious that something concrete in the way of a training mission or material, or both, will have to be provided Saudi Arabia if our position there is to be maintained in the face of this British offer of an alliance plus technical personnel.” On this basis he recommended that Secretary Marshall approach the Secretary of Defense to determine what concrete military assistance could be furnished in order to make “this large-scale British entry into this predominantly American area unnecessary.”

Despite this plea, the Secretary of State instructed the Legation in a message quite different in tone, to inform the King that the U.S. and U.K. had shared goals in promoting Middle East security and the territorial integrity of states. As such, the U.S. would have no problem with an Anglo-Saudi security arrangement as long as it was in the best interests of Saudi Arabia, did not interfere with the U.S.-Saudi agreement on Dhahran, and did not interfere with further development of political, military and economic relations between their two countries.

As it turned out, the King rejected the treaty with the British while the Anglo-Iraq agreement also fell through. Abdul Aziz insisted that an isolated treaty with London was insufficient. Required was a network of treaties between the Great Britain and the Arab states and between the U.S. and Arab states. Most of all he desired a treaty with the U.S., although he maintained such a bilateral understanding was probably best accomplished in

---

51 Childs to Marshall, 1 April 1948, 890F.24/4-148, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia.
the context of multilateral arrangements. Undoubtedly this was to make it more politically palatable.\textsuperscript{54} The King again demonstrated his skill in using the two outside powers against each other to his gain, while minimizing any local political exposure.

In an effort to convey movement and enduring interest in the King’s desire for U.S. military assistance, American military representatives met with the King and Deputy Foreign Minister Yusuf Yassin in April. Led by Major General Robert Harper, Commanding General Air Transport Command, the team also included Col. Richard J. O’Keefe, designated Commanding Officer of the Dhahran Air Field, and Col. Harry Snyder, Chief of the Air Training Mission at Dhahran.

General Harper brought news of an approved $1.5 million program for upgrading facilities at the field. But whatever hopes there were that this would mollify the Saudis, if only temporarily, were quickly dashed. In his meetings with Harper and Childs, Shaykh Yassin stressed the need for extensive military assistance to protect the Kingdom as a whole, well beyond the Dhahran area. Unimpressed with the $1.5 million, he argued that the U.S. should approach the problem as if Saudi Arabia was their territory and on that basis design a comprehensive defense plan. Yassin added that the Saudi armed forces the U.S. helped organize, train and equip would be available to America as well in an emergency. In summarizing his points Yassin stated that there was nothing that will be as convincing to His Majesty and to the people of Saudi Arabia of America’s interest in the country as an offer of substantial military aid...$1,500,000 is nothing, but if you should come to us and say that ‘Here is military equipment for four Saudi Arabian groups [80,000 men]’, you could ask for anything and His Majesty would grant it. In fact, His Majesty will not wait for you to come to ask him. He will himself ask you to come to him.

General Harper agreed to take back these views along with a recommendation to “study the area as if it were our own country and then arrive at a plan of action that would prepare Saudi Arabia for any emergency.”\textsuperscript{55}

The following day General Harper and the rest of the American representatives met with the King. No doubt briefed earlier by Yassin, His Majesty invited General Harper to tell him what he had brought and to “State all that you have.” Following General Harper’s remarks about the recent allocation of $1.5 million for upgrading Dhahran, Abdul Aziz began with an ominous question: “Is that all?” He then launched into a rebuke on the limited military assistance he had received to date. His repeated requests for significant military assistance remained unanswered. In the face of acute threats from the Hashemites and in order to assist U.S. defense plans, he needed four groups of 20,000 men each fully equipped and trained in mechanized warfare. Fully recognizing he would rely on the U.S. in the event of any Russian attack, his proposed force was for Saudi self-defense against lesser regional threats. The U.S. unwillingness to provide military assistance evoked stinging criticism from the King; “Truly and actually, I never believed the US Government would give me this kind of reply to my request for aid.” He then angrily recounted the comments of his enemies that “I have given Saudi Arabia over to the Americans.” And now, despite London’s support for the Hashemites he anguished how “I do not know of any other government except the British from which I can get help….Truly I am in a critical situation.”

It was not a good session.

The next day Minister Childs and General Harper reemphasized to Shaykh Yassin that they would take back the recommendation for a group of U.S. planners to go to the Kingdom and with Saudi officials prepare a comprehensive study for the defense of Saudi Arabia. Yassin then put yet another spin on how best to approach defense

---

55 Childs to Marshall, 29 April 1948, Enclosure 2, 890F.20/4-2948, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia. This reference contains the complete set of memoranda of conversation compiled by Childs for the seven official meetings held from 21-23 April.


57 Childs to Marshall, 29 April 1948, Enclosures 4 and 5, 890F.20/4-2948, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia. Colonel O’Keefe, who also was in attendance at this meeting, later would head a comprehensive military survey of the Kingdom’s defense needs.
cooperation. Any attempt to use a revised Dhahran Air Field agreement as a formal vehicle for including follow-on defense cooperation was unattractive. Once raised to the level of an official document, this could force its rejection, as happened to the British with Iraq and Egypt. Referring to the Arab desire to “depend more on agreements in our heart rather than written agreements” he believed “the best solution is a secret agreement.” Along these lines the “American Government would like to strengthen Saudi Arabia; America needs facilities, airports, et cetera, and Saudi Arabia will offer these to the American Government. Saudi Arabia is constructing these facilities for itself and is putting them at the disposal of the American Government...We will keep silent and make a secret agreement with you whereby all facilities will be at your disposal.” Childs explained that the original U.S. intent was to imbed the needs of the two countries into a single agreement that did not represented a formal treaty. In this way it would not have to be approved by Congress and would be low profile.\(^{58}\)

In their final meeting with the King, Abdul Aziz continued the line that secrecy and apparent distancing was the most effective approach to U.S.-Saudi security relations. “We must work together, and the best way to work together is for Saudi Arabia to maintain its neutrality. Then if an emergency arises Saudi Arabian neutrality can be utilized to mutual advantage.” If attacked as a neutral, Saudi Arabia would have the moral high ground and the U.S. could then move into the Kingdom in any way necessary for defense.\(^{59}\) Formal peacetime military cooperation and commitments, on the other hand, would expose the Saudis to many criticisms and would in fact undermine their

---

\(^{58}\) Childs to Marshall, 29 April 1948, Enclosure 6, 890F.20/4-2948, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia. This Saudi penchant for informal, unwritten security commitments would become a regular feature. Attributable in part to the Beduin tradition of the sanctity of one’s word, more practically it allowed the Saudis to avoid the risks of formal obligations. It also maximized Saudi flexibility in determining the specific crisis conditions under which direct cooperation would be invoked. Parenthetically, this was the case in the early days of the 1990 Iraqi crisis and continues to this day. Saudi Arabia remains the only Gulf Cooperation Council state with no formal defense agreement with the U.S.

ability to cooperate. Therefore by staying officially neutral, and having any U.S. military assistance treated as exclusively for Saudi self-defense and not a *quid pro quo* for any U.S. military access in peacetime or crisis, the practical benefits of cooperation could be achieved while minimizing the risks. In this somewhat convoluted formulation then, the King wanted a secret U.S. commitment to come to Saudi Arabia’s defense in a crisis, agreed to provide U.S. military access under these circumstances, and wanted peacetime U.S. military assistance to take a form conveying only Saudi self-help, while recognizing such assistance was in fact designed to facilitate U.S.-Saudi cooperation in a crisis. Restated, in lieu of a formal commitment peacetime military assistance provided the essential security linkage. Adding to the twists was the King’s need to get visible military assistance from the U.S. to justify continued American peacetime access to Dhahran, which was not a secret. Or at least that was the argument put forth. All of this elaborate dancing also gave the King additional bargaining leverage with the U.S.: arms for access on his terms.

Childs summed up the King’s disposition as “do something concrete now or tell us that you are going to do nothing;” the time for talk had passed. Given this situation, he argued the need for concluding the numerous studies and deliberations in Washington over military assistance to the Kingdom. If the decision was favorable, a party from the Defense Department should be sent to Saudi Arabia to meet with the King and his advisers, inform them of what could be offered, and what the cost to the Saudi government would be. Based on Childs’ conversations with the King and Yusuf Yassin, he was confident that providing military assistance would resolve any problems with gaining access to Saudi facilities the U.S. might need for its own defense requirements.

---

60 Childs to Marshall, 24 April 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol V, *The Near East, South Asia, and Africa* Part 1, pp. 237. The U.S. military was also now dealing with another more operational aspect of access to Saudi Arabia. In January 1948 the National Security Council requested that Secretary of Defense Forrestal instruct the JCS to prepare a statement on military considerations involved in the demolition of oil facilities in the Middle East. Among the issues was whether any peacetime preparations were required for this eventuality. The JCS concluded that the Soviet Union, through the use of airborne assault and other forces, could completely control Iran, Iraq and the oil resources of Saudi Arabia within 60 days of hostilities. As
The linkage between military assistance and U.S. military access was clear, even if it had to be obscured publicly.

Further pressure to get on with a military assistance program came from Henderson, who stated in mid-May that U.S. withholding of military aid to Saudi Arabia should be considered “a temporary position” pending a settlement on Palestine. In order to prepare for subsequent negotiations on military assistance, the U.S. had to decide what it was prepared to commit to in the future. The one existing military assistance activity, the training of Saudi nationals to operate Dhahran, was proving inadequate even within its own limited sphere of activity. The first group of Saudi Arabian students graduated from the training program on July 1st. Yet despite this apparent progress Colonel Snyder, commander of the Training Mission, could not suppress his disillusionment over the marginal commitment of the U.S.:

The prospect of operating another school term under the same conditions that made the first term a pathetic caricature of a training program filled the staff with consternation. No one was being bluff by the feeble efforts of the U.S. Government to fulfill its training commitment, lease of all the Saudi Arabian Government and students.

the U.S. did not have the capacity to actively defend against such an assault, the Joint Chiefs concluded that the oil should be denied to Soviet invaders. This required detailed planning and regional stockpiling of materials for sealing oil wells. Demolition would be used to destroy transportation, refineries and loading facilities. It also called for standing up an organization in the region “utilizing allied missions, black psychological warfare teams, and oil company representatives” to be charged with implementing the destruction if necessary. Should the fields have to be abandoned, the Joint Chiefs concluded that it would take 30-60 days to properly prepare the fields to deny them to the enemy. This was due to the fact that the wells would not simply be blown, but actually plugged; this would effectively eliminate the well itself from any future use, but without destroying the resources. Using this approach involved stockpiling large concrete blocks to serve as plugs and the assignment of demolition crews. As far as local responsibility for the program, this was to be entrusted to a military officer also “assigned other duties which will furnish a logical pretext for his presence in the area.” In his absence it was argued that the Commanding Officer, Dhahran Air Base, should be invested with this responsibility. Given the political ramifications of a decision to execute plugging of the wells, the Secretary of State was considered the appropriate decision maker for this. Disclosure of the existence of such a program to the King or other members of the Saudi Government was to be made only at the discretion of the Secretary of State. Preparation for Demolition of Oil Facilities in the Middle East, J.C.S. 1833/1, 20 March 1948, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), and Preparation for Demolition of Oil Facilities in the Middle East, Report by the State-Army-Navy-Air Force Coordinating Subcommittee for the Near and Middle East, enclosure to SANACC 398/4, 25 May 1948. This program was later codified in NSC 26.

In the absence of adequate training supplies and facilities, Snyder suggested that the next term be postponed. The State Department rejected this on the grounds that “such action might have unfortunate political implications.”\footnote{Even discounting the remarks as in part a means for getting needed resources, the program clearly had serious problems. \textit{Report on Saudi Arabian Training Mission}, 31 August 1948, \textit{Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State} (RG 84), Dhahran Consulate, Miscellaneous Classified Records, 1947-1951. This file contains monthly reports of the Training Mission.}

**What Price Dhahran?**

While political pressures mounted to get on with a decision on military assistance to Saudi Arabia, the military value of the air field and facilities remained contentious. In response to a State Department request for an evaluation of the strategic facilities required of the U.S. military in Saudi Arabia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff listed telecommunications capabilities at Dhahran and the air base facilities there.\footnote{In October 1948 a U.S. Navy Communication Unit was established at Dhahran under the military command of the Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean (CINCNELM). This was part of the Navy’s world-wide communication system. See CINCNELM Annual Reports, 1947-1953, 18 April 1949, housed at the Operational Archives Branch of the U.S. Naval Historical Center, Washington D.C.} As for key operational requirements, these were the right of U.S. military forces to enter the area upon threat of war and directly related, the peacetime right to develop and maintain the facilities necessary to accomplish this crisis access. Therefore wartime access was conditional on peacetime presence and peacetime presence conditional on military assistance.\footnote{Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense Forrestal, 10 August 1948, \textit{FRUS}, 1948, Vol V, \textit{The Near East, South Asia, and Africa} Part 1, pp. 244-245.}

Another appraisal in October 1948 by U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff General Hoyt Vandenberg can best be described as lukewarm. Vandenberg’s comments carried considerable weight not only as Chief of Staff, but also in his designated role as Executive Agent for the JCS on all matters pertaining to renewal of U.S. military rights at Dhahran. While citing and endorsing the views of the JCS as to the desirability of Dhahran as a transit stop, telecommunications facility, and useful base in the event of an
emergency, he also stressed JCS recognition “that the area in which this air base is located would probably be lost shortly after an outbreak of hostilities with the USSR.” In clear reference to limiting U.S. obligations for any future use of the facilities he concluded that the “[m]ilitary appraisal of the relative importance to U.S. security of this base in light of the probability of its early loss will largely determine the extent to which the U.S. should commit itself, in terms of critical U.S. aid and equipment, in order to retain the present Saudi rights.” Simply put, Dhahran might not be worth any commitment of peacetime U.S. military assistance. There was also growing concern—shared by Vandenberg and others—that Abdul Aziz would use the recent U.S. vote on Palestine as leverage to extract a greater price for renewing U.S. base rights. Militarily this could include substantial increases in arms, equipment and other military support, if not actual military commitments, to the Kingdom. Given the already limited military value of the air base and the ever-growing demands on U.S. forces throughout the globe, the military cost of retaining the air base had to be carefully weighed. Vandenberg recommended that the question of renewal be referred to the Joint Strategic Survey Committee (JSSC).

The relative value of Dhahran was also reflected in U.S. war plans at the time. As far as staging areas for conventional and nuclear counterattacks with long-range bombers, the U.S. emphasis was on the British base complex at Cairo-Suez. This consisted of an extensive infrastructure of 38 army camps and 10 airfields. The air base at Abu Sueir had the most potential for striking at the Soviet industrial heartland, along

---

65 Military Viewpoint as to Renewal of Air Rights at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, Memorandum by the Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force, enclosure to J.C.S. 1869/3, 16 October 1948, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218).
66 A summary of these plans and the priorities underpinning them are in Appendix A, U.S. War Plans And The Middle East: 1945-1950.
with Wheelus Air Force Base in Libya.\textsuperscript{68} Indeed by the late 1940s the U.S. military concluded that Abu Sueir was of such strategic importance that it advocated a cost-sharing agreement with the U.K. for further development of the field, despite scarce resources.\textsuperscript{69} The extensive military facilities in Egypt also provided the option of amphibious assaults into the Balkans.\textsuperscript{70}

During this same period Turkey was becoming a major element in U.S. defense planning, both as a means to mount a conventional ground defense against Soviet invasion and as key territory from which to launch long-range air strikes. As part of the effort to build up Turkey through the Truman Doctrine, the U.S. provided large sums of military aid to Ankara. The U.S. also invested in reconstruction of existing air bases and the building of new ones with the intent of using these for strategic bombardment of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{71} Over time Turkey’s role would grow further as the allied ‘Northern Tier’ strategy supplanted earlier efforts hinging on Cairo-Suez, largely due to Britain’s collapsing political-military position in Egypt. The remote and rudimentary infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and the Dhahran Air Field paled in comparison to these other assets.

The draft recommendations of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee were forwarded to the JCS on November 6. The JSSC deemed the Dhahran air base “highly important but not vital to the future security of the United States.” Having also recognized the Soviet capability to occupy the area, the JSSC concluded that from the immediate and short-range viewpoint, it would seem unwise to make any commitment of

\textsuperscript{68} For the importance of the Canal Zone bases in U.S. strategic plans see Peter L. Hahn, \textit{The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945-1956} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 74-77.
\textsuperscript{69} Cohen, \textit{Fighting World War Three From the Middle East: Allied Contingency Plans, 1945-1954}, p. 136. Hahn states that this effort was rejected by Truman, leaving the British to incur all the improvement costs.
\textsuperscript{71} For a discussion of early U.S. thinking on the role of Turkey as a base for strategic operations against the Soviet Union see Cohen, \textit{Fighting World War Three From the Middle East: Allied Contingency Plans, 1945-1954}, pp. 53-56.
magnitude in order to retain our rights there.” However, taking the longer-range perspective to include the increasing strategic value of oil reserves in Saudi Arabia and the likely need for the U.S. to retake the oil fields should the USSR occupy them in a war, JSSC concluded that maintaining

our present friendly relations with the government and people of Saudi Arabia is a highly important consideration. Therefore, from other than the short-range viewpoint, it would be a significant contribution to our national security for the United States to make such commitments as may be practicable in order to retain our foothold in Saudi Arabia and maintain our friendly relations there.  

This was of course a classic hedge, stopping short of any commitments based on military need while leaving the door open (to others) to determine the military assistance price of maintaining “friendly relations.” In sum, this could only be described as a weak endorsement with equally weak justifications.  

As to military assistance itself, JSSC supported limited amounts of material but no increase in the number of U.S. military personnel stationed at Dhahran. It considered such increases impractical given existing heavy commitments by the U.S. military elsewhere and prospective budgetary limitations. JSCC did concede that the military personnel at Dhahran exerted “by their presence a stabilizing influence in Saudi Arabia” and that such influence would be lost should a new agreement fail to be reached. The JSSC summarized its overall position on renewal of air rights at Dhahran as follows:

[I]t is the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that it is in the military interest of the United States to retain, through negotiations for renewal of the present agreement,

72 Report of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Military Viewpoint as to Renewal of Air Rights at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, J.C.S. 1869/4, 6 November 1948, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218).

73 The point of retaining friendly relations in order to expedite recapturing occupied oil fields certainly was a stretch. U.S. military planning at the time assumed that if the Soviets did manage to capture significant oil production centers in the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia, any successful effort to later eject them would result in widespread Soviet destruction of the wells to prevent allied use. As one author put it, between this prospect and the underdeveloped status of Saudi fields “A successful counteroffensive in the Gulf seemed to promise only the recapture of unusable resources.” Indeed as the prohibitive logistics of protecting or retaking the fields set in, by the late 1940s the U.S. shifted its focus away from declaring Gulf oil resources critical to the war effort, instead planning for the much less demanding task of denial. Ross, American War Plans, 1945-1950, p. 68, and State-Army-Navy-Air Force Coordinating Committee (SANACC) planning papers, May 1948, later codified in War Plan Offtackle, November 1949, cited in Ross, pp. 106, 113.
our base rights at Dhahran, and to maintain the good will of Saudi Arabia in order
to secure oil from that country during peacetime and unless deprived by war, and
to have available the assistance of the people of Saudi Arabia in retaking that
country should it be overrun by USSR forces in the course of war.  

As a result of subsequent study the JCS revised upward its opinion of Dhahran’s value, but only by also changing the military assumptions surrounding it. It now stated that “our world-wide strategic position would be greatly improved” in time of war if Dhahran could be protected and sustained air operations run from the air base. Once active and extended defense of Dhahran was included, then the principal liability of early loss was greatly reduced. To this end and in contrast to the JSCC it requested that as a first step additional U.S. military personnel be posted in the Kingdom. The JCS believed “that this initial increase in personnel could be effected by expanding the Air Force Training Mission” at Dhahran, to include Army and Navy contingents. As defined previously by the Joint Chiefs in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, the goal was “for a United States training mission so expanded that it, in conjunction with Saudi Arabian nationals, can defend United States military installations in the Dhahran area.” The idea was to build a force of sufficient defensive capability that Dhahran could not be easily overrun by the Soviets as projected. This all suggested an increase in the American military interest in Dhahran and in its presence there. This in turn entailed a corresponding shift in the importance and purpose attached to peacetime military assistance. Secretary of Defense Forrestal endorsed these views and recommended to the Secretary of State that negotiations with the Saudis be undertaken to accomplish this.

74 Report of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Military Viewpoint as to Renewal of Air Rights at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, JCS 1869/4, 6 November 1948, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218).

75 Recorded in Forrestal to Marshall, 8 November 1948, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (RG 330), Office of the Administrative Secretary, Correspondence Control Section, Numerical File, CD27-1-12.

76 For original JCS memo see JCS to the Secretary of Defense, 10 August 1948, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (RG 330), Office of the Administrative Secretary, Correspondence Control Section, Numerical File, CD27-1-12. See also Forrestal to Marshall, 8 November 1948, FRUS, Vol. V, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Part I, p. 252. Language was later drafted for the follow-on Dhahran Air Base
Thus the U.S. Training Mission, set up to teach the Saudis to ultimately take over the commercial functioning of Dhahran, became a means for enhancing U.S. wartime capabilities against the Soviet Union as well. Also entering the picture was the objective of training a Saudi force to supplement U.S. forces in the protection of key areas and facilities in the Kingdom.

Yet at this very time the military was seeking to increase the American presence, Minister Childs was recommending a low-key U.S. approach to Dhahran. Given the prevailing atmosphere of Royal disappointment that no military assistance was imminent, he argued that any request for an extension of the Air Base agreement be of short duration pending more favorable conditions. Any near-term changes more favorable to the U.S. were not in the cards. As the March 15, 1949 expiration date rapidly approached, and in response to the JCS position, Secretary of State Marshall wanted to know if the National Military Establishment was “prepared, provided the embargo against shipments of arms to the Near East is lifted, to supply the Government of Saudi Arabia with arms and other military equipment?” He also inquired as to whether the military was “prepared to extend the scope of the training provided Saudi Arabia to include instructions in fields other than aviation?”

Childs continued to wax pessimistic. The Saudi Arabian Government and people were “at present bitter toward and distrustful of the United States Government.” As he saw it the King’s dilemma was that

the Saudi Arabian Government is sincerely desirous of renewing the Dhahran Airbase Agreement and under ordinary circumstances it would probably be prepared to do so without any quid pro quo. In order, however, to avoid the criticism from other Arab states, notably Iraq and Egypt, that Saudi Arabia has become a virtual satellite of the United States by permitting the United States Air

agreement requesting the original limitation of 2,000 base personnel be expanded up to 6,000. Childs to Marshall, 18 December 1948, FRUS, Vol. V, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Part I, pp. 260-261.  


Force to establish itself for an indefinite period at Dhahran in the face of what the Arabs conceive to be a hostile United States’ policy toward them, the King has been obliged to link the renewal of the Airbase Agreement with the promise of some tangible military assistance in return.\textsuperscript{79}

As the year came to a close, it was clear that attitudes toward Dhahran’s importance and corresponding future military assistance to the Kingdom remained fluid. This was summed up in Lovett’s telegram to the Saudi Legation in mid-December:

Thinking of Nat Mil Estab has not crystallized re Dhahran...can get nothing definite on such questions as expanding facilities and personnel Dhahran Air Base, increasing re training given there, and possibility eventually furnishing mil equipment SAG...at present Air Force considers Dhahran important but not vital and is in no position make extensive commitments re expansion training, or providing mil equipment if such should be required for extension of Agreement.\textsuperscript{80}

Childs was instructed to continue explaining to the King the many difficulties still facing the U.S. in providing military assistance. He was to emphasize the advantages accrued to Saudi Arabia from having the U.S. operate the air field, including the costs absorbed by the U.S. in doing so.\textsuperscript{81} Playing for time remained the principal negotiating strategy.

\textbf{Bridging The Gap: Short Term Renewal And Military Survey}

In the face of these continuing difficulties both parties searched for a short-term solution. The Saudi position was that between the pressure on the King due to the U.S. Government’s support for Israel and the limits this and other political factors placed on any concrete military assistance coming from the U.S., it would be exceedingly difficult for the King to make any long-term agreement at the time. The Saudis added that they did value the U.S. presence and the King had no desire to see that presence removed. The expedient called for an extension of short duration, one year, with provisions for annual extensions pending a longer-term solution.

\textsuperscript{79} Childs to Marshall, 9 December 1948, Dispatch No. 264, \textit{Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State} (RG 84), Dhahran Consulate, Miscellaneous Classified Records, 1947-1951.


In January 1949, a cease fire between Israel and the Arabs took hold. This development eased some of the pressure on the Truman Administration to refrain from selling arms to the Arab states. A few weeks later the State Department received answers to its inquiry on the importance attached by the National Military Establishment to Dhahran and its willingness to commit resources to that end. Forrestal, writing to Marshall on February 10, stated that the Air Force was willing to spend several million dollars to further develop and maintain the field; as for military assistance, the continuing embargo made any judgment difficult, and the military simply agreed to revisit the issue once it was lifted. On the question of extending the scope of training, the JCS responded that it was prepared “to expand the training mission to Saudi Arabia and its objectives to include not only airport operation but also air base defense.” This additional training, the Joint Chiefs argued, “will go far toward the attainment both of the United States strategic objective and of King Ibn Saud’s desire for trained military personnel as a stabilizing influence in the country.”

Though still quite restrictive in scope, this represented another expression of the willingness and intent to move toward formal training of the Saudi military.

In a March 31 letter to President Truman, the very day the Dhahran Air Field was officially transferred over to the Saudi Arabian Government, Abdul Aziz addressed the issue of the Dhahran agreement and military assistance. Starting with the issue of the U.S. military presence at the air field, he remarked on the differences between privileges extended during wartime and adjustments that had to be made in time of peace. The original provisions could not continue “without giving rise among friend and foe to the kind of talk which we wish to avoid.” Consequently “new conditions are not the result of our lack of desire to continue providing you effectively with the requested facilities for

\[82\] Forrestal to Acheson, 10 February 1949, FRUS, 1949, Vol VI, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, pp. 1579-80.
\[83\] For details of the transfer see Meloy to Acheson, 4 April 1949, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State (RG 84), Dhahran Consulate, Confidential File, 1946-1949, Box 1.
military aircraft belonging to the United States armed forces; they are based on our desire
to avoid disturbing public opinion both at home and in the neighboring Arab countries
and abroad.” He then turned to the current status of military assistance. The King made
clear his sense of future expectations:

Your Excellency will observe also that we have set one year as the term of this
agreement. This period is, of course, a short one, but we have done this because
we feel sure that the United States of America, because of the deplorable situation
in the Middle East and the disturbance and troubles arising from the painful
events in Palestine, is not in a position to examine, confirm, and strengthen its
relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on a long-term basis. However, since
the motives which have led the United States Government to adopt such a
position have almost run their course, we hope and believe that it may be fitting
for us to take the opportunity to study the situation in the light of the development
of major international events and establish the ties between our two countries on a
firm, fixed basis. This would be not only for the purpose of guaranteeing the use
of the Dhahran airfield by aircraft of the armed forces of the United States of
America, the great strategic importance of which cannot be denied, but also to
conclude a broader and clearer long-term agreement guaranteeing mutual defense,
which it has until now not been possible to put into our various agreements.\footnote{Abdul Aziz to President Truman, 31 March 1949, \textit{Harry S. Truman Library}, Papers of Harry S. Truman, White House Central Files, Confidential Files, Box 41.}

The U.S. continued to explore ways to signal its intent to provide some form of
training and equipment. In a letter from the Secretary of State to the Secretary of
Defense on May 10, 1949, Acheson requested the National Military Establishment to
urgently consider ways to bring the Dhahran air base agreement to successful short-term
closure and lay the foundation for long-term arrangements. In writing to Louis Johnson
he noted that the

King’s ultimate desire is some sort of a mutual defense pact with this country.
While such an arrangement is impossible at the present time, it is felt that there
are measures which could be taken, short of such a defense pact, which might
give concrete assurance to the King of our interest in the continued independence
and integrity of Saudi Arabia, and willingness to help the King in his efforts to
insure internal security and reasonable defense against aggression from his
neighbors....Whatever the outcome of current negotiations for a one year
extension, it is virtually certain that no long-term agreement can be obtained without a substantial *quid pro quo*. 85

Acheson recommended that Saudi Arabia be told it would be eligible for U.S. military assistance on a cash reimbursable basis under the military aid program then being proposed to Congress. In the interim, while such legislation was being formalized, the U.S. would offer to send a group of American military officers to evaluate Saudi Arabia’s defense needs and determine U.S. long-term military requirements at Dhahran. The expectation would be that once the embargo was lifted, necessary equipment and training as determined by the survey would then be offered. But Acheson was clear that the State Department had no desire to send such a message to the King unless the National Military Establishment could supply the needed officers and effectively implement the proposed survey program. 86

The frustration in Riyadh meanwhile became ever-more palpable. In a private meeting with Ambassador Childs 87 on May 10 Abdul Aziz marked with growing impatience his repeated requests and the failed responses of the U.S. This was the last time he would ask. Childs took this renewed agitation and threat very seriously, telling Washington of the need to at least offer to train 10,000 Saudi mobile airborne troops to defend Dhahran. 88

In a May 23 letter to the King President Truman expressed his hope that a prompt agreement could be reached for a one-year renewal of Dhahran, this “in order that we may proceed with plans and negotiations for a long-term agreement” of mutual

---

85 A copy of Acheson’s letter to Johnson is attached as an enclosure to *Current Negotiations for Extension of U.S. Military Rights at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia*, J.C.S. 1881/6, 12 May 1949, *Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (RG 218).
advantage. As part of these longer-term plans and negotiations the President apprised the King that he was directing the “Department of State and the National Military Establishment to make a careful study of the whole subject.” While still non-committal, certainly in terms of any defense pact, the implied message was that the full range of military issues, including military assistance to Saudi Arabia, would be under consideration.

The prospects for military assistance were made even more explicit by Ambassador Childs in his meeting with the King. After conveying the contents of the President’s May 23 letter, the Ambassador explained that a proposed plan to Congress for future military assistance would make Saudi Arabia eligible for military equipment on a cash reimbursable basis—the only Arab state scheduled for such assistance. But this Congressional action would take time. In the interim and as preparation for longer term plans, Childs explained that if His Majesty believed it beneficial, the State Department would request immediately that the National Military Establishment send a group of officers to Saudi Arabia. They would come with two objectives. First, they would conduct an overall assessment of Saudi Arabian defense needs and on that basis, make recommendations for the organizing, training and equipping of Saudi defense forces. Second, they would undertake a study of U.S. defense requirements at Dhahran air field

89 A tentative revised agreement to extend the Dhahran Airfield Agreement for one year was reached on March 25. This was followed by a series of additional negotiations over details, culminating in a formal exchange of notes and signing on June 23, 1949. This extended the agreement until June 23, 1950. See footnote pp. 1589, and Chargé in Saudi Arabia Bergus to Acheson, 20 July 1949, in FRUS, 1949, Vol VI, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, p. 1602. For text of the agreement see FRUS, 1949, pp. 1607-11.


91 In a memorandum attached to the draft of this reply to the King, Secretary of State Acheson noted to the President that it specifically “avoids any direct mention of the King’s desire for a defense pact, and instead concentrates on the Dhahran Airbase.” Memorandum For The President, 10 May 1949, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Harry S. Truman, White House Central Files, Confidential Files, Box 41.

92 The proposed legislation called for extending arms purchases to nations deemed important to U.S. national interests that were not part of any formal defense arrangement. Congress would later strike out this provision from the FY 1950 Military Defense Assistance Program (MDAP), limiting it instead to countries “joined with the United States in a collective defense and regional arrangement.” This setback would soon pose problems and other alternatives had to be pursued.
and how these could best be meshed with Saudi Arabia’s own military needs.\textsuperscript{93} Both of these activities would help establish the necessary conditions for arriving at a long-term agreement. In sum, Childs explained that “With a program of the type outlined...progress can be made in achieving the security which His Majesty so earnestly desires, and in which the United States Government also has great interest.”\textsuperscript{94}

Here then was the formal offer of a military survey team, with the clear implication that its recommendations would result in a serious, and likely extended, U.S. commitment of military assistance to the Kingdom. The “dual purpose” also made clear the linkage between a long-term agreement on Dhahran and this future military assistance.\textsuperscript{95} Less than a week later Ambassador Childs sent word that King Abdul Aziz approved the proposal.\textsuperscript{96} A watershed in the scale and long-term involvement of the U.S. in the military affairs of the Kingdom was about to be reached.

The U.S. and Saudi Arabia reached closure on the short-term renewal of the Dhahran air base agreement on June 23, 1949. To be in force for one year, this was to be followed by an extended and revised agreement based on the findings of the military survey. A few days later Secretary of Defense Johnson directed the JCS to “organize a small group of officers to proceed to Dhahran for the purpose of surveying the defense needs of Saudi Arabia.” The team was to be headed by a senior officer of general or flag

\textsuperscript{93} The JCS had earlier approved this offer and agreed to supply the officers necessary for conducting a survey. \textit{Current Negotiations for Extension of U.S. Military Rights at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, J.C.S. 1881/7, 28 May 1949, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218)}.


\textsuperscript{95} While the U.S. continued to use circuitous diplomatic language to avoid characterizing the negotiations as a trade or \textit{quid pro quo}, as a practical matter this was now well established. Remarking on the Saudi negotiating strategy over Dhahran, the \textit{Chargé} noted that the hard line taken by Riyadh on the recent one-year extension was predictable: “as has so often been expressed by the King, the Saudi Arabian viewpoint is that once we are in a position to make a firm commitment of some kind with respect to assistance to Saudi Arabia in her defense problems, we can count upon receiving every necessary facility in this country. Until that time, we can only expect the Saudi Arabs to exact as hard a bargain as they can.” Bergus to Acheson, 20 July 1949, \textit{FRUS}, 1949, Vol VI, \textit{The Near East, South Asia, and Africa}, p. 1606.

\textsuperscript{96} Acting Secretary of State Webb to Johnson, 20 June 1949, enclosure to \textit{Current Negotiations for Extension of U.S. Military Rights at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, J.C.S. 1881/8, 28 June 1949, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218)}.
USAF Chief of Staff General Vanderberg, previously appointed by the JCS as Executive Agent for matters relating to negotiations on U.S. military rights at Dhahran, was now also designated Executive Agent for what came to be known as the Joint United States Survey Group to Saudi Arabia (JUSSGSA). 

On August 17, 1949, and following his promotion to temporary rank of brigadier general, Richard J. O’Keefe, USAF, Commanding Officer of the Dhahran Air Field, was designated as Chief of the JUSSGSA. A Letter of Instructions to him set the parameters for establishing the defense needs of Saudi Arabian forces:

You will devise, in concert with Saudi Arabian officials, plans for defense forces satisfying the following conditions:

a. Fulfill the King of Saudi Arabia’s requirements for internal security subject to Saudi Arabian capabilities, financial or otherwise.
b. Permit independent operation of the Saudi Arabian defense establishment at the earliest opportunity.
c. Not impose on the Saudi Arabians a training or operational task beyond their ability.
d. Not require U.S. military assistance incapable of being supplied on a reimbursable basis.
e. Not require training of Saudi Arabian personnel either in the U.S. or in Saudi Arabia in excess of service capabilities.

O’Keefe was further instructed to make no commitments of any type to the Saudis. And in recognition of continuing political sensitivities he was told to keep distance from a British Military Survey Party already resident in Saudi Arabia. In the event of an encounter “Any such contact should be limited to informal or courtesy-type meetings,

---

97 Secretary of Defense, Memorandum for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Assignment of a Survey Group to the Dhahran Air Base, Saudi Arabia, 28 June 1949, Enclosure to JCS 1881/8, Current Negotiations For Extension of U.S. Military Rights At Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218).

98 Interestingly at the very time the survey party was authorized and military assistance growing as a real possibility, the defense perimeter of the U.S. was now shifting to Europe. Military planning had to reflect the April signing of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the U.S. commitment to the defense of Europe west of the Rhine. This now took priority over Cairo-Suez and the Middle East oil regions. While Dhahran held value as a base for air strikes, beyond this Saudi Arabia was increasingly peripheral to allied contingency planning.

and, accordingly, you will not collaborate or coordinate with the British Survey party and will avoid giving any semblance of combined planning.\textsuperscript{100}

**The Joint United States Survey Group to Saudi Arabia (JUSSGSA)**

Clearly the creation of the JUSSGSA was directly linked to the U.S. desire to renew military rights at Dhahran and further solidify U.S.-Saudi political-military relations. For the Saudis this was the most serious opportunity yet to gain long-term military assistance from Washington. Though its recommendations would be substantially modified by the Joint Chiefs, the JUSSGSA survey and report became the foundation and modernization blueprint for U.S. military assistance to the Kingdom spanning the next several decades. As such, it merits detailed examination.

**Background**

The JUSSGSA team arrived in Saudi Arabia on August 20, 1949. As one of the first orders of business General O’Keefe presented the survey group’s terms of reference to Shaykh Yassin, Deputy to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Fuad Bey Hamza, Counselor to the King. Among the key points covered was that the survey team was there only to conduct the necessary studies in support of the defense assessment and had no authority to make any commitments on behalf of the U.S. government. Any recommendations arrived at “should be based on a wise balance between the practical needs of Saudi Arabia for internal security (that is, for the defense of Saudi Arabian sovereignty) and commensurate with the ability of Saudi Arabia to pay for the equipment and to maintain such a military establishment.” The final report, to be compiled in

\textsuperscript{100} *Establishment of a Joint U.S. Survey Group to Saudi Arabia*, Appendix A. The British had been conducting a survey of Saudi Arabian and Empire military requirements in the Kingdom. Ambassador Childs argued that Abdul Aziz finally agreed to this out of resignation “our indifference his repeated overtures to US.” The final product became known as the Royal Air Force Reconnaissance Report. Notably, in responding to the report the British Chiefs of Staff stated that there was no military justification for the development of air fields in Saudi Arabia by the U.K., and that they were not prepared to spend any defense funds for this purpose. Childs to Acheson, 19 May 1949, 890F.20/5-1949, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59), Internal Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia; and *Exchange of Information with the United Kingdom Regarding Saudi Arabia*, Note by the Secretaries, J.C.S. 1881/19, 21 March 1950, *Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (RG 218). This document includes a summary of the R.A.F. Report.
Washington D.C., would be transmitted to His Majesty at the same time it was delivered to the U.S. Department of Defense.  

At General O’Keefe’s request the King assigned six Saudi Army officers to aid the U.S. team, including the Army Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Said Bey Kordi. From August to November the survey team traveled 3,825 statute miles by vehicle. Total air travel within the region in support of the survey group’s studies totaled 44,613 statute miles. On November 13 the survey team’s findings on requirements for Saudi Arabian internal security were presented to Crown Prince Saud, who fully endorsed the group’s recommendations. A similar presentation was made by the Saudi Chief of Staff to the Minister of Defense and the Foreign Ministry on November 16. Following a final meeting with the King, Abdul Aziz also fully supported the findings of the team. No written document was provided at the time, as the formal report was not yet compiled. The final written report was completed in January 1950 and submitted at that time to the JCS for review. What follows are the principal findings of that report and its recommendations.

The Report’s Strategic Appraisal

The final report opened with a strategic appraisal of Saudi Arabia’s importance to the U.S: "Saudi Arabia is strategically the most important nation in the Arabian Peninsula and the Arabian Peninsula is the most important area in the Middle East-Eastern Mediterranean region in view of its oil resources and its geographical position."

Protected on three sides by water and in the north by countries resisting Soviet expansion

---

101 Report by the Joint U.S. Survey Group to Saudi Arabia, transmitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff thru the Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force on U.S. Military Aid to Saudi Arabia for Negotiation of Long-Term U.S. Rights at Dhahran Air Base, 3 January 1950, Main Report, and Appendix E, “Itinerary of JUSSGSA,” Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218). Hereafter this document will be referred to by its short common name the “O’Keefe Report,” named after the survey team head.

102 O’Keefe Report, Enclosure: “Facts Bearing on the Problem and Discussion.”

103 Ibid., Appendix E, “Itinerary of JUSSGSA”.

104 This is based on a distillation of the entire report which, including all appendices, is over 500 pages.
“it is capable of being the core, or hub, of U.S. action to resist Communist aggression from the north, east, or west.” Time, space and terrain factors made defending Saudi Arabian oil "immeasurably simpler" than that of Iran and Iraq. Any Russian effort to seize the oil of these adjacent neighbors to fuel a larger war against Europe would be unlikely to succeed "if bases in Saudi Arabia supplied by Saudi Arabian oil could affect retaliation, or even destruction, of Iranian and Iraqi oil fields."  

Operationally for the U.S., Saudi Arabia's difficult terrain and very limited transportation infrastructure would help provide security to any base development program there. Air bases could provide strike and post-strike capabilities as well as a source of fuel for military operations. Furthermore, "[s]ubject to a limited number of minor restrictions, air base development of any size or type may be accomplished in any area of Saudi Arabia."  

Turning to an appraisal of the King’s own security concerns, the report reiterated his long-held perspective that the greatest threats to the Kingdom came from his Hashemite enemies in Transjordan and Iraq. He lived with the constant fear that these enemies would seek to regain the Hijaz Province and the northern Nejd. Regarding the Soviet Union

> [t]he danger of invasion from Russia is constantly present in the minds of those in top control. This fear remains in a nebulous form, however, more as a "bogey-man" than an actuality. The concern over Russia has only crystallized in the fear that Russia will arm and equip one of the neighboring states in the Middle East.  

In other observations consistent with previous positions, the report records that the King was "determined to obtain military assistance for development of an adequate defensive force" against these threats and was growing increasingly frustrated at failed efforts to

---

106 Ibid., Appendix F: “Strategic Significance of Saudi Arabia.” The report notes that Strategic Air Command (SAC), recognizing the importance of Dhahran air base, already included it in its planned support for SAC operations. See Enclosure: “Facts Bearing on the Problem and Discussion.”
obtain such assistance (or a military alliance) from the U.S. It concluded that the King "has reached the limit of his patience and, if early assurance of U.S. military aid is not forthcoming, he will turn to other, possibly unfriendly, sources for military assistance." Severe consequences would flow from a failure to provide military assistance quickly. These were cast as much in political and economic as military terms, stressing that “U.S. influence in the Islamic world will be lost irretrievably,” and with it, U.S. commercial opportunities throughout the middle east. The benefits of U.S. military assistance on the other hand, were stated with equal conviction and gravity, again greatly exceeding the scope of pure military matters. These included encouraging “the Middle East to resist aggression and the spread of Communism,” and “tend to stabilize the unstable Middle East.”

Furthermore, U.S. military assistance would directly and favorably influence the internal differences within the Royal Family over long-term relations with the U.S. The Truman Administration’s position on Palestine had bolstered the position of those individuals critical of relying on the United States; a decision now to be forthcoming with military aid would shore up those advocating closer ties. A military assistance program would also "serve to strengthen the Saud dynasty and to ensure the continuance in power of rulers friendly to the United States." As to financing this undertaking, "[t]he Saudi Arabian Government has fully accepted the fact that all military aid will be on a reimbursable basis" and that the only U.S. funds required would be those for further development of the Dhahran Air Base.

---

108 Ibid., “Main Report.”
110 The Saudis also made it quite clear that they would not accept second-rate or obsolete equipment. They were well aware that in the past other countries had used Saudi Arabia as a dumping ground for old or heavily used equipment, oftentimes without providing proper ammunition or spare parts. This led to considerable bitterness. The Saudis stipulated that all equipment purchased from the U.S. must be current and in production. Ibid., Appendix B: “Existing Saudi Arabian Defense Means,” p. 34.
From this strategic appraisal it is clear that military assistance was being argued as much or more on political as on military grounds. Strategic political benefits included containment of Communism, enhanced regional stability, influence in the Islamic world, and long-term commercial access to oil. More narrowly, military assistance would serve the political functions of directly strengthening the Al Saud regime (to include maintaining internal security) and those factions within it predisposed toward the U.S. As to U.S. military objectives, assistance would insure U.S. access to facilities for waging war against the Soviet Union, while a capable Saudi armed force could also reduce demands on U.S. troops. Finally, a Saudi self-defense capability in and of itself was considered beneficial to the U.S. Encapsulated here were the multiple purposes to be served by military assistance to the Kingdom.

Assessment of Existing Saudi Defense Capabilities

The survey team judged existing Saudi Arabian defensive capabilities to be very weak, with the ability only "to maintain border patrol and internal garrisons for police action in the Kingdom." Responses to external threats would be limited to "guerrilla-type actions," with no ability to materially aid U.S. forces, either with trained troops or equipment. Overall training was low and largely limited to small arms and light artillery. While as individual fighters the soldiers were motivated and capable, there was "an almost complete lack of knowledge on combined action, logistics, and staff procedure." In terms of its material foundations, the Saudi military suffered from worn out and badly outdated equipment, lack of standardization and virtually nonexistent logistics. Aside from sabers and daggers, all military equipment had to be purchased from abroad; there was no indigenous Saudi defense industry. While organized political intrigue inside the Army was not believed to exist, the highly personalized nature of all

---

111 Ibid., Enclosure: “Facts Bearing on the Problem and Discussion.”
government decision making bred personal favoritism and animosities.\textsuperscript{112} This problem was worsened by the fact that "the pyramid of command above units consists of inefficient and generally corrupt groups with the local Amir, Province Governor, and, in turn, with the Defense Ministry."\textsuperscript{113} Despite these substantial liabilities, the report concluded that "[g]iven modern arms and equipment, a thorough training program, and an efficient top control, the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces could easily become an efficient fighting force capable of countering modern armies."\textsuperscript{114}

In the event of an invasion, Saudi Arabia faced the challenges of maintaining as much of its territorial integrity as possible, with special emphasis on protecting the oil producing areas, the TAPLINE and the holy sites of Mecca and Medina. While Saudi Arabia's geographic expanse and harsh environment still served its defensive purposes well, the growing concentration of oil resources in the north and the accompanying growth of road networks and other infrastructure was increasing its physical vulnerability.\textsuperscript{115} In particular this development meant that the classic Saudi defensive concept of trading space for time, exploiting natural sand barriers and emptiness, would now have to be replaced with a new defensive concept and system.\textsuperscript{116}

**Structure of the Armed Forces.** The survey group estimated the Saudi Arabian armed forces to consist of a Regular Army of 18,000-20,000 men (600 officers), a Militia of between 80,000-90,000, and a tribal force ("jihad" troops) of approximately 300,000. The Regular Army was populated in peacetime by 18-21 year-old volunteers for periods of 3-5 years. The latter two forces, the militia and tribal soldiers, were under the control of local tribal chieftans/emirs but subject to levies by the King in emergencies. This

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., Appendix B: “Existing Saudi Arabian Defense Means.”
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., Appendix C: “Training Status of Saudi Arabian Military Forces in Being,” Army, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., Appendix B: “Existing Saudi Arabian Defense Means,” p. 22.
\textsuperscript{115} As part of the TAPLINE project, a highway of over 900 miles was built from the Persian Gulf to the Jordanian border, running along Saudi Arabia’s northern frontier. See *TAPLINE...the story of the world’s biggest oil pipe line* (New York: Trans-Arabian Pipe Line Company, January 1951), p. 11.
loose and dispersed collection constituted the country’s military “reserves,” as there was no organized reserve system in the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia had no navy and no air force, though it did have an airline supervised under contract by TWA consisting of 13 C-47/DC3 type passenger planes and five British transports. These were used for commercial purposes and for direct use by the King. The aircraft were not employed by the military and the transports were not configured to drop paratroops. In terms of aircraft support, the most technically proficient Saudis and best repair and maintenance facilities were located at Jeddah, also the location of two hard surface runways. Jeddah was used heavily to transport pilgrims during the Hajj which accounted for much of the capability located there.

For all practical purposes the Saudi armed forces were the King's personal army. The chain of command ran from King Abdul Aziz to his eldest son Crown Prince Saud, who acted as Commander-in-Chief. Faisal, second eldest living son, exercised considerable influence as President of the Council of Ministers, President of the Consultative Council, and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Next was the Minister of Defense, Abdul Aziz’s twelfth son Prince Mansour, reportedly a favorite of the King. Within the Ministry of Defense there was a Chief of Staff and several Directorates (Finance, Operations, Aviation). Army Area Commands were established throughout the Kingdom, headed by Field Commanders who were also in charge of local units.

According to Saudi Chief of Staff General Said Bey Kordi all Army Field Commanders reported directly to him, although the survey team believed the system to be much more decentralized. Even in the case of the Regular Army, the Governors of the various provinces (all members of the Royal Family) were believed to exercise considerable operational control over army units garrisoned within their provincial areas.

---

117 One of the Douglas C-47s was a gift from President Roosevelt to the King following their meeting at Great Bitter Lake.
This control was occasionally further decentralized by governors granting local Amirs authority over the units garrisoned in their towns. The result was an Army that was a mixed national and territorial force.\textsuperscript{119}

Given that the dominant role of the Army was to maintain internal security and\textit{not} to defend against external adversaries, this structure made a great deal of sense. Furthermore, the extensive family and tribal networks ensured that localized control served the primary objective of protecting the rule of the Al Saud. Such a structure was ill-suited, however, to meeting the challenges posed by serious outside aggressors.\textsuperscript{120}

Infantry, cavalry and artillery branches were designated for training purposes, but no practical service units existed. Battalions were the highest organized tactical units, but assessed as "little more than grouping of persons in rifle and machine gun companies, artillery and cavalry companies." The Army possessed no tanks or heavily armed or armored vehicles, limited to an inventory of about 30-40 British armored cars. Due to maintenance problems and lack of desert modifications these vehicles remained garaged and considered of little use by the Saudis. The Army was "motorized in a very limited sense" with most vehicles in poor mechanical condition.\textsuperscript{121}

**Military Deployment.** In 1949 Saudi Arabia was divided into five major geographic and political areas. These were organized into the five provinces of Hasa (eastern), Nejd (central), Hijaz (western), Asir (southwest), and the Rub‘ al Khali (southeast). These geographic areas also correspond to the territories conquered by Abdul Aziz. Most notable in terms of the King's security fears was the Hijaz, home of the holy cities of Medina and Mecca, and the territory wrested from the Hashemite family in 1926. As Hussein's descendants became the ruling Hashemites of Iraq (King Feisal, his grandson)

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p. 24.

\textsuperscript{120} As subsequent chapters will show, this legacy was to prove a long-term liability in efforts to create a modern and capable defensive force against conventional external military threats.

and Transjordan (King Abdulla, his second eldest son), these countries were viewed as natural enemies by the King.

As a function of its largely internal security role, the Regular Army operated from garrisons located in centers of population throughout the country. Several of these locations were near border areas and lines-of-communication. The Saudi Arabian Chief of Staff reported that the Saudi Army was deployed at nine such area garrisons inside the Kingdom, with a tenth in the Sinai Peninsula. The nine Saudi-based garrisons and associated Area Commands were Riyadh, Taif, Mecca, Medina, Jeddah, Hail, Hofuf, Abha, and Jizan. The Ministry of Defense and the Army Headquarters were both located at Taif. An Army radio net, part of the larger civil net linking the provinces with the King, linked Taif with each of the subordinate Commands and units.  

Assessment of External Threats to the Kingdom

As previously noted, the King considered Transjordan and Iraq to be the principal threats to the Kingdom. Geographically the most vital areas in Saudi Arabia were the Red Sea coastal zone with its holy cities of Mecca and Medina and the oil rich Eastern Province along the Persian Gulf coast. The survey team focused on plausible invasion routes from either adversary threatening these regions. These routes are shown on Map 3.1, Defense Needs of Saudi Arabia, reproduced from the original report.

In the case of Transjordan, a single vehicle route existed from the southeastern corner of the country running south to the Red Sea coast. Along the Trans-Arabian pipeline (TAPLINE) ran a road traversing the northern Saudi tier from the Gulf coast oilfields to the Eastern Mediterranean. The survey team assessed this road, built to support the TAPLINE project, as providing "a rapid vehicular route to the oil field area"

122 Ibid., p. 40.
Map 3.1 Defense Needs of Saudi Arabia

from both Transjordan and Iraq. The survey team concluded that a properly equipped division-sized force could easily move from Basrah in southern Iraq through Kuwait and to the Dhahran area within one week.

The U.S. threat assessment looked at individual invasions by either country alone, as well as a combined invasion. The latter was estimated to be the maximum regional threat to the Kingdom. Each country was considered capable of mounting a single-division threat of approximately 13,000 men and 1,000 vehicles, to include armored cars. Neither country's air force was considered a meaningful threat.

In the case of an Iraqi invasion, the threat was estimated to be a division-sized force staged out of Basrah with an axis of attack through Kuwait to the TAPLINE road. The objective was the northeastern oil areas around Dhahran. If unopposed, the U.S. estimated that the division force could reach the area in five days. Iraq was considered capable of also launching an amphibious attack out of Basrah with the objective of landing a regimental combat team ashore on the Saudi coast, with possible objectives Ras Tanura-Al Khobar-Jubail. A postulated invasion by Transjordan consisted of a single-division force with an axis of attack southward along the Red Sea coast with the objective of Medina and Mecca. Also considered was an axis thrusting southeast to the TAPLINE road and then to the oil fields. If unopposed, it was estimated this force could reach Medina in ten days or Dhahran in eleven days.

The combined action considered was a two-division force totaling approximately 20,000 troops. Three enemy courses of action were considered: a two-pronged attack with Iraq seizing the oil producing areas, Transjordan the holy cities Medina and Mecca;

---

123 Ibid., Enclosure: “Facts Bearing on the Problem and Discussion”.
125 The threat assessment limited itself to Middle Eastern countries and did not evaluate outside powers as adversaries (i.e., the Soviet Union). As the report notes, invasion by a major external power would result in other major power interventions (U.S., U.K.), dramatically changing military calculations.
a combined attack against the holy cities; and a combined attack against the oil areas. The assessment concluded that the most feasible action would involve a combined assault on the oil areas consisting of an Iraqi thrust southwards with Jordanian forces thrusting eastward along the TAPLINE road to support the invading Iraqi army.¹²⁷

**Future Requirements**

The survey group concluded that Saudi Arabia had sufficient quantity and quality of manpower along with the financial resources to field a modern military force capable of defending the Kingdom against neighboring powers. Out of a total population estimated at seven million, 700,000 males were estimated to be between 18–40 years of age. The average Saudi from among this group, with modern training and equipment, was deemed capable of becoming a good soldier in the same amount of time required of their U.S. counterparts.¹²⁸

In determining future Saudi defense requirements and the need for simplicity and economy, the U.S. team emphasized equipment having wider commercial application (i.e., "dual use"), preferably equipment already in use inside the Kingdom. Consequently, all vehicles recommended for the armed forces were of a commercial type suitable for support of normal everyday government operations and already in use in the desert by ARAMCO. In the case of the air force, any troop carrier aircraft should also be suitable for commercial passenger transportation of the Saudi Arabian airline. Following this same philosophy, the report emphasized that Saudi investments in the proposed defense modernization plan would be an investment in the development of Saudi Arabia as a whole, contributing to its basic infrastructure and the technical education of its population.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 145-147.
¹²⁸ Ibid., Appendix H: “Saudi Arabian Capabilities Reference Ability To Utilize U.S. Military Assistance,” p. 82.
Specific Service Recommendations: Army. The survey group recommended a Saudi Arabian Army of approximately 42,000 men consisting of 2,700 officers and 39,500 enlisted. These were broken out into combat and service supply forces as shown in Table 3.1. In terms of major equipment items, the proposed Infantry Divisions were to be motorized with trucks and equipped with M-1 rifles, as well as mortars and rocket launchers. The much smaller Parachute Infantry Combat Team was to be similarly equipped, while the Tank Destroyer Battalion including a complement of 76mm guns. The report’s recommended dispositions of the forces and their major headquarters is shown on Map 3.2. This proposed Saudi Army would be trained and advised by a U.S. Army instructor contingent consisting of 144 Army officers and 240 Army enlisted. These American Army personnel would be located at Dhahran, Al Kharj, Riyadh, Hail, Medina, Jiddah, and Hofuf. The initial five year cost for equipping and training the Army and for the necessary associated construction was estimated at approximately $80 million.130

Navy. The survey group recommended creation of a Saudi Arabian Navy of 265 men consisting of 50 officers and 215 enlisted. The mission of the proposed navy would be to enhance the sovereignty and prestige of the Saudi Arabian government, begin to balance the naval forces of Iraq, Iran and Transjordan, secure coastal waters, islands and off-shore oil rights, combat smuggling and provide a modest defensive force against seaborne attack by her neighbors. The Navy was to be equipped with Gunboats (PGMs), Motor Torpedo Boats (PTs), Support Landing Craft (LCS)(S)(2), and Motor Launches (ML) located at Ras Tanura and Jeddah, with Naval Headquarters in Riyadh. The proposed

---

### Combat Personnel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Enlisted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GHQ</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserves for GHQ</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Infantry Divisions</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>13680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserves for 2 Divisions</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>13680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parachute Infantry Combat Team</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tank Destroyer Battalion</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,086</strong></td>
<td><strong>28,908</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Service Supply Personnel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Enlisted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HQ SOS</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Service</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordnance Service</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quartermaster Service</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signal Service</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer Service</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation Motor Pools</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOS Reserves</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>5371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>618</strong></td>
<td><strong>10,742</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Army Totals:**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2,704</strong></td>
<td><strong>39,650</strong></td>
<td><strong>42,354</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Table 3.1**

**JUSSGSA Proposed Saudi Arabian Army Personnel**

Map 3.2. Recommended Dispositions Major Headquarters And Installations, Saudi Arabian Army

personnel and force structure breakout for the Saudi Arabian Navy is in Table 3.2. This Navy would be trained and advised by a U.S. Navy instructor contingent of three officers and eight Navy enlisted. A naval training school would be located at Ras Tanura. Select officers and enlisted men would also be sent to the U.S. for advanced training. Infrastructure development would consist of constructing naval bases at Ras Tanura and Jeddah and a Naval Headquarters in Riyadh. The initial five-year cost for training and equipping the Saudi Navy and for related construction was estimated at $7.8 million.\textsuperscript{131}

**Air Force.** The Survey Group recommended a Saudi Arabian Air Force of 862 men composed of 107 officers (79 pilots) and 755 airmen. The Saudi Air Force was to be equipped with 33 transport aircraft (28 Super C-47 or C-119s and 5 C54s or C-119s) that would form a Troop Carrier Unit, with a Group Headquarters located at Jeddah and with airborne training located at Hail.\textsuperscript{132} This unit, consisting of two Troop Carrier Squadrons, would be capable of transporting more than one thousand troops (battalion strength) or large loads of supplies (235,000 pounds) in a single lift. Such a force could be rapidly deployed to reinforce ground troops in trouble spots or to independently secure key locations. Given the limited defense resources of the Kingdom, the great size of the country, and the scarcity of roads for transportation, this ability to air transport a significant force was considered well suited to the defense needs of the Kingdom. It was to be the backbone of the proposed Saudi Air Force. No combat aircraft were recommended.\textsuperscript{133}


\textsuperscript{132} Jeddah was selected as the headquarters to take advantage of already existing facilities there.

### Persian Gulf Fleet (Base – Ras Tanura)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Enlisted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 PGM</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 PT</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LCS (S) (2)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ML</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base/Training School Support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>141</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Red Sea (Base – Jeddah)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Enlisted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 PT</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LCS (S) (2)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ML</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base Support</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Headquarters (Riyadh)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Enlisted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Navy Totals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>50</strong></th>
<th><strong>215</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>265</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.2**

**JUSSGSA Proposed Saudi Arabian Navy Personnel**


In terms of infrastructure, the plan called for construction of two major air bases at Dhahran and Jeddah, two major air fields at Hail and Riyadh, eight minor operational air fields at Taif, Mecca, Medina, Taima, Duwaid, Buraida, Al Kharj and Hofuf, and four major Airway Communications Centers at Riyadh, Hail, Jiddah, and Dhahran (see Map....

150
The proposed air fields were to be located near stationed Saudi ground forces to permit reinforcement by air.

The Saudi Air Force would be trained and advised by a U.S. Air Force instructor contingent of 26 officers and 38 airmen. Dhahran would be the location for basic training of Saudi Arabian personnel. Select groups would then enter USAF schools in the U.S. for one year of advanced technical training before returning for unit assignment. The initial five-year cost for equipment, training and air base construction was estimated at about $80 million. This cost would be independent of and separate from expenses incurred to expand facilities at the Dhahran airfield required for any U.S. training of the Saudi Arabian Army and Air Forces.

---

134 The survey group identified about two dozen airstrips throughout Saudi Arabia in 1949. All but two of these had surfaces consisting of compacted sand, graded gravel, or clay. Only Dhahran and Jeddah had Macadam runways. See Appendix J, Annex D, table entitled “Airstrip Information, Arabian Peninsula.”

Map 3.3. Air Force, Troop Carrier Airfield Location And Facilities

Summary Recommendations For U.S. Military Assistance to the Kingdom

Taken together, the total five year proposed defense plan for the three services would require 44,000 soldiers at an estimated cost of $107 million and organized as follows:

(a) Two light infantry divisions equipped with desert-modified vehicles
(b) One Airborne Infantry Combat Team
(c) One Tank Destroyer Battalion
(d) Two Troop Carrier Squadrons
(e) A Moderate naval force of sixteen small vessels
(f) An efficient military logistics system

This force was considered capable of providing Saudi self-defense against her northern neighbors as well as contributing "substantial assistance to U.S. military forces against invasion by Russia." And as no significant U.S. ground-based security force existed at Dhahran, the proposed Saudi units "would provide concurrent security of the oil area and air base against all but major overland or airborne attacks." The requirement to defend the Dhahran air facilities could therefore be largely assumed by the Saudis.

The report concluded that U.S. military assistance should be made available promptly, be adequate to the objectives and tasks described in the report, and be phased in over a five year period. Specific elements would include a joint U.S. Military Mission of advisors (estimated at 457 officers and enlisted, the bulk of which would be Army), along with equipment, technical assistance and training to the Kingdom, to include enrollment of several hundred Saudi students in U.S. service schools. At the end of five years the O’Keefe report recommended that the entire program be reviewed.

---

136 Ibid., Enclosure: “Facts Bearing on the Problem and Discussion.”
137 Ibid. The report also called for additional on-site security provided through “formation of a reserve unit consisting of American employees of American industrial organizations in Saudi Arabia.”
138 Ibid., Main Report, pp. 5-6.
U.S. Defense Requirements: Options on Dhahran Air Base

As part of its two-fold mission, the report also addressed U.S. military requirements in the Kingdom, specifically as applied to the Dhahran air base. Three alternative plans were developed for consideration. The first, "Plan A," called for the continued use of an expanded base at Dhahran. The USAF had already allocated $1.5 million for construction at Dhahran (FY 1948), principally related to the U.S. Training Mission there. The USAF now believed that additional construction was required "for the operating personnel and the rotational training flights of bomber aircraft, particularly from Europe." This requirement plus additional proposed construction at Dhahran placed the estimated total cost for "Plan A" at $28 million.\(^{139}\)

"Plan B" proposed the construction of a new base just to the west of existing facilities at Dhahran. In a phased construction program the USAF would gradually evacuate the existing base for the newly constructed one capable of "accommodating and operating one Heavy Bomb Group and two Fighter Groups with a Wing-Base organization, with a total capacity, including base complement, of 6,600 personnel." The estimated total cost for "Plan B" was $50 million. "Plan C" considered construction of an entirely new base using extensive underground construction to protect and conceal facilities. Its cost was estimated at $71 million.\(^{140}\)

Of the three proposals "Plan B" was considered superior assuming the U.S. could secure long-term basing rights (25 years or longer). Among its key advantages was that the right of ownership of the new base would reside with the U.S. Given that the existing base at Dhahran belonged to the Saudi Arabian government, any additional U.S. investment in its development could not be recovered. "Plan A" was considered the

---

\(^{139}\) Ibid., Appendix I: “Air Base Requirements In Saudi Arabia,” pp. 89, 102.

\(^{140}\) Ibid., pp. 85, 92, 94.
second-best alternative, to be used in the event sufficient long-term basing rights were not secured. "Plan C" was least preferable and apparently not a serious option.  

The report argued that in terms of negotiating leverage, the level of military assistance to the Saudis should be pegged to the length of the base rights granted. For a 50-year lease, full assistance as detailed in the survey group's recommendations would be provided. For a 25-year lease, one of the two infantry divisions would be dropped along with the Tank Destroyer Battalion. A 10-year lease would result only in equipment and training for the Troop Carrier Group and Airborne Battalion Combat Team. Less than 10 years would constitute continuation only of the conditions of the current interim agreement.

Here was another clear demonstration of the nexus and tensions between the U.S. military objective of base access and the objective of building a modern Saudi self-defense capability. While the report based its estimates of Saudi self-defense requirements on a traditional threat assessment, combined with judgments of Saudi potential to modernize to the proposed level, the specific level of military assistance the U.S. actually provided was to be scaled directly to the air base options and length of U.S. basing rights made available by the Saudis. That the Saudis would themselves be paying for the military assistance simply highlights this point of emphasis.

Within the larger political-military context this is of course not surprising. As the lead-up to the survey showed, there was a very conscious link made between these two objectives that drove the survey’s brief. Equally clear—if somewhat inconsistent with the scaling approach—was the importance attached to the role of military assistance in underpinning critical political objectives. Indeed given the gravity with which these political objectives were presented, alone they would appear to have justified a robust military assistance program. Yet whatever the merits of this, the military objective of

---

141 Ibid., pp. 94-95.
142 Ibid., Main Report, p. 7.
U.S. access to Dhahran Air Field or its replacement had to be met at some level. As codified in the findings of the report, the multiple political-military objectives were inseparable. They had to be pursued as such even when they were as much antagonistic as complementary.

This raised some interesting possibilities. For one, if the Saudis only offered short-term basing rights, the U.S. would not provide any meaningful military assistance, with all that implied for long-term U.S.-Saudi political relations. If the Saudis truly believed they were facing political conditions precluding a significant extension (as opposed to gaming U.S. negotiators) this was hardly a sensible outcome. This would also result in continued Saudi vulnerability to both internal and external threats, jeopardizing both American oil interests and potential access to Dhahran in a future crisis. For another, justifications for particular military assistance packages would be subject to major credibility challenges. If professional military analysis and judgment concluded that a particular capability was required for Saudi internal and external defense, how to explain major inconsistencies in what might actually be provided, especially to the already suspicious Saudis? And skeptical U.S. lawmakers could certainly ask equally tough questions on purpose and effectiveness. What exactly was the military basis and justification for the proposed program? Now that an extensive and detailed military assessment existed, the dance necessary to reconcile these tensions became increasingly difficult and complex. The report also made them impossible to avoid.

After JUSSGSA: Still Playing For Time

While the U.S. survey team was still in country, Abdul Aziz again raised with Ambassador Childs the specter of hatching Anglo-Hashemite plots against him. His list of British collaborators in his encirclement now included Iraq, Jordan, Yemen and the
Gulf shaykhdoms. The ultimate aim of this encirclement was a Hashemite attack on his Kingdom to recover the Hejaz. He also underlined that in a recent trip to Britain his son, Minister of Defense Prince Mansour, had been promised certain arms. But with the arrival of the American military survey team the British had not fulfilled this pledge. It was, he believed, another signal and pressure point on the King to distance himself from the U.S. He also took this opportunity to express his views on the often-stated U.S. promise to take any aggression against the Kingdom to the United Nations. The King cynically remarked that the U.N. would prove as effective in dislodging any attacker as it had been in attaining Jewish compliance with its resolutions on Palestine. Four days later Ambassador Childs was presented with a Saudi memorandum requesting immediate action of the part of the U.S. to protect Saudi Arabia’s integrity, either by providing military assistance or by signing a treaty with the Kingdom.

Half a world away the U.S. Congress was adding to the difficulties of satisfying the King. Congress rejected proposed legislation permitting the Administration to provide armaments to Saudi Arabia. Childs had not informed the Saudis of this most recent development, admonishing Washington that “I do not need to emphasize to Department deplorable effect on our political relations with SAG which would ensue if any eventual impasse reached as regards extension some form military aid to SAG in connection long-term lease DAF [Dhahran Air Field].”

Shortly after the JUSSGSA survey team returned to Washington, General O’Keefe met with members of the State Department’s Office of African and Near Eastern

---

143 Inclusion of the shaykhdoms was due to outright British rejection of renewed Saudi claims to territory reaching into Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Muscat, along with British statements that it would take action to prevent the Saudis acting on these claims.
Affairs to discuss findings and begin formulating a plan of implementation. In the course of these discussions O’Keefe made some additional observations. He believed that while the King’s fears of invasion were quite genuine, they were in fact ill-founded given the logistics challenges and long lines-of-communications any invader would face in the underdeveloped expanses of Saudi Arabia. Despite this, he argued on political grounds in support of the survey group’s recommended force “as a steadying influence upon Emir Saud’s succession, as well as a means of strengthening Ibn Saud’s hand among the other Arab countries, a development which could exert a valuable influence toward moderation in Near Eastern affairs.” He also stated that Crown Prince Saud told him confidentially that the proposed program would serve his interests and security when he acceded to the throne, though O’Keefe added his doubts that Emir Faisal held similar views. Militarily, O’Keefe considered a modernized Saudi military “a useful force for our purposes in the event of war with Russia.” Mirroring the findings of the report then, military assistance was again framed as meeting a diverse set of political-military objectives; from promoting the longevity and stable succession of the Al Saud rule, to being a tool of regional moderation, to serving a direct military role in war with the Soviet Union.

The O’Keefe Report was formally completed and submitted for review on January 19, 1950 to a Joint Staff ad hoc committee prior to final routing to the JCS. The committee concluded that the Joint Chiefs should endorse the concept of providing Saudi Arabia with reimbursable military assistance to insure long-term leasing of Dhahran Air Field. It also recommended that the JCS forward a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense outlining the key issues involved, their support for the program, and that “reimbursable military assistance to Saudi Arabia is a condition precedent to acquisition of long-term rights” in Saudi Arabia. To this end the proposed program “would serve as

---

147 Remarks as recorded in Memorandum of Conversation by Frederick H. Awalt of the Office of African and Near Eastern Affairs, 8 December 1949, FRUS, 1949, Vol VI, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, p. 1626. O’Keefe’s comments regarding Faisal would prove prophetic, for as subsequent chapters will show his differences with Saud over use of American military assistance would significantly affect the evolution of this cooperation in the late 1950s and early 1960s.
a basis for bargaining with the Saudi Arabian Government.” Upon his concurrence with this assessment, the committee recommended that the Secretary of Defense request the State Department approach Abdul Aziz. The U.S. should express its desire for long-term rights at Dhahran “premised upon a reimbursable military assistance program.” While acknowledging that the State Department’s position remained “to negotiate agreements for base rights independent of agreements for military assistance” and not treating these two as “quid pro quos,” the language clearly indicated that they indisputably were.  

The State Department was at the time already compiling background material on Saudi Arabia for upcoming efforts to seek Congressional amendment to existing restrictive military assistance legislation. The Saudi country study material continued to stress the need for U.S. access to militarily facilities, the strategic value of the Kingdom’s oil, the importance of a stable and secure Saudi Arabia to broader regional security, and the personal friendship and support of the Al Saud regime in containing communism. Military assistance would be the best means for satisfying the King’s internal and external security concerns short of a treaty with the U.S. State advanced “that a military solution to Saudi Arabia’s special problems of internal security is of first importance” and that the King’s forces for this “should be increased, trained, and equipped along western lines for the purpose of preserving order...and for the purpose of lending effective assistance in time of world hostilities.” As to the Kingdom’s external security problems and their relevance to America, U.S.-assisted military modernization would mean that “Saudi Arabia would be willing and able to use such forces to resist aggression including the protection of the United States oil installations.”

---

148 U.S. Military Aid to Saudi Arabia for Negotiation of Long-Term U.S. Rights At Dhahran Air Base, Ad Hoc Committee Report to the JCS, J.C.S. 1881/11, 31 January 1950, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218). In subsequent versions of these recommendations to the JCS, both the USAF Chief of Staff and Chief of Naval Operations called for strengthening the proposed JCS language to the SecDef in support of a military assistance program to Saudi Arabia. See J.C.S. 1881/13 and 1881/14 respectively, (RG 218).

149 McGhee to Bruce, Military Assistance Program for Fiscal Year 1951, 10 February 1950, National Security Archives, Box 13, Persian Gulf, 1950.
Back in the Kingdom, Ambassador Childs kept up the pressure, reminding the State Department that he would be asked again soon as to the status of military assistance. Recalling the short term extension of the Dhahran agreement last June, Childs noted that “It is as certain as anything can be SAG will expect US soon enter DAF negotiations with proposals MAP [Military Assistance Program].” Washington responded in terms that could only have further frustrated Childs, notifying him that at the moment the U.S. could provide “informal guidance” on how to make commercial purchases on the open market, but nothing more. And while acknowledging the King’s efforts to link the two negotiations, State adhered to the contrivance that “we shld [sic] make strenuous effort handle and discuss separately if possible.” Ambassador Childs responded that both he and Brig Gen O’Keefe considered such separation to be impossible.

One positive note was Childs belief that the JCS findings based on the O’Keefe Report would favorably influence MAP proposals to Saudi Arabia. As part of the ongoing JUSSGSA review, for example, Air Force Chief of Staff Vandenberg now was stressing the importance of Dhahran, not only to the USAF but the Department of Defense as a whole. Among the functions served by the installation were its support for “the primacy of U.S. interests in Saudi Arabia,” its “use in connection with planned strategic air operations,” as support base to U.S. Missions in Iran and Eritrea and Military Air Transport Service (MATS) operations, the Middle East link in global communications, and “Base for special operations in this area with which you are familiar.” As a result of these important functions he noted that the USAF expected to spend approximately $17.5 million on future improvements at Dhahran.

---

150 Childs to Acheson, 1 February 1950, Acheson to Childs, 9 February 1950, and Childs to Acheson 14 February 1950, FRUS, 1950, Vol V, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, pp. 1122-24, 1126-1127. At the time the JCS had still not made any recommendations regarding the JUSSGSA findings.

151 U.S. Military Aid to Saudi Arabia for Negotiation of Long-Term U.S. Rights At Dhahran Air Base, Memorandum by the Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force, J.C.S. 1881/15, 6 March 1950, Records of the Joint
But another practical problem now emerged, this one over timing. Congress was not expected to complete its deliberations on fiscal year 1951 military assistance before the June 23, 1950 expiration of the Dhahran Air Field agreement. This made virtually impossible any firm commitments to the Kingdom based on the O’Keefe Report, weakening the U.S. negotiating position. As an expedient the State Department asked the Secretary of Defense if he would consider a token form of military assistance to help bolster that position.\(^{152}\)

The Combatant Commander with responsibility for Saudi Arabia, Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean (CINCNELM), also weighed in.\(^{153}\) He himself considered the two sets of negotiations as inseparable and pushed hard for military assistance. In endorsing at least a token shipment of rifles until changes in MDAP legislation permitted something more substantial he noted:

> Ambassador [to Saudi Arabia] needs timely bargaining power if he can hope to conclude any agreements for airbase rights. Airbase negotiations have been protracted over period of 3 years with U.S. Government mostly sparring for time largely due I believe to restrictions of arms embargo. Time has arrived for quick settlement of long-term base rights agreements because to attempt another short-term agreement would be construed by SAG at this stage as an indication that U.S. is merely carrying them along with probability of eventual complete brushoff. It would be my judgment that U.S.-Saudi Arabian relations, while excellent at this moment, are in unstable equilibrium due to uncertainty of this issue. I am ready to state that we can buy here considerable security at low cost if

---

\(^{152}\) Hare to Johnson, 8 March 1950, FRUS, 1950, Vol V, *The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, pp. 1129-30. Johnson responded on 20 April that 5,000 M-1 rifles and 5 million rounds of ammunition could be provided. He would agree to this only “as a last resort [of] tangible evidence of US intent” in connection with negotiations, and if there were definite indications of Congressional approval of MAP to Saudi Arabia. This corresponds to U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Collins recommendation of 3 April 1950 to the JCS, later approved by the JCS on 10 April. Collins added that “If it appears MDAP [Military Defense Assistance Program] bill permitting reimbursable aid to Saudi Arabia will not be acceptable to leaders of Congress, I consider it inadvisable for JCS to commit themselves to token shipment at this time.” Collins to Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, 3 April 1950, FRUS, 1950, Vol V, *The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, p. 1154. Bradley to Johnson, 10 April 1950, *Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense* (RG 330), Office of the Administrative Secretary, Correspondence Control Section, Numerical File, CD6-5-2.

\(^{153}\) In 1947 joint planning responsibility for the Middle East, to include Saudi Arabia, was placed under CINCNELM, who reported directly to the JCS. *The United States Military in North Africa and Southwest Asia Since World War II*, History Office, United States Central Command, January 1988, p. 29.
we can make some small scale positive commitment soon enough followed up
with favorable action on Military Aid, even if largely on reimbursable basis.\footnote{154}

Negotiations continued in Saudi Arabia, to now include the Assistant Secretary of
State for Near Eastern and African Affairs George C. McGhee. In a week-long stay from
March 19-25 McGhee met with senior Princes, non-royal advisors, and the King over the
issue of Dhahran and U.S. military assistance. During the course of meetings with
Foreign Minister Faisal the Prince noted that Saudi Arabia considered the
recommendations of the O’Keefe Report to be a bare minimum; “We need more but not
less than that.” Crown Prince Saud and other Saudi advisers spoke of the King’s desire
for a treaty of alliance with the U.S. and arms on a grant basis.\footnote{155} In a meeting with the
King himself on March 22 the monarch pushed for closer relations, saying “that he
considered the United States and Saudi Arabia as one state.”\footnote{156} McGhee delivered a letter
from President Truman that was more carefully measured. While extolling the King’s
leadership and the importance of “strong ties of friendship,” the letter was notable in
what it did not say. Referring to General O’Keefe’s report, the President emphasized the
need for its thorough study; no commitments of any sort were conveyed.\footnote{157} The King
later replied diplomatically in writing but without wavering:

we, on our part, wish to express our full appreciation of the circumstances that
have to be taken into consideration before adopting the policy which you believe
will insure the achievement of increasingly fruitful cooperation between our two
countries. We hope that these studies and consultations which you deem fit to
take place at an early date, will end in an agreeable [sic] and satisfactorily
manner.\footnote{158}

\footnote{154} CINCNELM to CNO, Dispatch NCC 2792, 13 March 1950, enclosure to Military Assistance to Saudi
Arabia, J.C.S. 1881/21, 31 March 1950, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218).
\footnote{155} See Memorandum of Conversation, 19 March 1950, and 23 March 1950, FRUS, 1950, Vol V, The Near
East, South Asia, and Africa, p. 1131-1154.
\footnote{156} Summary of Conversation Between Assistant Secretary of State George C. McGhee and His Majesty
King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, 10 April 1950, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Harry S. Truman,
White House Central Files, Confidential Files, Box 41.
\footnote{158} Abdul Aziz to President Truman, 29 March 1950, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Harry S. Truman,
White House Central Files, Confidential Files, Box 41.
A short time later, as part of a larger middle eastern inspection trip the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, General J. Lawton Collins, arrived in Riyadh on April 2, 1950. Following a courtesy visit with the King, he met with Crown Prince Saud and Prince Mansour to discuss the status of U.S. military assistance. General Collins explained that the O’Keefe Report was still under review, as was the entire matter of military aid to Saudi Arabia. He explained, however, that in his professional judgment the O’Keefe Report proposed a military modernization program both too large and too expensive for Saudi Arabia at this time. Of particular concern was the estimated $107 million cost of the five-year program. Even assuming an annual cost of $22 million this was more than double the current Saudi expenditures on defense. He noted that these outlays would be in addition to those necessary for maintaining existing forces and were unrealistic goals. More than a matter of money, there were also issues of absorption. Again referring to the O’Keefe Report as too optimistic and ambitious, he asked the Saudis to consider a more modest Army force of three regimental combat teams and one mechanized cavalry regiment. Depending on progress and financing, the ground forces could then later be expanded by converting each regiment into a division. He also opposed the Report’s recommendation of a parachute combat team, considering this much too complicated. He thought it preferable that troops be quickly flown to trouble spots inside the Kingdom to reinforce ground forces already deployed to the site.  

Prince Abdallah argued that given Saudi Arabia’s strategic importance to the U.S. military arms should be provided on a grant basis. Ambassador Childs intervened to explain that grants were reserved for those countries who could not afford to bear the cost. Now that Saudi Arabia was solvent this was out of the question. General Collins

---

159 Collins to Secretary of the Army Gray, April 1950, FRUS, 1950, Vol V, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, pp. 1158-66. As later documentation will show, the J.C.S. ultimately adopted this scaled down program.

160 The young Abdallah would later become head of the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG), a position he holds to this day.
pointedly added that priority had to be given to “front line” states in direct proximity to the Soviet Union, and that even in a war neither the U.S. or its Navy would rely on Saudi Arabian oil.\footnote{Collins to Secretary of the Army Gray, April 1950, \textit{FRUS}, 1950, Vol V, \textit{The Near East, South Asia, and Africa}, pp. 1158-66. These “front line” state priorities were reflected locally in U.S. assistance to Iran. The U.S. was just about to sign the United States-Iranian Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement under which the U.S. agreed to provide the necessary personnel for administering a grant assistance program for Iran, as well as establishing a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG).}

Back in Washington Secretary of Defense Johnson sent a condensed version of the JUSSAG findings and recommendations to Secretary of State Acheson. Johnson recommended that this version be sent to the King with a letter specifying that for the time being the “great mass of detail had been omitted” but would be made available for any later discussions over arrangements.\footnote{This was referred to in the O’Keefe Report as the “Extract Copy,” Appendix N.} In a clear indication of the uncertain status of the O’Keefe Report recommendations, Johnson further requested the King be told that “No action has been taken on the report and no inference should be drawn that it has been approved by the United States Government, particularly as to the size and composition of forces recommended. However, the report is under study.”\footnote{Johnson letter dated 18 April 1950, quotations to this letter (711.56386A/4-1850) referenced in footnote to discussion of JUSSGSA in \textit{FRUS}, 1950, Vol V, \textit{The Near East, South Asia, and Africa}, p. 1112. A summary of the JUSSGSA report can also be found in \textit{FRUS}, 1950, pp. 1112-20.}

As it became increasingly clear that a new, longer-term agreement would not be reached by June, Ambassador Childs drafted an \textit{Aide-Memoire} to the Saudi Foreign Office. That memoire explained that Congress had not yet had a chance to consider the new military aid program legislation, and as a consequence, a conclusive agreement on military assistance to the Kingdom could not then be made by the administration. Furthermore the final views of the Defense Department and Joint Chiefs of Staff were still pending on the O’Keefe Report findings. Given these factors and the desire of the United States to ultimately arrive at a “more inclusive agreement as soon as circumstances permit,” a temporary extension was requested.\footnote{\textit{Aide-Memoire}, 22 May 1950, \textit{FRUS}, 1950, Vol V, \textit{The Near East, South Asia, and Africa}, pp. 1176-77.} Childs proposed this to

\[161\]
the King directly and Abdul Aziz agreed to it, extending the existing Dhahran arrangement until February 1951.\textsuperscript{165}

In May 1950 the United States, Britain and France announced the \textit{Tripartite Declaration Regarding Security in the Near East}. This declaration recognized that the Arab States and Israel all need to maintain a certain level of armed forces for the purposes of assuring their internal security and their legitimate self-defense and to permit them to play their part in the defense of the area as a whole. All applications for arms or war material for these countries will be considered in the light of these principles.

The primary intent of the Declaration was to avoid regional arms races and limit arms shipments to the Middle East. But it also recognized the need to provide military aid to these states, part of the larger effort to stem Soviet influence by orienting them toward the west. Another political impediment to military assistance was eroding.

Far more powerfully, the emerging crisis on the Korea peninsula would soon raise containment to a global level, and elevate greatly the military dimension of the Cold War competition. While Saudi Arabia would remain a secondary U.S. consideration even within the region (events in Iran and Egypt came to dominate the early-to-mid 1950s), it benefited directly from this transition. Although it would take another year, military assistance now became an accomplished fact. This would soon prove a mixed blessing, however, as military cooperation with the U.S. began running into the rising tide of Arab nationalism.

\textbf{Observations on Post-War Patterns}

Following the end of World War II the U.S. continued to pursue conflicting policies toward Saudi Arabia. Strategically, the Kingdom remained an important interest in terms of oil and, to a lesser degree, the perceived ability of Abdul Aziz favorably to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{166} Text in Department of State \textit{Bulletin}, 5 June 1950, Vol. XXII, No. 570, p. 886.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
shape political developments in the region. As the Cold War emerged, Saudi Arabia also took on certain limited importance as part of the evolving containment policy. The military dimension of this revolved principally around U.S. access to the Dhahran Air Field for strategic bombardment, along with the desire for some resident military presence to deny the Soviets unfettered wartime access to Saudi oil.

But equally if not more pronounced were reservations and resistance to significant commitments to the Kingdom’s security. Much of this came from a military facing escalating demands while its resources continued to shrink. On the political front the Truman Administration, wrestling with the Palestine problem, also found itself facing serious policy tensions in its dealings with the Kingdom. U.S. military assistance could not be separated from this confluence. It quite logically mirrored the larger policy condition of which it was a part. That condition was an inability to produce a consistent and directed policy toward Riyadh. Or put another way, it was one in which the U.S. pursued simultaneously a number of oftentimes competing if not conflicting objectives.

The Saudi approach to U.S. military assistance during this period was itself a complicated mix. At its core was an unwavering objective—obtain U.S. military assistance—blended with many variations on how to pursue it and the conditions necessary to making it acceptable. While many of the variations were linked to negotiating ploys, others resulted from fundamental issues of political survival. When this mix of Saudi motives intersected with contending U.S. approaches, the resulting process of military assistance was hardly a clean and logical undertaking.

What did this mean more specifically and how was it reflected in the patterns observed? To begin with, the dual use of military assistance for both political and military purposes—and the tensions so produced—were pronounced throughout this period. On the political front, military assistance was consistently pushed by the State Department as a means for further solidifying ties with the leadership of Saudi Arabia. The importance of this grew in State’s eyes as the situation in Palestine deteriorated. To
this was added the enduring tie-in to concerns over the stability of the Saudi regime. Those with responsibility for the Saudi account maintained that providing military assistance would bolster the regime politically, strengthening not only the present King but succeeding rulers as well. The JUSSGSA survey itself made these points repeatedly and many of its military recommendations were focused on the internal security requirements of the regime. For its part the Saudi leadership, while walking the fine line between stressing the problems it faced internally and its ability to rule effectively, reinforced this view whenever possible.

The tensions between U.S. political objectives and military assistance activities were well captured in the efforts of the Saudi Arabian Training Mission to teach Saudi nationals to run the Dhahran Air Field. The gap between the political imperative to provide this service—especially in the midst of the Palestine imbroglio—and the practical ability to deliver on this commitment was quite large. The political imperative carried the day, to the considerable frustration of those trying to get the job done in the field.

Even more instructive is the JUSSGSA military survey. It clearly was as much political as military process. Much of it was about buying political time with the King, helping to keep the door of diplomacy open. But these political objectives coexisted with a set of distinct military objectives. And there were tensions even within these military objectives. One clear military purpose of the survey was to make a professional determination of Saudi Arabia’s self-defense requirements and on that basis the degree and type of U.S. military assistance necessary to accomplish this. A second purpose was to determine U.S. military requirements inside the Kingdom. Tying these two together was inescapable given the larger context of the negotiations. But this linking also put U.S. military objectives in direct tension. Anything less than the best case of the Saudis granting a long-term base access lease for the U.S. undermined the goal of developing a Saudi self-defense capability.
In another interesting set of tensions, to the extent the U.S. military valued Dhahran as an operational base in time of war, this entailed some corresponding effort to protect the air field. Military assistance was used by the U.S. to accomplish this through two mechanisms. First, by training Saudi military forces to perform this function; second, by using U.S. military personnel attached to the military assistance training activities as a forward defensive presence. Yet at the same time the Saudis made it clear that any military assistance provided could not merely be part of a U.S. desire to protect Dhahran and American oil interests. The need was for something far more encompassing. The Saudis were looking to develop a significant self-defense capability, and any proposed U.S. military assistance plan had to reflect this. Such a plan had to have a serious military component in which military effectiveness mattered and was a real objective. It could not simply prescribe material based on political expediency or patronage. This itself was now another source of tension in the system. Once genuine military requirements began to take concrete form, so too did expectations that they should be met. When they were not, political tensions rose.

Another distinct pattern was the Saudi “pull” for U.S. military assistance combined with the ever-present “push” to separate it at least publicly from any implied political or security commitments to Washington. The latter involved consistent efforts to portray any U.S. military assistance to the Kingdom exclusively as a means for the Saudis to develop an indigenous self-defense capability. Throughout this period the Saudis worked tirelessly to maintain an acceptable equilibrium between these two forces. It would be too simplistic to treat this as a simple effort at cover. Whatever public role it played in this regard, in actuality it did allow the Saudis to distance themselves from any commitments, or at least keep them ambiguous and highly conditional. The construct served both purposes well. It was yet another example of how Abdul Aziz took a very real concern and used it to good advantage elsewhere.
Palestine became a central aspect of this approach-avoidance dynamic and an exemplar of the practice of attending to the equilibrium. For the Saudis it was a deep source of tension and mistrust toward Washington, and placed the King in a very difficult political position in his dealings with the U.S. In this sense it was another impetus to the need for distancing. But it never intruded to the point of derailing Abdul Aziz’s quest for military assistance. And like previous patterns, the monarch turned this potential roadblock into a point of bargaining leverage. American support for a Jewish homeland made the Saudi ability to work with the U.S. all the more difficult. Surely Washington could appreciate the great risks the King was taking in keeping close ties. Shouldn’t that appreciation take a material form? And precisely because of the raw regional feelings toward the U.S. it also had to take a form conducive to maintaining a certain distance, this itself serving Saudi Arabia’s very real desire to keep any commitments ambiguous.

Also still manifest though now less pronounced were the tensions of the Anglo-American-Saudi triangle. True to form, Abdul Aziz kept up his drumbeat of encirclement and British-Hashemite conspiracies. As previously practiced during the war years, interwoven with this expression of threat from the British were his periodic reminders to Washington of London’s efforts to co-opt him at U.S. expense. The Anglo-Saudi treaty negotiations were the most prominent example of this. Oftentimes both arguments found receptivity among State Department figures, and continued to be used to strengthen the case for U.S. military assistance to the Kingdom.

The elaborate post-war dance was in fact about to culminate in a long-term military assistance program to Saudi Arabia. As the pressure of the Cold War increased with Korea, the immediacy of the Israeli crisis abated. The way was becoming cleared for concrete implementation. But in a now well-established pattern, this implementation phase would serve to heighten, not diminish, the continuing need for the dance.
CHAPTER 4

THE DANCE JOINED: MILITARY ASSISTANCE FORMALIZED, 1950-1953

Strategic Setting: Korean War, Stirrings of Revolutionary Nationalism, and Military Assistance

The North Korean invasion of South Korea on June 25, 1950 had major ramifications for U.S. security policy in the Middle East. While the initial effect was to focus attention and military resources away from the region and to the Korean peninsula and Europe, the longer-term consequence was to galvanize the view of a hostile and aggressive Communist bloc with global designs. Truman and many of his senior advisors now considered the Middle East to be one of the principal zones of future Soviet aggression if concrete steps were not taken. U.S. concerns were magnified by the growing erosion of British political, economic and military capabilities in the region. The need to bolster the British position was a major thrust of U.S. security policy throughout this period, combined with the growing realization that the U.S. would have to assume increasing responsibility for Near Eastern security. In this vein several efforts were undertaken to establish regional military organizations to arrest the decline of the British and better coordinate regional defense, though largely without success. The forces of Arab and Persian nationalism, most notably in Egypt, Iran and Iraq, proved insurmountable in preserving British dominance. Domestic upheaval in Iran threatened to bring the monarchy down, further elevating fears of instability and communist encroachment throughout the Gulf, a chronic concern throughout this period.
Meanwhile the practical demands to move military forces to the Far East heightened the importance of the Suez Canal, the British air base complex in Egypt, and protected access in general throughout the region. Access to oil itself took on growing strategic significance with the additional requirement to build up the NATO states.¹

All of this also led to significant shift in the importance assigned to foreign military assistance in the Near East and the willingness to fund it as part of the U.S. security strategy. New legislation, expanded resources, and above all else a change in attitude opened up new possibilities for long-term security assistance. Saudi Arabia would be among the beneficiaries.

Predictably, the Saudi leadership was focused on developments in the immediate neighborhood and inside Saudi Arabia itself. From the Saudi strategic perspective this period posed several security challenges. The King’s fears of communist expansion, and with it the potential threat of direct Soviet aggression against the Kingdom, was genuinely felt. But beyond the visceral hatred of communism and these worst case possibilities, his practical concerns were always much closer to home. These consisted of his enduring fears of his northern Hashemite neighbors, now joined with the growing spread of Arab nationalism as an ideological threat to the monarchy. Although the latter was still a relatively dormant threat, early stirrings and signs of polarization in the region demanded that it be taken seriously in Saudi calculations.

A major source of political friction outside of inter-Arab affairs was the Anglo-Saudi dispute over the Buraimi oasis. This stretch of desert was located in the southeastern border area of Saudi Arabia, the Shaykhdom of Abu Dhabi, and the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman. It would become the source of great tension between Britain and Saudi Arabia throughout the 1950s. British interests were a mix of treaty

obligations to her protectorates (Abu Dhabi and the Sultanate), a desire to retain her dominant political and military position on the Gulf coast, and concerns over the oil potential in the region. While the U.S. was not an active participant in the dispute, its efforts to facilitate a solution were viewed by the Saudis as favoring Great Britain and unresponsive to the special relationship between Washington and Riyadh. The fact that the British were frequently agitated with American efforts was of little consequence in Saudi eyes. As with Palestine earlier, this never reached the point where it placed security cooperation with the U.S. and American military assistance to the Kingdom in jeopardy, but it would prove a major source of Saudi frustration and effect military assistance negotiations.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, was the evolving internal political situation in Saudi Arabia. This period would see the death of ‘The Lion’—Abdul Aziz—preceded by an extended period of impaired mental and physical health for the King. While Abdul Aziz retained a remarkable degree of control over the affairs of the Kingdom to the time of his death, that impairment provided opportunities for others to exert more influence on the King’s decisions. Dealings with the U.S. were no exception. It also meant that the issue of succession, concerns over the orderly transfer of power, and what the future direction of the Kingdom should be following the King’s death all were major issues well before the King’s demise in November 1953. U.S.-Saudi relations and military assistance developments certainly could not escape being affected by these internal political dynamics.²

**Establishing Saudi Eligibility For Reimbursable Military Assistance**

As noted in the previous chapter, in mid-1950 the Administration was still facing the problem of Saudi eligibility for reimbursable military assistance. Congress had yet to

---

² While not the focus of this history, it is certainly the case that chronic financial problems also remained at the center of what ailed the Saudis. It was certainly a regular feature on the minds of U.S. and U.K. diplomats throughout this period, to say nothing of the King himself.
approve the necessary legislation for extending military assistance—grant aid or reimbursable—to countries of the Near East beyond Turkey and Iran.\(^3\) But now, motivated by the growing sense of threat from communist expansion and punctuated by the outbreak of the Korean War, military assistance legislation was broadened considerably. The new legislation, _An Act to Amend The Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949_ (PL 621), permitted the President to extend “without cost to the United States” (i.e., reimbursable) military assistance to any nation “whose ability to defend itself or to participate in the defense of the area of which it is a part, is important to the security of the United States.”\(^4\) President Truman signed this new legislation into law on July 26, 1950. Written with many possible future candidates in mind, this also now opened the way for reimbursable military assistance to the Kingdom.

Events on the Korean Peninsula served Abdul Aziz in other ways. He quickly seized on the attack to express his concern over the vulnerability of Dhahran to potential Soviet attack. The U.S. must not wait until Moscow takes the initiative, he warned, for Russia “is practically at our borders.” Further expressing Saudi anxiousness, Shaykh Yusuf Yassin wanted to know if the U.S. would be able to come to the Kingdom’s aid quickly in the event of sudden Soviet aggression.\(^5\) Likely real worries, the Saudis also realized a good opportunity to pressure when they saw one.

As part of the growing importance—and size—of the overall Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP), in August 1950 the Secretary of Defense instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to establish MDAP guidelines and priorities. The Joint Chiefs

---

\(^3\) The operative legislation at the time was the _Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949_ (PL 329), signed into law in October 1949. This explicitly authorized grant aid to those two countries under Titles II and III. It also made them eligible as determined by the President for transfers of equipment and services under reimbursable arrangements (Section 408e). The legislation is reprinted in _United States Statutes At Large_, Volume 63, Part I (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1950).

\(^4\) The revised language is in Section 12, which amended Section 408(e) of the Act of 1949. _United States Statutes At Large_, Volume 64, Part I (Washington, D.C: GPO, 1952).

responded that the “long-range over-all military objective” of MDAP was “to improve to
the maximum extent possible”

the ability of the United States in event of war to implement, in conjunction with
its allies, a long-range strategic concept. Briefly, that concept is that the United
States, in collaboration with its allies, will impose the war objectives of the
United States and its allies upon the USSR by conducting a strategic offensive in
Europe and a strategic defensive in the Middle East and in the Far East.  

With this general perspective in mind, the JCS designated U.N. forces in Korea as
the number one priority for receiving military equipment, followed by U.S. forces in
occupied areas, then active U.S. forces in strategic reserve and those slated for
mobilization. These were followed by non-American NATO forces and then all
remaining countries. In laying down these priorities the JCS recognized “that certain
factors, such as the need for strengthening the morale and internal security of recipient
nations and protecting various United States interests abroad may, in exceptional cases,
become overriding political considerations modifying the strict application of the above-
mentioned priorities.”

With these “overriding political considerations” in mind, on August 4, 1950 the
Joint Chiefs of Staff approved a military assistance program for Saudi Arabia and
recommended approval of that program to the Secretary of Defense. In accordance with
General Collins’ earlier assessment, the program was substantially scaled back from that
recommended in the O’Keefe Report. This was based on the high cost of the O’Keefe
recommendations and the judgment that much of the equipment could not be absorbed
effectively by the Saudi armed forces in the proposed time frame. The revised JCS
program called for equipping a force of 18,000 army, 108 air force, and 265 navy
personnel at an expense to Saudi Arabia of $75.5 million. In terms of army forces, it
proposed a structure based on an American infantry regimental combat team (RCT) and

6 Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 27 October 1950, in Records of
the Office of the Secretary of Defense (RG 330), Decimal File, CD 091.3 MDAP (General).
7 Ibid.
an armored cavalry regiment. The Joint Chiefs further advised that if approved the program be forwarded to the Secretary of State “with the recommendation that, upon the enactment of legislation establishing Saudi Arabian eligibility for reimbursable military assistance, the detailed program be transmitted to King Ibn Saud, and arrangements be initiated for the Saudi Arabian Government to receive a small joint military group to plan for the execution of the assistance program.”

Secretary Johnson approved the proposed JCS program and on August 11 submitted it to the Secretary of State. In a clear recognition of the trade-off between what was considered most effective to Saudi modernization from a military effectiveness standpoint and the needs of the U.S. for access, the Secretary of Defense added that “in view of the importance of securing long-term rights at Dhahran Air Base, it is believed that the program recommended herein should be modified upward if such action is essential to accomplish this.” The Secretary of Defense also argued, based on the advice of the JCS, that a commitment to the proposed program should not be offered to the Saudis until a U.S. military team had the opportunity to determine first-hand what was required. An in-country assessment would be necessary to arrive at specifics on the phasing of equipment deliveries, the composition of the U.S. training mission, and a program for Saudi Arabian military personnel to be trained in U.S. Service Schools. Secretary Johnson therefore recommended that the proposed program be transmitted to the King and that arrangements be made for a small survey team to visit the Kingdom.

---

8 The tables of proposed units and equipment are enclosed in the JCS memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Military Aid to Saudi Arabia for Negotiation of Long-Term U.S. Rights at Dhahran Air Base, J.C.S. 1881/26, 4 August 1950, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218). Summary points are in Editorial Note in FRUS, 1950, Vol V, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, p. 1184. The revised requirements contained in J.C.S. 1881/26 became the military assistance proposal to the Saudis and the basis for negotiating base rights at Dhahran.

9 U.S. Military Aid to Saudi Arabia for Negotiation of Long-Term U.S. Rights at Dhahran Air Base, J.C.S. 1881/26, 4 August 1950, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218).

10 This option of scaling up was in the original JCS 4 August recommendations to the Secretary of Defense. Johnson’s 11 August letter to the Secretary of State is in U.S. Military Aid to Saudi Arabia for Negotiation of Long-Term U.S. Rights at Dhahran Air Base, J.C.S. 1881/28, 14 August 1950, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218).
Meanwhile the Ambassador-designate to Saudi Arabia, Raymond Hare, was getting initiated into the political and military intricacies surrounding Dhahran Airfield. A Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs briefing memorandum captured the essence of the sovereignty and USAF control issues that would soon occupy him. Dhahran was essentially a civil airport used for air travel to the Near East and South Asia, with perhaps 90 percent of operations civilian in nature. Despite this, the USAF consistently maintained that it needed to exercise control over the facility’s operations, directly antagonizing Saudi sensitivities over their sovereignty. From the Bureau’s perspective it was unclear whether the USAF’s need for control was due to the inability of the Saudis to financially and technically operate the facility or out of wartime considerations; that peacetime control was necessary to rapidly transition to a war footing and mount air operations out of Dhahran. For its part the Saudi Arabian government had consistently refused to grant the U.S. any formal rights to control the airfield or its operations, but the *de facto* situation had the U.S. controlling daily operations. Furthermore, in recognition of the need to closely coordinate civilian and military use of the airfield, a single administrator was assigned to manage airfield operations, this being Brigadier General O’Keefe. Given this situation, and assuming the USAF concurred, the Bureau representative argued that the U.S. might as well call a spade a spade and formally acknowledge the full sovereignty of the SAG over Dhahran with all that implies. We should then insist, that in view of the inability of SAG to operate the field that the two governments enter into partnership by jointly appointing a mutually acceptable Administrator of the field. During the period of existing military requirements this individual would, of course, be the Commanding Officer at Dhahran.\(^\text{11}\)

As to the issue of use of the airfield in a wartime situation, civil aircraft would likely be excluded from the field, minimizing operational difficulties. On the surface

such proposals were attractive. But as Hare soon discovered, clear-cut solutions remained perpetually elusive, and convolution far more the norm.

A bit of a diplomatic faux pas occurred in early September which further illustrated the King’s sensitivities and the need to step carefully. General O’Keefe visited Riyadh to request storage of 5,000 tons of conventional bombs at Dhahran. The timing clearly was not ideal, as proposed military assistance to the Kingdom was still wending its way in Washington with nothing concrete as yet. This triggered a tirade by Abdul Aziz that Dhahran was all that mattered to the U.S. and set off renewed demands by him for military assistance. The Chargé in Saudi Arabia remarked that while the King remained committed to the U.S. “I wish to assure Department that the much worn theme of the ‘O’Keefe report still being studied in Washington’ is rapidly becoming unpleasant to Saudi ears and they are beginning consider it as delaying tactics and double talk on our part.”

Embassy personnel were reporting that U.S. operating conditions at Dhahran would get increasingly difficult until there was some tangible movement on military assistance. The King remained highly engaged on the issue of arms and eagerly awaited replies to his request for broader U.S. defense of the Kingdom, not just of Dhahran and the oil-rich areas. Embassy Counselor Hill opined that:

In view extreme sensitivity SAG re their sovereignty, and their particular concern lest other Arab states infer they being subjected US dominance, Embassy seriously doubts they would welcome any extension our military activities beyond those already authorized unless this closely integrated with some sort military aid grant or US protection commitment which they could make known to other Arab states. Embassy believes that in King’s mind not possible separate military expansion from some such quid pro quo.

---

14 Hill to Acheson, 17 October 1950, 786A.5/10-2050, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). As to the Saudi emphasis on protecting the Kingdom in its entirety, Ambassador Hare suggested that the Defense Department might consider setting up training bases in the central and western sectors of the country “in
The quid pro quo was also likely to involve more than just the level of arms and services to be rendered. In Saudi eyes the issue of payment was still open as well. The clear focus of the Administration had been on reimbursable military assistance, but this continued to irritate the Saudis. In an apparent effort to drive the point home, when Counselor Hill referred to progress on “reimbursable military assistance to Saudi Arabia,” Prince Faisal interrupted that the words “military equipment sold to Saudi Arabia” conveyed a more accurate meaning. Hill noted to Washington that the idea of reimbursable assistance remained “extremely distasteful” to the Saudis, who considered themselves entitled to cost-free assistance. Hill added that pride was deeply involved here, and was perhaps a greater factor than monetary considerations.  

Ambassador Hare would be met with similar Saudi expressions; Riyadh had close mutual interests with the U.S. of the type Washington had with neighboring countries like Iran. Why not then similar treatment?

In his preparations for upcoming negotiations with the Saudis, Hare received a summary of the proposed military assistance to Saudi Arabia along with its military rationale. The proposal was for modernizing the Saudi army along the American organizational concept of a ‘triangular system’ in which each unit consisted of three similar combat elements plus a fire support unit. This was believed well suited to the Saudis. In addition to representing a proven combat concept, it offered the advantage of allowing Saudi officers to make the progression from platoon, to company, to battalion in relatively straightforward fashion. It also had the great advantage of providing a clear method for ground force expansion at a later date. Each of the proposed regimental order meet Saudi criticism of over-concentration our interests in Dhahran and oil area rather than in security of SA as whole.” Hare to Acheson, 11 November 1950, 786A.00/11-1150, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).


Hare to Acheson, 4 November 1950, FRUS, 1950, Vol. V, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, p. 1191. Hare succeeded Childs as Ambassador in October 1950. As previously noted, Iran was already receiving grant military assistance at the time.
combat teams could be expanded into a division by adding men and material to each of
the subordinate units, converting them to the next higher echelon, e.g., company to
battalion, battalion to regiment. In this way the proposed program laid the foundation for
a future Saudi force of three infantry divisions and a light mechanized division.

On the broader policy front, but with the upcoming negotiations as backdrop,
President Truman wrote King Abdul Aziz in late October. In part to introduce his new
Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, he also used the opportunity to renew the President’s
expressions of American friendship and of the importance of the Kingdom. President
Truman emphasized the latter by writing:

I wish to renew to Your Majesty the assurances which have been made to you
several times in the past, that the United States is interested in the preservation of
the independence and territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia. No threat to your
Kingdom could occur which would not be a matter of immediate concern to the
United States.  

This statement, which remained classified for some time, would later be
repeatedly summoned by the Saudis as a commitment by the U.S. to come to the support
of the Kingdom in its territorial disputes, most notably over the Buraimi conflict with the
British. What is important to note here is that this general pronouncement was invoked
because it represented one of the most tangible statements of U.S. assurance to the
Saudis. In terms of military commitment, nothing more formal or specific existed
between the two countries. This indicated the U.S. policy of limited liability as much as
Saudi sensitivities, with the King’s frequent efforts to involve the U.S. in a direct security
pact repeatedly deflected. This latest correspondence from Truman to Abdul Aziz was
the most recent in a series calculated to avoid any reference to the King’s past requests.

17 President Truman to King Abdul Aziz, 31 October 1950, FRUS, 1950, Vol. V, The Near East, South
Asia, and Africa, pp. 1190-1191.
18 This formulation would be repeated by subsequent administrations and many consider it the cornerstone
statement of U.S.-Saudi security relations. See Sarah Yizraeli in The Remaking of Saudi Arabia, The
Struggle between King Sa’ud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953-1962 (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center
for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1997), p. 161.
19 On this point see Acheson’s Memorandum For The President, 10 May 1949, Harry S. Truman Library,
Papers of Harry S. Truman, White House Central Files, Confidential Files, Box 41.
Furthermore, the inclusion of this ‘key’ passage had everything to do with the negotiations over Dhahran and not with signaling any further U.S. commitment. This is clear from Acheson’s memo to Truman accompanying the draft letter to the King:

Attached is a draft of a proposed letter from you to King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia. It is believed desirable to have this letter presented to His Majesty by Ambassador Hare soon after presentation of the latter’s credentials and before negotiations for a long term renewal of the Dhahran Air Base agreement are initiated. It is intended to create an atmosphere of friendliness and good will which may tend to offset possible disappointments on the part of His Majesty at being offered cash reimbursable military assistance rather than grant aid, and at receiving recommendations for less military equipment and smaller defense forces than he would like to have. It is also designed to establish a sense of partnership which may be helpful in discussions regarding the air base and contribute to the King’s sense of security. Toward this end assurances given by you and other United States officials on several occasions in the past are again reiterated.  

While these diplomatic preparations were underway, progress was being made on the formal process for extending reimbursable military assistance to Saudi Arabia under the new legislation. A further determination of individual country eligibility was required to insure the Kingdom met the necessary criteria. The Defense Department, conforming to the legislative language, concluded that Saudi Arabia’s ability to defend itself clearly was “important to the security of the United States” and on that basis found the Kingdom eligible. On October 26, 1950 Saudi Arabia was formally approved by the Secretary of State as eligible for reimbursable military assistance, the first Arab country to be so designated. With this, both plans for Saudi military modernization and the legislative mechanism were now in place for direct U.S. military assistance to the Kingdom. But considerable hurdles remained, as the upcoming negotiations soon would reveal.

---

20 Memorandum For The President, 30 October 1950, Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Harry S. Truman, White House Central Files, Confidential Files, Box 41. Following the death of Abdul Aziz, Yizraeli argues that for the Saudis this construct served as a useful compromise between Saud’s desire for close and formal military ties to the U.S. and Faisal’s resistance to this. The Remaking of Saudi Arabia, The Struggle between King Sa’ud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953-1962, p. 161.

On November 17, 1950, the State Department transmitted an approved draft of the proposed long-term Dhahran Air Field Agreement to the American Embassy in Jeddah and instructed the Ambassador to initiate negotiations. Following Congressional notification, the Saudis were informed on December 2 of the Kingdom’s eligibility for cash reimbursable military assistance. The first set of talks was conducted from December 14-23 at Riyadh. The American side was represented by Ambassador Hare, Brigadier General O’Keefe, and Brigadier General Edwin M. Day, designated to assume command of Dhahran Airfield. The Saudis’ lead negotiator was Shaykh Yusuf Yassin. Many outstanding issues remained, among them continuing differences over the level of military assistance to be provided, the form such assistance should take (reimbursable versus grant), questions of sovereignty, and the duration of future U.S. access.

Shaykh Yusuf made his principal themes the King’s strong feelings that military assistance should be on a grant basis and His Majesty’s continuing need for sensitivity to any domestic and foreign criticism of Saudi Arabia’s sovereignty in the case of the Dhahran airfield. Repeatedly made was the point that in wartime Saudi Arabia would be opened to the U.S. military, but in peacetime political factors regarding presence and sovereignty carried great weight. Hare considered this to be an accurate portrayal of the Saudi situation, while recognizing that it also “gave them good cover for hard bargaining.

---

America, Inc., 1982, p. 81. The Saudis were also hedging their bets with the British. Following the formal lifting of the arms embargo on the region in August 1949, London made arms for purchase available to the Saudis. As a result, in September 1950 Riyadh made an initial purchase in the amount of 250,000 pounds sterling for small arms from London (Bren guns, Vickers machine guns), with planned additional orders totaling over 1 million pounds. American Ambassador in Britain to Acheson, 4 November 1950, 786A.5/11-350, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).

Brigadier General Day replaced Brigadier General O’Keefe on 15 January 1951. As with his predecessor, in addition to his designation as Commanding General, Military Air Transport Service (MATS), Dhahran, General Day also had responsibility for the U.S. training mission instructing the Saudis in airport operations. He would later inherit the additional role of Chief of the military training mission.
which they did not fail [to] exploit.”²³ Prince Mansour, Minister of Defense, later joined the negotiations and reported that the Saudis accepted the JCS recommendations in principle, but wished to retain the option to make future requests for articles not currently listed, in particular combat aircraft, increased supplies of ammunition and spare parts, and workshops.²⁴ Another issue raised appeared to be one of semantics, but with obvious overtones bearing on sovereignty sensitivities. The current title for the American officer in charge of the U.S. operations was “Commander, Dhahran Air Field.” The Saudis found this objectionable, and political efforts ensued to alter this to “Chief, Training Mission.”²⁵

Following this initial airing of positions, the group agreed to meet again on December 30 with the objective of completing agreements on both Dhahran and military assistance. The same principals convened along with the King. The dominant concern on Abdul Aziz’s mind remained the issue of sovereignty at Dhahran and the criticism he was exposing himself to. This led to an interesting negotiating position in which the Saudis argued that the U.S. desire for a 25-year agreement on access to Dhahran should be matched by a military assistance commitment of equal duration. Added to this was the Saudi desire and expectation that the U.S. military assistance program would go well


²⁴ According to Safran, Abdul Aziz was obsessed with having a combat air capability ever since the annihiilation by the RAF of two thousand Ikhwan following a raid into Transjordan in 1922. As the Ikhwan became increasingly uncontrollable by Abdul Aziz and their raiding more pronounced, especially into Kuwait, the British set up a system of air policing. A cadre of Special Service Officers (SSOs) drawn from the RAF was established to monitor raids and direct fires against the Ikhwan. Later in 1930 the British provided Abdul Aziz with four de Havilland biplanes, along with British pilots and maintenance crews, for his use in controlling the Ikhwan. Given this early history, it is fair to assume that Abdul Aziz viewed air power as much or more as a tool for internal security as for defense against a foreign invading force. See Nadav Safran, Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 68. On the history of British air policing of the Arabian Peninsula in the 1920s and 1930s, see J.E. Peterson, Defending Arabia (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 18-48.

²⁵ Hare to Acheson, 24 December 1950, FRUS, 1950, Vol. V, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, pp. 1197-1200. Like so many issues raised by the Saudis, the one over title would be revisited over the years. In a typical solution, the senior U.S. officer held the title of Commander, Dhahran Air Field, and Chief, Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) once the MAAG was established. The Saudis were free to refer to the latter in their dealings with the senior U.S. officer.
beyond delivery of equipment and training on that equipment. As Ambassador Hare records in his notes of the meeting, “Prince Mansour observed that what the Saudi Arabian Government had in mind in accepting the suggested military assistance program was the complete reorganization of the Saudi Arabian Army to include not only training but also staff organization for its direction.” The Saudi intent was for a long-term U.S. commitment to the modernization of its armed forces. The Ambassador was told that this point was of particular importance to the Saudis and should be conveyed as such to the U.S. Government.  

The new year began with the U.S. negotiating team receiving another close encounter with the frustrating tactics of Shaykh Yusuf and the Saudis. He stated that the King’s position had now changed due to his growing concerns over the sovereignty problem. Negotiations would have to start over, with the Saudi Arabian Government having full authority over the Dhahran Air Field. The U.S. military presence at Dhahran would have to be altered such that civilian technicians would operate the field, not uniformed soldiers. The 25-year lease period was also deemed unacceptable by the Saudis, “arousing specters of imperialism” even among those in the Palace favoring an agreement.

Ambassador Hare expressed surprise at this latest turn of events. In the case of the U.S. military presence at Dhahran, he reminded his counterparts of the “mission concept” formula agreed to by the U.S. whereby that presence was treated as part of a military mission to Saudi Arabia. This was done precisely to ameliorate these concerns.

---

26 Hare to the Department of State, Negotiations on Military Assistance and on Dhahran Air Field, Chronology of Conversations at Riyadh, December 30, 1950-January 5, 1951, 9 January 1951, 786.5 MAP/1-951, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
27 The key issue here was legal jurisdiction over American soldiers at Dhahran. The Saudis wanted full authority over the American personnel, which the U.S. rejected.
28 Hare to the Department of State, Negotiations on Military Assistance and on Dhahran Air Field, Chronology of Conversations at Riyadh, December 30, 1950-January 5, 1951, 9 January 1951, 786.5 MAP/1-951, and Hare to State Department, 3 January 1951, FRUS, 1951, Vol. V, The Near and Middle East, pp. 1017-21. The original one-year extension was due to expire in February, and it was now clear that final agreement would not be reached by that time.
His Majesty had already agreed to this formulation. As to the length of the Dhahran Air Field agreement, the Ambassador stressed that the desire in Washington was for something even longer than 25 years, and that a sharply reduced period could result in “a negative decision” from Washington on renewal of the agreement (and by implication, on U.S. military assistance). In terms of changing the military character of U.S. air operations at Dhahran, Hare pointed out that the air field was part of the U.S. world-wide military system, reflected in the fact that U.S. activities there were under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Military Air Transport Service (MATS). He cautioned that the Saudis needed to understand these aspects before they went final on this latest shift in proposal.\textsuperscript{29}

**The Evolving Regional Context**

While the ongoing negotiations with the Saudis focused on the narrow details of the terms and conditions of U.S. access to Dhahran and of military assistance to the Kingdom, Washington was wrestling with much larger security planning for the Near East as a whole. In particular were U.S.-U.K. efforts at cooperative security planning. Planning in this broader regional context directly affected U.S. views toward its security interests in Saudi Arabia, including trade-offs between London and Riyadh and how much assistance was worth investing in the Kingdom given the many other claims on resources. From the Saudi perspective, local developments were central in its decisions on how best to deal with the U.S., especially in the sensitive area of security cooperation.

\textsuperscript{29} Hare to the Department of State, *Negotiations on Military Assistance and on Dhahran Air Field, Chronology of Conversations at Riyadh, December 30, 1950-January 5, 1951*, 9 January 1951, 786.5 MAP/I-951, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59), and Hare to State Department, 3 January 1951, *FRUS*, 1951, Vol. V, *The Near and Middle East*, pp. 1017-21. Hare reported that the latest flare-up over sovereignty was stimulated by Arab foreign press reports critical of Saudi negotiations with the U.S., the recent rejection of a British treaty by the Iraqi Government along with the popular response this evoked, and the strong opposition of Prince Abdullah ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman (Abdul Aziz’s brother). Prince Faisal also was opposed to this length of term. This was an example of how external regional actions and internal palace attitudes beyond the King himself could be influential. It is also worth noting that Abdul Aziz was now increasingly beset by health problems and strong medications. It is unclear how much this impaired his decision making and gave wider influence to those surrounding him, Royals and commoners alike.
In sum, for both parties regional events were powerful, if oftentimes silent, partners at the negotiating table.

Of primary concern to the U.S. was the rise in anti-British agitation. London and Cairo remained deadlocked over British base rights at Suez. In a speech on November 16, 1950, the day Egypt’s Parliament opened, King Farouk announced that the 1936 treaty with London entitling the United Kingdom to maintain 10,000 soldiers in the Canal zone would be abrogated. This was quickly followed by Iraqi Premier Nuri Al-Said’s notification that the twenty year Anglo-Iraqi Treaty was now outdated. These popular actions in Cairo and Baghdad heightened the exposure of Riyadh to charges it was compromising its sovereignty at the very time other Arab states were taking decisive action to reverse this trend. Concurrently, there was now growing recognition in Washington that the U.S. would have to become more actively involved in defense of the region, this despite the strong desire of the U.S. for Britain to retain principal responsibility for Near East security. The result was a broad policy combining regional collective defense arrangements in close coordination with the British, modest military assistance to indigenous military forces, all backed by British—and to a much lesser degree U.S.—military power. Various efforts along these lines would characterize U.S. regional policy for the next several years.  

Secretary of State Acheson was pushing for improved coordination and expansion of military assistance to the region. While making it clear to Secretary of Defense Marshall that State’s proposals “do not involve the United States in a Middle East security pact or in a commitment of combat forces in the Middle East,” he believed current efforts could be improved. In particular, he advocated a more assertive U.S. effort to train indigenous forces. The lack of U.S. participation was breeding the sense among the leaders of the region that the U.S. would leave middle eastern defense up to

---

30 Poole, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume IV, 1950-1952, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, pp. 333-335.
the British, producing “political disaffection and deterioration.” The State Department concluded that “[o]nly direct U.S. participation in building up the defense of the area as a whole can provide the confidence required to halt this adverse trend and prepare the Middle East for allied use in the event of war.” Furnishing small training missions and limited quantities of arms and ammunition in the short term would pay major dividends. U.S. military assistance to Saudi Arabia was one relatively minor element in this much broader scheme.

This proposed heightened involvement of the U.S. was soon to be blessed by the President. In March 1951 President Truman would approve NSC 47/5, the NSC’s “Statement of Policy on the Arab States and Israel.” This Statement called for limited arms supply programs to the nations of the Near East and stressed the positive political impact of even token amounts if delivered promptly. The intent was to reverse the perceived trend toward neutrality among the Arab states and their growing sense “that the United States will not help the countries to prepare to defend themselves.” The past unwillingness of the U.S. to provide military assistance for self-defense in the face of repeated requests “has given added impetus to the already existing attitude that neutrality in the present conflict [Korea] may present the best opportunity for their survival in an all-out war.” Alternatively, NSC 47/5 argued that

If military assistance were supplied to the several Arab States and Israel, these states would (a) tend to become more closely oriented toward the United States; (b) be able to preserve internal security; (c) contribute after a time to the defense of the area; (d) be able to conduct guerrilla warfare and harassing operations in the event the area or part of it is overrun; and (e) be more amenable to the granting of strategic rights.

---

31 Acheson to Marshall, 27 January 1951, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (RG 330), CD 092 (Middle East), Box 234.
32 A Report to the President on U.S. Policy Toward the Arab States and Israel (NSC 47/5), 14 March 1951, NSC Registry (Permanent File), Records of the National Security Council (RG 273). An April 1951 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on the Near East was somber on the short-term prospects. The overall assessment concluded that “In view of the fundamental weakness of most countries in the region, in addition to such political obstacles as their anti-imperialism and the Arab-Israeli conflict, even a broadly conceived US-UK program including security commitments, economic aid, and the building up of local defense forces could not decidedly increase the Near East’s stability or local defense capability over the
Continuing Negotiations: Internal and External

As part of the ongoing U.S.-Saudi negotiations, Deputy Under Secretary of State H. Freeman Matthews requested that the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider the desire of the Saudis to revise upward the planned military assistance program. Specifically mentioned were the requests of the Saudis for combat aircraft and additional supplies of ammunition to insure a five-year reserve. In the case of the combat aircraft, the Saudis had expressed their intent to pursue an air force “regardless of difficulty or cost” to include purchases from the United Kingdom. Referring to earlier JCS and Secretary of Defense language that the military assistance package could be modified if this would improve the prospects for securing continued access to Dhahran, the Deputy Under Secretary now concluded that “a small number of fighters might be expected to improve the possibility of reaching a satisfactory agreement.” Therefore he was requesting the opinion of the Joint Chiefs on making this offer. He also wanted their views on the extent and duration of training the U.S. military was willing to commit to in light of the latest Saudi requests.\(^\text{33}\)

A series of discussions ensued in the Administration regarding the Saudi request for assistance in building a combat air force. It was widely recognized that this would be a long-term prospect and did not represent a good near-term investment on the part of the

\(^{33}\) Key Problems Affecting US Efforts to Strengthen The Near East, National Intelligence Estimate (NIE-26), 25 April 1951, Central Intelligence Agency, Harry S. Truman Library, President’s Secretary Files.

Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews) to the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Foreign Military Affairs and Military Assistance (Burns), 6 February 1951, FRUS, 1951, Vol. V, The Near and Middle East, p. 1043-44.
Saudis. Just the same, there was equal recognition that accommodating this Saudi desire was linked to success on Dhahran. And as Ambassador Hare pointedly added,

I appreciate all the arguments re availability, Saudi incapacity in aviation, etc., but this is a case where cold logic on our side may be expected to meet corresponding frigid reception by Saudis. It is submitted that this is a case where a gesture in deference to Saudis desires might pay important dividends.

In this same memo Hare made a much larger point that really got to the nub of the matter, of which the debate over a Saudi air force was merely a symptom; the issue of how best to achieve wartime access:

King and advisers have repeatedly given assurance that in event of war facilities of SA would be freely at our disposal. However, it is one thing to say so and quite another to put it down in black and white since to do so is to commit SA in advance to at least neo-belligerency and Saudis may well hesitate to give such commitment unless we can give some kind of reciprocating assurance or guarantee, a step which we have thus far been unwilling to take.

Put another way, in the absence of U.S. willingness to take on a formal security pact with Saudi Arabia, the U.S. would have to accept a certain amount of reciprocal ambiguity on the part of the Saudis as to the conditions under which it would grant access in a crisis. Under these circumstances, peacetime military assistance represented an important surrogate that could at least serve to build and expand confidence and military security ties, increasing the odds of a favorable decision in a crisis.

Another pressure point for the U.S. was the concern over Abdul Aziz’s increasingly poor health and diminished capacity to rule. Few doubted that near-absolute decision making power still resided in the personage of the King; the issue was his ability to make effective decisions. To this was added the known opposition of some

---

34 Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews) to the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Foreign Military Affairs and Military Assistance (Burns), 6 February 1951, FRUS, 1951, Vol. V, The Near and Middle East, p. 1043.
35 Hare to State Department, 3 March 1951, FRUS, 1951, Vol. V, The Near and Middle East, p. 1047.
36 Hare to State Department, 3 March 1951, 786A.5/3-351. This portion of Hare’s memo is not included in the FRUS extract cited above.
37 As early as 1950 American physicians reported on the King’s confinement to a wheelchair and growing senility. By then he also was being heavily medicated. Leslie McLoughlin, Ibn Saud: Founder of a Kingdom (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), p. 175.
Saudi princes to the proposed agreement with the U.S., and who were no doubt trying to influence His Majesty’s decisions. Members of the State Department’s Office of Near Eastern Affairs further worried that Abdul Aziz alone commanded the prestige among his people necessary to conclude the controversial agreement.\(^\text{38}\) In this sense there was a race against time. As General Day later put it to the Air Force leadership in pushing for closure, “[t]here are forces at work within the Saudi Government not favorable to us and the Government itself at the present time is not too stable.”\(^\text{39}\)

The Joint Chiefs reported back that they had no objections to a small fighter force for self-defense, as well as including a five-year reserve supply of ammunition to the Saudis. They also proposed that a joint U.S. military advisory and training mission be provided for an initial period of five years, with a provision that the program then be reviewed as to any future commitments. The idea was to convey that “in principle” the training would in fact be extended. This formula would give Ambassador Hare “considerable flexibility in negotiating the training aspects of the Agreement, and, at the same time, commits the United States to a fixed agreement for only the first five years.” They recommended to the Secretary of Defense that Ambassador Hare be authorized to negotiate on this basis, a position which Marshall accepted and conveyed to Secretary of State Acheson.\(^\text{40}\)

In late April General Day provided U.S. officials in Washington with a first hand account and update on negotiations with the Saudis. He reiterated his strong belief “that Saudi Arabia wants us there but they are afraid of a formal agreement and look to the


situation between the United Kingdom and Egypt as a case in point.” He underscored the importance the Saudis attached to acquiring an air force, describing it as the one thing “which they put above everything else and irrespective of cost.” But decisions had to be made quickly, as the Saudis were looking for some capability almost immediately. Prince Mansour wanted a flight group available later that year to fly over Mecca and Medina to impress the pilgrims.\footnote{Memorandum of Conversation, 25 April 1951, 786A.5-MAP/4-2551, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG 59).}

Following several more weeks of tough negotiations, a final agreement on the Air Base at Dhahran was reached with an exchange of signatures on June 18, 1951. It allowed the U.S. use of the air base for five more years, with the possible extension for another five. The nine-page agreement dealt with the many details of Dhahran and U.S. operations there. Also described was the U.S. commitment to send at U.S. expense a Mission to Dhahran to train Saudi nationals in the functioning and technical administration of the airport. As part of this, provisions were made for some Saudi students to be trained in the operation and maintenance of airfields at USAF schools. On jurisdictional issues, a compromise was reached in which American military personnel would fall under the legal authority of the U.S. for activities conducted at Dhahran Airfield and strictly designated surrounding areas. Beyond that Saudi jurisdiction ruled. The agreement also was clear on the sovereignty issue, noting that “complete authority and sovereignty inside and outside of Dhahran Airfield is the absolute right of the Saudi Arabian Government and it will make arrangements for guarding and maintaining the safety of the Airport.” Only one sentence (15a) addressed future military assistance, the U.S. agreeing to provide a military training program and associated military mission to Saudi Arabia as part of the Dhahran Air Base Agreement, the details to be provided under separate agreement. A second agreement signed on the same date, \textit{Mutual Defense Assistance}, outlined the basic provisions and procedures whereby the U.S. would provide
Saudi Arabia with military assistance on a reimbursable basis, as well as provide military personnel for training Saudis in use of the equipment, the cost of which would be borne by the U.S. It also agreed to accept select Saudi students for study and training in American military schools.⁴²

In separate documents not made public, Saudi Arabia was assured that the U.S. Government was prepared to “assist in the provision of a modest fighter force,” the numbers and types to be determined by the U.S. joint military group that would be sent to Saudi Arabia as part of the overall agreement. The U.S. also agreed to provide an enhanced ammunition reserve, base workshops, and “furnish tactical training as well as training in use of equipment.” In apparent response to Saudi sensitivities over the duration and conviction behind U.S. military assistance, the document stated that “[T]he United States Government has directed serious effort and good will in deciding what it can and will do in meeting the desires of the Saudi Arabian Government and it has not the slightest intention of entering an agreement it does not plan to live up to.” During the first phase of the program the U.S. was willing to offer direct training in the U.S. to 429 Saudi Arabians (Army: 244; Navy: 25; Air Force: 160). As for the American military advisory mission, the U.S. was prepared to commit the following personnel:

- **Army:** 25 to 50 officers; 60 to 100 men
- **Navy:** 3 officers; 8 men
- **Air Force:** 13 officers; 19 men⁴³

---

⁴² Copies of the texts of the two public Executive Agreements are in Appendix B. A good example of how a particular frame of reference leads to different interpretations of evidence is Sarah Yizraeli’s take on the agreement’s training emphasis. Working from a perspective emphasizing the King’s fear of military forces as a threat to his rule, she concludes that “In keeping with Ibn Sa’ud’s suspicions of strong armed forces, the emphasis in applying the treaty was placed on training rather than armaments.” Yet the bulk of evidence here and over the next several years suggests that it was the U.S. that stymied the King’s very apparent appetite for arms, using training as a much weaker substitute. Yizraeli, *The Remaking of Saudi Arabia, The Struggle between King Sa’ud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953-1962*, p. 151.

⁴³ Hare to Minister of Foreign Affairs Feisal, 18 June 1951, *Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State* (RG 84), Saudi Arabia, Jidda Embassy, Classified General Records, 1950-1955. In addition to the two public agreements, there were additional letters on installations and services applied to DAF, and two explanatory letters regarding military assistance. These were not made public. Hare to Secretary of State,
Devil In The Details: Reaching Closure on the Military Assistance Program

Following the signing of the agreements, and as part of the condition to provide the Saudis with a training program and to implement reimbursable military assistance, a U.S. military survey team was dispatched to the Kingdom. The United States Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) Survey Team arrived in Dhahran on July 17, 1951.⁴⁴ Headed by General Day, chief of the survey team, its formal brief was to “come to an agreement with the appropriate Saudi Arabian authorities on the training program and the phasing of deliveries of arms and equipment required by the Saudi Arabian Government” including “necessary preliminary arrangement for a U.S. training mission for Saudi Arabia.”⁴⁵ As part of this brief, the team also was to make recommendations on reorganizing the Saudi military.

The following day they met with the King and over the next week conducted a number of discussions and studies. The team then traveled to Taif where General Day provided the new Minister of Defense, Prince Mish’al, with a copy of the proposed reorganization of the armed forces and the associated military assistance proposals.⁴⁶ Members of the U.S. survey team also met with the British Military Mission stationed at Taif, headed by Brigadier Baird.⁴⁷ Despite the earlier delays in responding to the British

---

7 July 1951, 786A.5/MAP/7-751, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). The author assumes that one of the explanatory letters was the one from Hare to Faisal cited above.

⁴⁴ The 16-man team consisted of five Air Force, seven Army, two Navy, and two State Department officers.

⁴⁵ Reimbursable Aid Agreement With The Government of Saudi Arabia, Report By Joint U.S. MDAP Survey Team to Saudi Arabia, July-August 1951, “The Problem,” Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), commonly referred to as the “Day Report.” This was the formal report of the Survey Team following their visit to Saudi Arabia.

⁴⁶ Prince Mansour died from medical complications while in Paris in 1951 and his brother Mish’al was appointed to replace him. Mish’al would hold the post until his dismissal in December 1956.

⁴⁷ This was the continuing mission presence originally established by the British in 1944. The British had been training Saudi Arabian Army officers and NCOs at Taif since January 1947. London presented its own proposed reorganization plan to the Saudis in 1948 and the Saudi Army was using British organization and equipment at the time. As a result of growing U.S. influence, and growing animosity between the Saudis and the British over the Buraimi dispute, this mission would be effectively closed out by 1951. At the time the Saudis were critical of the British training mission to members of the U.S. survey team, stating that it had accomplished little and was an intelligence agency. For Saudi criticism see Jiddah to Secretary of State, 26 July 1951, 786A.5-MAP/7-2651, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
on the RAF Reconnaissance Report, the State and Defense Departments recognized the need for cooperation on military assistance affairs over any residual competition with London. Both agreed that U.S. military training should seek to be complementary, avoid duplication, and that nothing should be done by the U.S. to undermine the British position in Saudi Arabia. In the event the Saudis looked to eliminate the British Mission in favor of American training, Acheson’s guidance to the American Embassy in Jeddah was “that the Embassy might, at its discretion, point out to the Saudi Arabian Government the advantages of receiving training from both Governments in the interests of advancing such a program more rapidly and of broadening it to greater training facilities than might otherwise be possible.” The MDAP survey team had been instructed on these points prior to its departure.48

Following Prince Mish’al’s tentative agreement to the preliminary plans, the survey team returned to Riyadh to prepare more formal proposals. In so doing the team consulted with Saudi government authorities, including two Egyptian Army officers assigned by the Saudis to represent them. During these consultations it was mutually decided that the Saudi Government should not seek to establish a Navy at the time, and the U.S. Navy members of the survey team returned home.49

---

48 Acheson to American Embassy Jeddah, 7 December 1950, 786A.5-MAP/12-750, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). Additional reassurances were provided to the British Foreign Office and Embassy by the State Department as negotiations continued in early 1951. Members of NE informed their British counterparts “that the military training contemplated by the United States was not an enterprise we were seeking but was in fact forced upon us as a quid pro quo for getting the one thing we did want, DAF.” Memorandum of Conversation with Geoffrey Furlong (British Foreign Office) and Denis Greenhill (British Embassy), 16 April 1951, 786A.5-MAP/4-1651, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). The MDAP team was told of the U.S. preference for the British mission to stay “and possible Saudi Arabian suggestions to the contrary should be discouraged.” Awalt to Jones, 9 July 1951, FRUS, 1951, Vol. V, The Near and Middle East, p. 1062.

49 Reimbursable Aid Agreement With The Government of Saudi Arabia, Report By Joint U.S. MDAP Survey Team to Saudi Arabia, July-August 1951, Inclosure A—“Composition And Activities of the Survey Team,” Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218). According to a later memo by Hare, the presence of Egyptian military advisors was an effort by the Saudis to have some ability to discuss military assistance matters on a more equal footing with the U.S., as virtually no Saudis could do so. Divisions existed among the Saudis over use of the Egyptians. Saudi Arabian Army Chief of Staff and military advisor to Prince Mish’al General Said Bey Kordi reportedly objected to their presence, viewing them as pro-British and with the intent “to undermine” the program. Hare to Fritzlan, 28 May 1953, Lot File No. 57 D298, Records of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs, Subject File, 1941-1954, Box. No. 8., Records of the Department of
On August 15 the revised plan for reorganizing, training and equipping the Saudi defense forces was formally presented to the Saudi Arabian Government. In terms of the Army, the official U.S. proposal conformed with the lowered recommendations of the JCS and called for equipping and training three regimental combat teams (RCTs), each to consist of three infantry battalions and one field artillery battalion. Including headquarters and support personnel, each regiment was to consist of approximately 4600 men, with each of the infantry battalions containing about 900 soldiers. Given the rudimentary status of existing Saudi forces, the infantry battalions were to be formed initially as separate units, each trained-up and equipped over time to the point at which artillery, reconnaissance, ordnance, engineering and signal sections could be added, leading to formation of the battalion-level combat teams. In the words of the MDAP Survey Team, “The ultimate objective for the Army shall be three (3) regimental combat teams capable of separation into nine (9) battalion combat teams, distributed under control of three (3) Area Commands in accordance with strategic needs.” Each Area Command would therefore control a Regimental Combat Team and supporting troops.\(^{50}\)

The phased reorganization of the Army would require training approximately 17,600 soldiers and support personnel. The U.S. Mission would first train Saudi Arabian instructors at the Training Center at Al Kharj.\(^{51}\) The choice of Al Kharj as the location...
involved a number of factors, important among them political considerations. Early
discussions included the possibility of setting up training at the existing area at Taif.
Both General Day and Ambassador Hare came to consider this a bad idea. In addition to
wanting to distinguish the U.S. training activities from the British efforts already there,
the facilities remained underdeveloped. But there were also deeper calculations having to
do with Saudi internal political dynamics. As the King’s health continued to deteriorate,
succession was now a major concern. To the extent internal political problems might
arise from the King’s incapacitation or death, they considered it “advisable for the bulk of
the military establishment to be in the Riyadh area, not half way across the country in the
Hejaz.” Adding to these worries was the underlying hostility between the Hejazis and the
Najd central government in Riyadh. In the event of trouble in Riyadh, the Hejazis could
interfere with troop movements needed to assist the Al Saud. So in part the selection of
Al Kharj as the military training sight was a function of instability considerations.
Descending to yet another level of political consideration (or intrigue), as Viceroy of the
Nejd Crown Prince Saud was already in political competition with Faisal, Viceroy of the
Hejaz. Faisal had strong political support from, and familiarity with, the Hejazes.
Placing major troop concentrations there could add to Faisal’s clout at Saud’s expense.
Recognizing this, Saud pushed hard to not have the training site in the Hejaz.  

The plan also now included a provision for organizing, equipping and training a
Saudi air force to be “established as an autonomous service, the primary mission of
which will be the tactical and airlift support of the Saudi Arabian Army.” It was to be
made up of a fighter and an air transport force, with the Air Base also located at Al Kharj.
The U.S. survey team concluded that given the Air Force’s primary function of providing

52 See Awalt (NE) to Kopper (NE), Conversations with General Day, 10 March 1952, 786A.5/3-1052,
Records of the Department of State (RG 59). Saud’s sensitivity to the local cultivation of Faisal is recorded
by Hare in a 12 February 1952 memo to Awalt, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Lot File No.
support to the Army, it made sense to co-locate the Air Base at Al Kharj rather than use the existing facilities at Dhahran.

Organizationally the Air Force was to consist of a Headquarters, an Air Base Squadron and a Composite Tactical Squadron, requiring about 400 personnel. During the first five years of the phased program, the Saudis were expected to purchase ten Super C-47 type aircraft to provide airlift support and twelve T-28 type aircraft for the tactical fighter portion of the force. The Saudis also requested the purchase of five training aircraft to determine the flying fitness of candidate Saudi pilots prior to their training in the U.S. A U.S. Air Force Training Mission in Saudi Arabia would provide training in fundamentals and aircraft maintenance, while pilot training was to be carried out in the United States.\textsuperscript{53}

The cost of the entire defense program was estimated at approximately $114 million for the five-year period (Army $97 million, Air Force $17 million), including construction costs but excluding the cost of personnel. Of this total about $69 million would be required for the purchase of U.S. equipment. These recommendations were formally accepted by the Saudi Minister of Defense on August 20.\textsuperscript{54} The next step would be for a small advance team of the permanent U.S. Military Mission to be sent to provide assistance during the construction of the base facilities at Al Kharj, estimated to take twelve months. Once those facilities were completed, the remainder of the U.S. military Mission would then be sent to the Kingdom. Simultaneously, the Saudis would begin submitting phased requests to the U.S. for equipment through the reimbursable aid


\textsuperscript{54} Prince Mish’al’s letter of acceptance is in Inclosure H, Reimbursable Aid Agreement With The Government of Saudi Arabia, \textit{Report By Joint U.S. MDAP Survey Team to Saudi Arabia, July-August 1951}. 

196
process, to first support the training program and then to provide for staggered equipment deliveries as each group of trainees was prepared to assume unit and field training.\textsuperscript{55}

On October 4 the Secretary of Defense directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to review the final report of the MDAP survey team. The Joint Chiefs approved the findings on December 7, 1951. Based on the Joint Chiefs approval, the Defense Department endorsed the findings in mid-December and the military assistance program was approved as proposed.

Interestingly, just as the U.S. was reaching closure on a military assistance program to Saudi Arabia, the British informed the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff on October 2, 1951 that the Saudi Government had expressed its desire to close down the British Military Mission.\textsuperscript{56} Two months later on December 5, the British notified the JCS of their decision to withdraw the Mission from Saudi Arabia. Thus came to a close the long-established British training presence at Taif. The British also informed the U.S. that they continued to “welcome the U.S. offer to confer with them regarding future coordination of British and United States efforts in Saudi Arabia.”\textsuperscript{57}

In the past year the U.S. and Saudi Arabia had managed to arrive at a formal agreement on Dhahran renewal, a U.S. commitment to provide a military training program to the Kingdom, and closure on the basic military force structure of the Saudi armed forces. Without doubt major accomplishments, the difficulty and contentiousness in arriving at them presaged what was to come in implementation. In particular were the remaining negotiations over the specifics of the military assistance to be provided. As would become clear, issues though to have reached closure rarely did, and reopening

\textsuperscript{55} The Saudis would begin this phased submission of requests in April 1952 based on the requirements laid out in the report and with the guidance of the U.S. Chief, MAAG.

\textsuperscript{56} Reference to the Saudi October request is in \textit{Feasibility of Holding the Bahrein-Qatar-Saudi Arabian Area}, J.C.S. 1887/36, 21 January 1952, \textit{Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff} (RG 218).

\textsuperscript{57} British Chiefs of Staff memorandum is included in \textit{British Interests in U.S. Rights in Saudi Arabia}, J.C.S. 1881/46, 28 May 1952, \textit{Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff} (RG 218).
matters became the frustrating norm. Meanwhile regional developments continued to create their own cycles of difficulties for the U.S. and its interests in Saudi Arabia.

**Supply and Demand: The Growing Imbalance on Security**

The British continued to struggle with their defense position in Egypt, upon which its entire regional defense posture hinged. London and Cairo remained at loggerheads over British base rights in the Canal area. Searching for a solution, the U.K. came up with the concept of a Middle East Command (MEC). Despite some misgivings, the U.S. reached “tentative agreement” with London in June to establish a MEC that would also include representation from Turkey and the Commonwealth countries Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Washington also agreed to the British proposal that a British officer act as Supreme Allied Commander, Middle East (SACME), to be headquartered in Egypt. The idea was to first get agreement from Turkey and the Commonwealth countries, then approach Egypt. The British would turn over the Suez bases to the Egyptian Government, who would in turn place them under the authority of SACME, a clear effort to retain effective British control “without incurring the odium of ‘occupation.’” In this fashion the British sought to strike a balance between the changing political circumstances in Egypt and Britain’s enduring defense needs. The State Department and Joint Chiefs concurred with supporting MEC, the former because it saw no practical political alternative given growing restiveness in Egypt, the latter because it kept Great Britain as principal military authority in the region.  

But as the details of MEC were being worked, and in particular the role and authority of Egypt in the Command, Egyptian nationalism continued to escalate. A major accelerator was a Security Council resolution sponsored by the British calling for

---

censuring Egyptian transit restrictions in the Suez Canal. After several U.S. efforts to head off the resolution it passed in September, inflaming Egyptian nationalism. The vote came just before the proposals on MEC were to be presented to Cairo, proposals designed to address Egyptian sovereignty concerns by making her a “full partner” in the command. But now passions were running high and time running out. On October 8 Prime Minister Nahas introduced legislation to abrogate the 1936 treaty, an action that met with widespread official and popular support. Parliament passed the legislation one week later, at that same time the Prime Minister informed Parliament that it had rejected the MEC proposals. MEC was effectively dead, though efforts to keep it alive and more palatable alternatives would continue.  

In the midst of these diminishing prospects for a viable collective security arrangement, U.S. authorities continued to worry not only about ways to protect the region as a whole but also about the particulars of how to secure or deny Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia in the event of war. But the U.S. military continued to likewise adhere to its very limited commitment to the region in terms of force allocations. This was well reflected in several studies at the time. In its prepared draft response on the subject for the Secretary of Defense the JCS noted that U.S. naval and air forces in the Mediterranean-Middle East area by themselves were not sufficient to defend these three territories. As to denial, the draft memorandum stated that the U.S. was “formulating plans to deny by field expedients the use of the present oil installations and wells in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrein” in the face of a Soviet aggression. “Under these plans the plugging of the oil wells and the demolition of refineries is to be accomplished by civilians.” The memorandum stressed that as U.S. support for MEC was in the context of “avoiding any commitment of United States forces,” the focus should be on contributions by the United

59 For this history and the importance of the U.N. resolution in further poisoning the atmosphere see Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945-1956*, pp. 116-128. A follow-on proposal to MEC was for a Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO) designed to make any defense arrangement appear less dominated by the West. British efforts to establish MEDO would continue for the next several years, but to no avail.
Kingdom and Commonwealth countries, combined with the efforts of indigenous forces. The memorandum concluded that

United States forces are not available for specific commitment to the Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrein areas under current war plans. Consequently, in light of all of the foregoing, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that the defense of these areas, together with the over-all area of the Middle East, should be accepted by the British as a British responsibility, and that they should develop, organize, and as necessary provide forces for an effective defense thereof.

The Joint Chiefs accordingly recommended that talks with the British be initiated “to explore the intentions and capabilities of the latter with regard to the defense of the Middle East area as it might affect the defense of the Kuwait, Saudi Arabian, and Bahrein areas.”

A clearer statement of the current limits to any U.S. military commitment to the lower Gulf states would be hard to find.

As far as military assistance was concerned, the picture was not much brighter. In January President Truman issued a letter outlining his military priorities in allocating U.S. military equipment globally. This was converted into definitive guidance by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in March 1952. First priority was given to U.S. and other United Nations forces engaged in Korea. Second priority went to all U.S. and NATO forces designated as D-Day forces. Third were forces designated for operational deployment or embarkation to high priority areas by D + 30. Fourth priority was for remaining U.S. forces, both active and reserve. This was then to be followed by transfers to remaining countries the U.S. considered important to its defense, with priorities going to those countries most likely to be directly engaged against the Soviets in the event of war.

---

60 Draft Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, enclosure to Examination of What Additional Steps, Political and Military, Might be Taken to Secure or Deny Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrein, J.C.S. 1887/29, 30 November 1951, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218). This memorandum was submitted to the Secretary of Defense on 5 December 1951. In an effort to have it both ways as regards Saudi Arabia the memorandum also noted that while Britain should have primary military responsibility for the area as a whole “the special United States-Saudi Arabian arrangements now existing should continue.” This language was drawn directly from NSC 47/51, U.S. Policy Toward the Arab States and Israel, approved by the President earlier on 17 March 1951.

61 Truman to Secretary of Defense Lovett, 9 January 1952, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Omar Bradley to Secretary of Defense Lovett, 14 March 1952, filed in Records of the Office of Secretary of Defense (RG
the basis of these criteria, Saudi Arabia clearly fell well down the pecking order, both in
terms of making available U.S. equipment for sale to the Saudis and certainly in terms of
providing any such equipment on a grant basis.

Despite these clear priorities, the Administration also was increasingly aware of
the need for some military assistance to non-front-line states in Near East region, at least
to bolster local political support. This was reflected in the NSC’s consideration of NSC
129, the latest proposed statement on U.S. objectives and policies in the Near East. But
in response, the JCS registered major concern about references to U.S. military assistance
commitments to the region, as well as to possible commitment of actual American forces.
In the case of the former the JCS stressed that any proposed military assistance to achieve
primarily political ends in the region would compete directly with other established
military assistance priorities. As for the proposed language calling for the assignment
of token American forces in a Middle East defense arrangement, the JCS worried any
such assignment might “do more harm than good, unless such forces are dispatched as

62 The NSC 129 series replaced the NSC 47 series, with the first (NSC 129/1) approved by the President on
24 April 1952.
63 The basic mechanics of developing priorities and implementing military assistance programs during this
period was as follows: Overall supervision of military foreign aid activities for the Secretary of Defense
was administered by the Director, Office of Military Assistance (OMA). Each of the military departments
had their own military assistance organizations relevant to their specific activities that were responsible to
OMA. Foreign Military Assistance Programs involving actual grant aid to countries were formulated on an
annual basis within an overall ceiling established by the Director for Mutual Security, part of the Executive
Office of the President. Military criteria to be applied to military assistance were provided by the JCS,
linking military assistance to broader U.S. security objectives and defense plans in the world. The general
JCS guidance and directives were then used by country MAAGs in the development of individual country
needs. These recommendations were then submitted back up to the Joint Chiefs and OMA for final
decisions on distributions within the allotted ceiling. The proposed total FY grant aid budget and
allocations were then compiled for submission in the Mutual Security Program portion of the Defense
Budget. Congress would of course then make its own adjustments once it arrived on the Hill. Supply
Procedures of Military Assistance, The Foreign Military Aid Branch, Supply Division, G-4, in Office of the
Secretary of Defense, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Office of Military
Aid Programs, Operations Division Control Branch, Subject File, 1950-1953, Military Foreign Aid. This
reference is a useful period piece that includes detailed flow charts of the steps involved in preparing and
executing mutual security programs in general and the Army’s military aid program in particular. The
legislation creating the Director for Mutual Security and its responsibilities is in Sections 502 and 503 of
the Mutual Security Act of 1951 (PL 165), United States Statutes At Large, Volume 65 (Washington, D.C.
GPO, 1952).
evidence of our intention to maintain or expand them to any extent that might reasonably become necessary.” This, the JCS did not envision, noting that “under current national war plans, the commitment of United States forces to operations in the area of the Middle East is not contemplated.” Therefore, any political considerations for doing so “should be of such import as clearly to overshadow the possible adverse military consequences of such a course of action.”64 The supply and demand for defense resources in the region were badly out of balance. Yet the U.S. was clearly on the hook in Saudi Arabia; military assistance commitments now had to be met.

**The Wheels Turn Slowly: Initiation of Military Assistance And Further Negotiations Over the MAAG**

Following Defense Department approval of the military assistance program to Saudi Arabia in December, the U.S. began preparations for standing up a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG). Once formally established, ‘MAAG, Saudi Arabia’ would become the central organization inside the country for coordinating all military assistance to the Kingdom, and the foundation of what would later become the U.S. Military Training Mission to Saudi Arabia (USMTM).65 In setting up a preliminary organization, the Joint Chiefs assigned responsibility for administrative and logistical

---

64 Bradley to the Secretary of Defense, 15 April 1952, *United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Arab States and Israel* (NSC 129), NSC Registry (Permanent File), *Records of the National Security Council* (RG 273).

65 There is an important issue of terminology here, which has caused some confusion in secondary source writings. Throughout this period the U.S. military training and advisory team in Saudi Arabia was almost always designated as ‘MAAG, Saudi Arabia,’ though occasionally referred to as the ‘Training Mission’ or USMTM. Its status was really that of a Military Mission rather than a Military Assistance Advisory Group, even though functionally it performed as a conventional MAAG with a training mission attached. This distinction is noteworthy because Saudi Arabia was then ineligible for grant aid and the group was not established under the provisions of the Military Aid Program (MAP), the formal legislated mechanism for creating a country MAAG. The training personnel were funded out of individual Service accounts, not out of traditional Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) funds. The term USMTM therefore more accurately captures the genesis and nature of the training team, and later came into official use. But because ‘MAAG, Saudi Arabia’ was the convention used at the time, it will be retained here. These points are summarized in Memorandum for the Chairman, JCS, *Augmentation of United States Army Section, MAAG—Saudi Arabia,* 27 October 1956, Chairman’s File, Admiral Radford, 1955-1957, 091 Saudi Arabia, and Memorandum for Admiral Radford from MG Cannon, Special Assistant to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for MDA Affairs, 29 November 1955, Chairman’s File, Admiral Radford, 1955-1957, 091 Saudi Arabia, *Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (RG 218).
support of the mission to the Chief of Staff, USAF, and authorized the USAF to designate a Chief of Mission. USAF argued that given the very small size of the mission at the time (4-6 men), it would designate General Day, commanding general at Dhahran, as acting chief. The intent was to later appoint a full-time Chief once the mission was formally established and increased in size.

Wearing his acting chief hat, General Day spent the early months of 1952 attempting to help the Saudis organize their version of a Department of Defense. In particular General Day wanted the Saudis to establish offices and individuals with specific responsibilities. He believed this was an important prerequisite to the success of the training and modernization program, providing U.S. team members with Saudi counterparts with whom they could coordinate. Predictably this ran into quick trouble. Such an organization required delegation of authority beyond Minister of Defense Mish’al, something the Minister was reluctant to do. Along similar lines, General Day encountered resistance to his requests to Prince Mish’al for an initial cadre of 40 young officers for preliminary training at Dhahran. When they repeatedly failed to materialize Mish’al claimed this was due to lack of qualified candidates. General Day attributed it to older officers fearing they might be challenged professionally by this new, rising officer corps.

---

66 Reimbursable Aid Agreement with the Government of Saudi Arabia, Memorandum For Record, 15 May 1952, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Office of Military Assistance, Decimal Files, April 1949-May 1953, Saudi Arabia, 091.3-471 (1952). At the time General Day was having difficulty filling even the existing slots and noted that the “Saudis have already expressed concern and dissatisfaction at the failure of personnel to arrive whom we have previously promised to secure.” The reason was funding. Because Saudi Arabia was not eligible for grant aid, no provision was made for funds in the MDAP program to support a MAAG, and funds had to be found elsewhere. See Brig Gen Day to Maj Gen Olmstead (Director, Office of Military Assistance), 4 June 1952, and Maj, Gen Olmstead to Brig Gen Day, 26 June 1952, RG 330, Office of the Secretary of Defense (ISA), Office of Military Assistance Project Decimal Files 1953, Box 39, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (RG 330).

67 Awalt (NE) to Kopper (NE), Conversations with General Day, 10 March 1952, 786A.5/3-1052. After great insistence General Day finally received his students, a collection of 14-15 year-olds. In addition to being too young, according to Day they suffered from severe morale problems since they were recruited by being told they were candidates for scholarships to study in France.
Meanwhile in February 1952 the U.S. received word that Abdul Aziz’s health had taken a sharp turn for the worst and that he was in a critical state, perhaps requiring immediate surgery. In response the President asked that Major General Wallace H. Graham, who had previously provided medical care to the King, be dispatched to Saudi Arabia to attend to His Majesty. The King’s deteriorating health—mental as well as physical—was now constantly on the minds of American diplomats and increasingly, on the minds of those responsible for implementing the U.S. military assistance program.

The formal initiation of military assistance to Saudi Arabia under the terms of the June 1951 military assistance agreement began in April 1952. The first formal Saudi request for military assistance was submitted to Washington on May 20, 1952. This was for initial equipment and armaments to cover the first year of the Saudi training and defense modernization program (designated as July 1952 to July 1953). As always, political considerations weighed heavily. In supporting this initial Saudi request, General Day stressed the need to move quickly in providing the equipment: “It is imperative that some training action begin as soon as possible for Saudi expectations, although

68 Acheson to Lovett, 8 February 1952, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (RG 330), OSD CD 092 (Saudi Arabia).
69 Brig. Gen. Day to HRH Prince Mish’al, 9 April 1952, filed in Office of the Secretary of Defense, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Office of Military Assistance, Reimbursable Aid Branch, “Country” Case Files, Saudi Arabia to Sweden, 1949-April 1955, Saudi Arabia Cases 1-10, 1952-1954, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (RG 330). This process in which the MAAG drafted the list and forwarded it to the Saudis for submission to the U.S. Government was repeated for subsequent requests as well. Each of these military assistance transactions was given a case number, e.g., the Saudi request for T-35s was designated “Case No. Saudi Arabia 3,” for pilot training “Case No. Saudi Arabia 7,” etc. The original Case No. 1 for Saudi Arabia was the long list of Army, Navy and Air Force equipment proposed for delivery prior to the revised findings of the July-August 1951 MDAP Survey Team. This was later withdrawn and replaced by a series of phased equipment requests based on the updated Survey. The practical effect of this was to make Case No. Saudi Arabia “2” the first formal request from which all subsequent Case numbers followed.
unrealistic from the beginning, demand prompt action in the interest of fostering the present excellent state of relations.”

This initial request would soon be followed by many others, the next for T-35 training aircraft. But as these phased equipment requests came in, all paid for by Saudi Arabia as stipulated in the reimbursable agreement, parallel pressures for grant aid were again resurfacing. These would be added to the ever-present Saudi harangue on sovereignty sensitivities. The bidding was about to reopen, and not surprisingly, invested with heavy political content on both sides.

Negotiations on the MAAG: Grant Aid Revisited

The principal venue for airing these new pressures was the negotiations over the details of the MAAG. These began only in mid-summer due to delays by the Saudis. Ambassador Hare was lead U.S. negotiator, with General Day acting as the Department of Defense representative in conjunction with the Ambassador. As before, the negotiations turned out to be “tortuous” and a “haggling match from beginning to end.” Hare interpreted the difficulties in part to be linked to the Saudi desire for grant aid which had so far failed to materialize. While grant aid was not raised formally by the Saudis as part of the MAAG negotiations, it was mentioned to him repeatedly “in such a way as to leave no doubt that the SAG was expecting the USG to offer such assistance.” He was also told by Prince Faisal that Minister of Defense Mish’al believed that now that the U.S. had achieved its objectives of base rights through the concluded DAF agreement, it was losing interest in the training program.

---


72 Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, 17 July 1952, filed in Records of the Office of Secretary of Defense (RG 330), Office of the Administrative Secretary, Correspondence Control Section, Decimal File, CD 092.2 (Saudi Arabia), 1952.

In the course of the previous talks to bring the Dhahran agreement to closure, the U.S. had discussed the possibility of providing some grant military aid to the Saudis as an incentive. According to State Department records, no promise of such grant aid was actually made, but the Saudis were told it would be strongly considered should Congress approve the necessary enabling legislation. Such legislation had since been passed with the Mutual Security Act of 1951 (PL 165). This Act included a provision for extending grant military aid under certain circumstances to countries of the Near East beyond Greece, Turkey and Iran. To date the Administration had chosen not to use this provision given the ongoing Anglo-Egyptian dispute and the difficulties surrounding establishment of the Middle East Command. Ambassador Hare now concluded, however, that in the case of Saudi Arabia the “US has an ‘implied commitment’ to give grant aid.”

Grant aid continued to be rejected on grounds of military utility. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had already rendered their opinion in December 1951 that “from the military point of view, the designation of any of the Near East countries (other than Greece, Turkey and Iran) for the receipt of military grant aid under the Mutual Security Act of 1951 would not be justified.” At the same time, the Joint Chiefs left the door ajar by recognizing “that political considerations may prove an over-riding and valid reason for the furnishing of military grant aid in token amounts to some of those countries on a selected basis.”

---

74 The provision was contained in Section 202. This allowed the President to offer military assistance to any country in the Near East but “only upon determination by the President that (1) the strategic location of the recipient country makes it of direct importance to the defense of the Near East area, (2) such assistance is of critical importance to the defense of free nations, and (3) the immediately increased ability of the recipient country to defend itself is important to the preservation of the peace and security of the area and to the security of the United States.” Mutual Security Act of 1951 (PL 165), United States Statutes At Large, Volume 65 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1952).

75 Grant Aid for Saudi Arabia, 19 August 1952, 786A.5-MAP/8-1952, and Grant Aid for Saudi Arabia, 19 September 1952, 786A.5-MSP/9-1952, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).

76 Acting Secretary of Defense Foster to Secretary of State Acheson, 10 December 1951, 786A.5-MAP/12-10-51, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
General Day was also pressing for at least some minor grant aid to get the program moving. Required Saudi funding for the first year of the defense program was $43 million ($26 million in construction, primarily for training facilities, and $17 million in equipment). Despite the fact that Minister of Defense Prince Mish’al had instructed the Minister of Finance to provide the funds, Day was convinced it would be extremely difficult for the Minister to do so in any timely way. Even small amounts of aid could allow him to get things underway while the Saudis determining where the funds would come from.  

Secretary of State Acheson had raised this issue of grant aid for the Saudis earlier with Secretary of Defense Lovett in April. Given the passage of the legislation, he thought it could prove awkward for the U.S. not to offer some form of grant aid to Riyadh, fully recognizing that the bulk of Saudi Arabia’s defense program still had to be funded on a cash reimbursable basis. He therefore requested that the Defense Department concur with State in recommending a Presidential determination of Saudi Arabia’s eligibility for grant aid. Lovett referred this request to the Joint Chiefs, who reiterated their December position, this time specifically applied to Saudi Arabia; that on military grounds grant military aid to the Saudis was not justified, but that the JCS understood its value to serve larger U.S. political and military (primarily continued access to Dhahran) objectives in the Kingdom. On that basis, the Joint Chiefs would not object to “token” amounts of such aid as long as it was understood that the great majority of military assistance to the Saudis would continue to be cash reimbursable. Furthermore, any grant aid “should not be construed as implying a requirement to commit U.S. military forces to the defense of Saudi Arabia or the Middle East” and warned of the “undesirability of permitting the exceptional case of Saudi Arabia to serve as a precedent.

---

77 Awalt (NE) to Kopper (NE), Conversations with General Day, 10 March 1952, 786A.5/3-1052, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
leading to similar requests from other Middle East countries.”

79 Weighing heavily on the Joint Chiefs’ minds was the ever growing demand for global military assistance, and the risks this posed for spreading available resources too thin.

As it turned out Secretary Lovett endorsed this view of the Joint Chiefs. Defense would support a Presidential determination for “token grant military aid” to Saudi Arabia for political, but not military, justifications. Even this limited endorsement was accompanied by a further clarification that “this recommendation of her eligibility for grant military aid should not be construed as implying a requirement to commit U.S. military forces to the defense of Saudi Arabia or the Middle East.” The Secretary’s office went on to note that at present no funds had been programmed for Saudi Arabia and any grant aid provided would have to come out of other country accounts. This was again a strong indicator of just how limited the commitment was.

At the same time the USAF was concerned that its substantial future investment in Dhahran be protected by appropriately long and generous terms of access from the Saudis. USAF plans called for investing approximately $81 million in construction to upgrade Dhahran over the next several years, an investment that directly benefited the Saudis as well.

81 The Commanding General of the Military Air Transport Service (MATS) which had cognizance over Dhahran, Maj. Gen. Joseph Smith, believed that if more generous terms of operations were not granted by the Saudis the USAF should

79 Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, 23 May 1952, in Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (RG 330), Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Office of Military Assistance, Decimal Files, April 1949-May 1953, Saudi Arabia, 091.3-471 (1952). This JCS corporate position on grant aid would remain consistent throughout the 1950s.


81 This USAF-funded construction at Dhahran began in 1951 and with it the Army Corps of Engineers post-war activities inside the Kingdom. Using USAF funds, the Corps upgraded the facility to include paving runways, adding lighting, POL storage, housing and utilities in the early-to-mid 1950s. The Corps would later become heavily involved in Saudi construction programs and quite influential as a credible source of expertise and judgment for the Saudis. For a brief history of Corps activities in Saudi Arabia from the early 1950s through the 1970s see John T. Greenwood, Diplomacy Through Construction: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Saudi Arabia.
consider reviewing Air Force plans for Dhahran’s expansion. None of this was a ringing endorsement for providing grant aid to the Saudis, at least on military grounds.

Ambassador Hare returned to Washington in August to brief officials on developments and to receive additional guidance. On the issue of grant military aid, Ambassador Hare concluded that much of the debate within the U.S. Government really needed to come down to what the U.S. wanted in Saudi Arabia, and how badly it wanted it. The Defense Department had not defined what its strategic interest in the area were and what it required to defend those interests. With such guidance in hand it would be much easier to assess Saudi Arabia’s role, and on that basis, how best to approach military assistance negotiations including any grant aid that might be offered.

While these issues were being worked on another outside source of political pressure intervened to further complicate matters. As part of an ongoing and recently reinvigorated territorial dispute with Muscat and Oman, in an unopposed operation in late August the Saudis occupied the Buraimi Oasis area. Responsible for the territorial integrity of the Shaykhdom, the British were not about to let the occupation stand, and tensions quickly mounted. The U.S. would get pulled into the dispute, working to seek a compromise political solution. In so doing it scrupulously sought to avoid getting caught in the middle. This, as it turned out, would not to be possible and Washington soon found itself angering both protagonists, with implications for U.S. military assistance to Saudi Arabia. In its closing days the Truman Administration was able to help broker a temporary compromise between Saudi Arabia and Britain over Buraimi, known as the

---

82 Smith to USAF Chief of Staff, USAF Program for Dhahran Airfield, 10 June 1952, 786A.5 MAP/6-1052, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). U.S. operations at Dhahran remained under MATS jurisdiction until 1 January 1953, when it was transferred to Headquarters, USAFE, at Weisbaden, Germany. Embassy Jeddah, 3 February 1954, 711.56386A/2-354, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).

Standstill Agreement of October 26. This effectively allowed the Saudis to remain in Buraimi while negotiations continued toward a final resolution. In an upcoming visit to the U.S. beginning in November, Foreign Minister Faisal would repeatedly request American support in the dispute.

The MAAG negotiations nevertheless continued, with a final draft arrived at in November. After difficult negotiations, Major General Orrin Grover (who replaced General Day as Commanding General, Dhahran Air Field, and as acting Chief MAAG, in September), judged that the agreement as then written should be approved, believing “this is the best possible agreement which we can obtain from the Saudi Arabians.” But now domestic American politics took hold and closure would have to await the next administration. U.S. decisions on any grant military assistance to Riyadh were further set back due to failed military grant assistance efforts with Egypt, now the central focus of the U.S. in the region. The State and Defense Departments had been trying to secure grant military aid for Cairo. These initial efforts fell through, in significant part because of opposition by the Israelis and its American supporters to any arming of the Arab states. Following the November election of former General Dwight Eisenhower, the Administration felt it best to leave these choices to the new administration. As a result, issues of grant military aid to Saudi Arabia were pushed to the back burner. By January 1953 it was the opinion of the State Department Officer in Charge of Arabian Peninsula-Iraq Affairs that without prior approval for Egypt, there was “little if any chance” of a favorable finding for grant aid to Saudi Arabia in fiscal 1953; and even with success on

84 Against the backdrop of these negotiations the British planned a show of air, naval and land power designed to intimidate and isolate the small Saudi occupation force if necessary, code named OPERATION BOXER. The British wanted the matter of Buraimi settled by arbitration, the Saudis through a plebiscite involving a Tripartite Commission of the U.K., Saudi Arabia and the U.S. See Moiara de Moraes Ruehsen, The Advent of American Hegemony in the Persian Gulf, 1953-56, Dissertation, The John Hopkins University, 1992), pp. 79-81.
Egypt, “considerable doubt” would still remain in the near-term for the Kingdom’s prospects.  

The Eisenhower Administration

The Eisenhower Administration would soon make its presence felt in the Near East. As one author summarized, Eisenhower was simultaneously more sensitive than Truman to the regional pressures of Arab nationalism while also perceiving communism as even a greater threat than his predecessor. Heightened emphasis on regional containment of Soviet power now coexisted with a sense that internal political and economic problems in the Arab World had to be addressed in order to make containment effective. Among other things this meant juggling support for Britain in its regional role. The U.S. continued to view Britain as a critical military partner in the region but not without growing concerns over British efforts to maintain its power in ways Washington considered counterproductive in the face of Arab nationalism. The result was a Middle East foreign policy “strewn with contradictions and inconsistencies.”

In the case of Saudi Arabia, the new administration inherited a still-difficult and mistrustful relationship with Riyadh. Not surprisingly, for much of its first year the administration was focused on larger regional matters well beyond U.S.-Saudi relations. But the twin issues of the Buraimi dispute and U.S. military assistance repeatedly found their way onto the agenda. The Saudi leadership regularly pushed for greater U.S. support in their dispute with the British and displayed considerable dissatisfaction when it failed to materialize.

For its part military assistance remained contentious and troubled in its implementation. Shortly after the new year Ambassador Hare provided a summary of the military assistance program as he then saw it. He concluded that “the Military Assistance

---


Agreement has thus far been slow and somewhat disappointing, with responsibility being shared by both the Saudis and ourselves.” The Saudis continued to be angry with not getting grant aid. They also “never appreciated the amount of both money and energy” required to build a military establishment. Dissatisfaction and disillusionment had set in. Hare concluded that progress was still possible, but that “the picture is somewhat somber and, in order to effect improvement, constructive effort will be required on both sides.” He maintained that some military grant aid could go a long way toward alleviating Saudi feelings of being undervalued by the U.S. and to partially offset Saudi growing recognition of the costs of the military modernization program, especially the costs of American military equipment and student training. A small investment now would represent a “stitch in time” that could prevent much greater problems later.  

The State Department also weighed in, arguing that a failure to provide grant aid could adversely affect long-term base rights. The Mutual Security Agency concurred with State’s recommendation, and after submitting a request to the President, on March 14, 1953 President Eisenhower made a formal determination of Saudi Arabia’s eligibility. This opened the way for reaching a Grant Military Aid Agreement with Saudi Arabia in addition to the already existing Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement (Reimbursable Aid Agreement). A draft agreement was prepared and passed to the Saudis in April. This draft also incorporating those assurances required by U.S. law from any recipient country receiving grant aid. Unrecognized at the time, this seeming technicality of assurances would soon become a major impediment to reaching agreement with the Saudis on grant military aid.

---

88 Hare to Department of State, 10 January 1953, 786A.5-MSP/1-1053, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), and 14 February 1953, FRUS, 1952-1954, Vol. IX, The Near and Middle East (Part 2), pp. 2434-35.
The first high-level visit between the new administration and the Royal Family was that of Prince Faisal, Minister of Foreign Affairs. Foreign Minister Faisal had arrived in New York in November of 1952 to lead the Saudi delegation to the United Nation’s General Assembly. This was the start of an almost five month stay in the United States that included meetings with members of both the outgoing Truman Administration and the incoming Eisenhower Administration. Throughout these contacts Faisal would stress the Buraimi dispute and the position of the U.S. in this matter, as well as the subject of military assistance, specifically grant aid to the Kingdom. Faisal was especially interested in getting a sounding of the new administration’s thinking on these matters.91

Prince Faisal met with President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles on March 2, and again on March 23. Faisal continued to express his concerns that the U.S. had not always extended an understanding attitude toward Saudi Arabia.92 At the conclusion of his March 23 meeting, Prince Faisal conveyed his father’s disappointment at the position of the U.S. on the Buraimi dispute. He thought that given the special relationship between the two countries, the U.S. should be taking a much more activist role in advancing Saudi Arabia’s legitimate rights in the dispute. On the subject of grant military assistance, while acknowledging the President’s recent decision to extend this to the Kingdom, he believed this was only a minor step in helping to resolve the differences.

These legal conditions the Saudis first did not understand, and once they did, considered as imposing on their sovereignty and unacceptable. As to the first point, one State Department official remarked at the time before Congress that “We are now in the process of negotiating an agreement with them [the Saudis on grant military assistance] which they do not understand, and they do not like very much, because it is rather long and full of legal terminology which is completely over their heads.” Once they did understand the “legal terminology” however, the problem only worsened. Comments of Arthur Z. Gardiner, Politico-Economic Adviser, Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs, testifying on 24 July 1953 before the Subcommittee on the Near East and Africa, in The Middle East, Africa, and Inter-American Affairs, U.S. Congress, House, Selected Executive Session Hearings of the Committee, 1951-56 (Historical Series) Vol. XVI, p. 186.

91 Also on Faisal’s mind was concern over a December meeting between Eisenhower and Winston Churchill, and what this might imply for the Anglo-Saudi dispute. When Dulles apprised him of this concern, Eisenhower wrote to his Secretary of State “If you think it advisable, bring the Prince in for a talk. Then he could not kick about me talking to W.C.” Note for Saudi Arabia File, in Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Whitman File, International Series, Box #46, Saudi Arabia.

92 Call on the President by Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister, 23 March 1953, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Whitman File, International Series, Box #46, Saudi Arabia.
in requirements and expectations. Faisal pushed for details on how much grant assistance was to be provided, and in that context, cited the excessively high costs of U.S. military training and equipment that the Saudis had been subjected to as part of the cash-reimbursable program. He concluded that the U.S. would have to provide more tangible evidence of its goodwill toward the Kingdom here than it had in the past.\(^9^3\)

Meanwhile events in Buraimi soon took a turn for the worse from the U.S. perspective when in April the British, in response to lack of movement on negotiations, began to set up military posts around the encamped Saudi troops and move forces to the area to drive out the Saudis. The British had already undertaken an aerial blockade of Saudi forces in Buraimi, an expensive and time consuming operation.\(^9^4\) A series of firefights followed, culminating in major exchanges in late June. Secretary of State Dulles and the President himself became increasingly involved in negotiations as the situation escalated.

To make matters worse, while Buraimi festered the Administration faced a much larger set of strategic decisions in the region. Shortly after becoming Secretary of State John Foster Dulles made a three-week tour of the Near East and South Asia. The Administration had come in on the assumption that some form of the Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO) remained the best approach to security in the region, with Egypt as the fulcrum. Misgivings soon set in, however, as the intensity of Egyptian nationalism and the region’s preoccupation with local problems led Dulles to conclude that such an approach was no longer viable. This was driven home to the Secretary in his May visit to Cairo. In briefing the National Security Council afterward, he noted that


\(^9^4\) This included the use of Lancasters, already under strain in terms of flying hours necessary for other operations. The Air Ministry was not happy with the reconnaissance and blockade operation, both because of the protracted diversion of resources it represented and the fact that it did not permit more decisive aerial attack of ground targets, “the customary technique for bringing unruly tribesman under control.” Downing Street, still seeking a political solution, was not yet willing to sanction this escalation. For operational details and the arguments of the British Air Staff see Air Chief Marshal Sir David Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, Air Historical Branch, RAF (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1980), pp. 114-119.
even if an acceptable agreement were reached between London and Cairo, “political and
economic instability in Egypt would be with us for years to come.” On this basis Dulles
was “strongly inclined to believe that we must abandon our preconceived ideas of making
Egypt the key country in building the foundations for a military defense of the Middle
East.” The NSC summary goes on to record that

The Secretary of State commented that the old MEDO concept was certainly
finished. For one thing, Turkey was still greatly feared by the Arab countries
which she had once controlled. A fresh start was needed on the problem of
defense arrangements, and the only concept which would work was one which
was based on the contribution of the indigenous peoples.

In what would become the administration’s strategic approach to defense in the
region, the Secretary of State concluded “that the U.S. should concentrate now upon
building a defense in the area based on the northern tier, including Pakistan, Iran, Iraq,
Syria and Turkey.” As for the southern tier Arab states of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan,
and Lebanon, they were “too lacking in the realization of the international situation to
offer any prospect of becoming dependable allies.”

Reaching Closure on MAAG, Stalling Out on Grant Military Assistance

The final agreement on the United States Military Assistance Advisory Group to
Saudi Arabia was signed on June 27, 1953. This contained the agreed-upon conditions
governing the MAAG in Saudi Arabia, and essentially focused on status and
jurisdictional issues involving MAAG personnel in the Kingdom. The substantive
responsibilities of the MAAG were spelled out in a single paragraph:

95 Memorandum of National Security Council, 1 June 1953, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, and Kaufman,
The Arab Middle East and the United States, p. 20, and Hahn, The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt,
1945-1956, pp. 158-159. For a history of the subsequent negotiations leading up to an Anglo-Egyptian
settlement in July 1954 on the Canal Zone base, including the strains it placed on U.S.-U.K. relations, see
Hahn pp. 160-179.
96 At the time the U.S. was estimating MAAG personnel for FY 54 in Saudi Arabia to consist of 39 officers
and 105 enlisted drawn from the Army and Air Force. No Navy personnel were scheduled. See Proposed
MAAG Complement for Saudi Arabia and Local Currency Requirements, Memorandum for The Director,
Office of Military Assistance, 22 April 1953, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (RG 330),
Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Office of Military Assistance, Decimal
Files, January-June 1953, Latin America to Switzerland, 091.3-353, Saudi Arabia.
The duties of the Advisory Group will include assistance and advice to the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defense and Aviation, as well as units of the Saudi Arabian armed forces, with respect to plans, organization, administration principles, training methods and the conduct of such training as is agreed upon between the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defense and Aviation and the Chief of the Advisory Group. This training will include the use of various kinds of weapons, tactics and logistics.  

The duration of the agreement was open-ended, subject to termination by either party following a one year prior notification.

The very day that the U.S.-Saudi agreement was signed, the British undertook military action in Buraimi. Abdul Aziz immediately wrote the President, requesting “Your Excellency to mediate in order to stop this aggression by any way which you believe would be effective.” But by now the King’s health was in precipitous decline. One public indication of this was the announcement by Mecca radio on August 25 that by royal decree Crown Prince Saud was named Commander-in-Chief of all Saudi military and security forces, including the Royal Guard. The next day the Secretary to the Crown Prince, Abdullah Balkhair, called at the U.S. Embassy to personally inform American representatives of the change given the close U.S.-Saudi cooperation on military affairs. He also let it be known that “it would now be proper [to] discuss with Crown Prince all matters relating military policy which formerly would have been taken up with King.” The embassy considered this an “important step in gradual transfer [of] royal authority to heir designate.”

Still unresolved was the proposed grant military assistance agreement. Negotiations over the details reopened Saudi objections to any conditions attached to U.S. military assistance that appeared to infringe on their sovereignty. They remained

---

97 Mutual Defense Assistance, United States Military Assistance Advisory Group to Saudi Arabia, June 27, 1953, Treaties and Other International Acts Series (TIAS), 2812. The entire text of the agreement is in Appendix C.


concerned for example over language in the June 1951 Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement specifying that the U.S. could divert items of equipment or not complete services already agreed to if this was in the U.S. national interest. In order to alleviate Saudi concerns it was explained at the time that this was a standard provision of MAAG agreements and would only be exercised under extreme conditions. The Saudis interpreted such language as both a compromise of their sovereignty and a threat to their long-term access to equipment. More disturbing still was eligibility language in the Act implying commitments and military obligations to support U.S. security policy. Faisal remained somewhat perplexed by the rigidity of the U.S. when it came to Saudi objections to these many provisions. He found the constant rejoinder that the administration was “bound by law” to be a demonstrable lack of flexibility in dealing with the particular conditions of Saudi Arabia. As a result, these conditions for grant aid remained an enduring impediment to an agreement.

Death of An Era, Birth of a Power Struggle

President Eisenhower’s last written communication to King Abdul Aziz was in an October 27 letter to the monarch expressing the President’s happiness with reports of the King’s improved health. He also reiterated the concerns of his Administration over “all phases of the Buraimi problem” and the enduring desire to assist in resolving the dispute, including continued discussions with the British for ways to hasten agreement. In addition the President declared “my intention since assuming office to strengthen still further the friendly ties between Your Majesty and the Saudi people and the Government


and the people of the United States.” Whether the King ever was made aware of the letter is unknown; he died less than two weeks later. 

After his protracted battle with poor health, Abdul Aziz finally succumbed in November 1953. Far more than the death of a national leader, Abdul Aziz’s passing would usher in an internal political struggle in the Kingdom that would last a decade. This was to have major implications for the evolution of U.S.-Saudi relations and directly affect the form and substance of U.S. military assistance. Indeed, U.S. military assistance would become inextricably linked to the ebb and flow of the power struggle between Saud and his nemesis Faisal.

The extent of the differences between the two brothers and their implications were initially muted by the smooth succession following Abdul Aziz’s death. That very same day (November 9, 1953) the senior Princes convened and confirmed Saud as the successor, swearing allegiance to him. Saud in turn proclaimed Faisal Crown Prince, and the Royal Family once again took an oath of allegiance to him. Thus on the surface all appeared calm. Fissures would soon emerge however, reflecting not only competition for personal power but profound differences in their respective views of the future direction of Saudi Arabia and how it should be governed, differences bearing directly on the issue of the power of the monarch.

President Eisenhower to His Majesty King Abdul Aziz, 27 October 1953, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, White House Office Central Files, Saudi Briefing Book.

Whether the ensuing struggle was predestined, prior events certainly set a strong stage, beginning with Abdul Aziz’s early actions to set the course of succession. As he continued to consolidate his kingdom, in 1926 Abdul Aziz declared his eldest son Saud Viceroy of Nejd, the center of the Al Saud’s power base, and Faisal Viceroy of the recently conquered Hijaz. These powerful appointments positioned his two sons well as future rulers and effectively excluded Abdul Aziz’s brothers from the running; primogeniture would be the method of succession. But the two appointments also reflected Abdul Aziz’s principle of dividing power between his two eldest sons. The Nejd was essentially tribal, insular and very conservative. Saud was in part appointed to have charge over this region in 1926 because of his ties to and effectiveness in dealing with local tribal leaders. He was proclaimed Crown Prince in 1933. By contrast the Hejaz, with its long Red Sea coastline and trade with the outside world, was more cosmopolitan, to include considerable contact with the West. In ruling over this region Faisal developed skills more akin to those in foreign affairs, for the Hejaz was in many respects another country. The population had considerable western education and technical expertise, and a continuing dislike for the rule of the Al Saud. His appointment as Foreign Minister of all Saudi affairs reflected this experience and orientation. The result was a growing divergence between the two leaders in world view, their vision of governance, and their respective personal
Saud envisioned his monarchy as modeled after his father’s in that principal decision making authority on the affairs of the Kingdom would rest with him. This emphasis was already in evidence in October 1953 when by Royal Decree of Abdul Aziz the first Council of Ministers (in effect a Royal Cabinet) was established to help centralize the numerous executive functions of the Kingdom. In that Royal Decree Crown Prince Saud was named head of the Cabinet, serving as President/Prime Minister. The Decree went on to state that the “President appoints a Deputy President to act during his absence.” A few days later Saud appointed Faisal as Deputy President. At the time the fact that Faisal was not mentioned by name in the King’s Decree, and that the appointment was in fact made by Crown Prince Saud and not the King, was already recognized as an indication of early maneuvering for power. And the respective positions themselves reflected a division of authority, sowing the seeds for later competition.\footnote{For a translation of the King’s original Royal Decree and Saud’s Decree appointing Faisal see Jones (Chargé d’Affaires ad interim) to State Department, 17 October 1953, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG 59), Central Files, Saudi Arabia, Internal and Foreign Affairs, 1950-1954. As to Saud’s decree, Jones remarked that “While appointment was expected, would seem Faisal’s subordinacy to Crown Prince unnecessarily emphasized by omission any direct reference to him in King’s decree and fact his appointment made by elder brother rather than Monarch.” Jones to Secretary of State, 14 October 1953, 786A.00/10-1453. As Holden and Johns note, the Decree did not specify whether the King or Crown Prince should be Premier, an omission that was soon to create problems. \textit{The House of Saud}, p. 172.}

Saud’s view was that the Royal Family and Council of Ministers would advise the King, but have very limited authority in making decisions. Faisal, on the other hand, believed that the majority of day-to-day management of the Kingdom’s affairs should reside in the Council and its Ministers. This was in significant part due to his belief that managing the Kingdom’s affairs was becoming increasingly complex and required a modern form of government management. In also of course meant significantly weakening the power of his brother’s monarchy. These profoundly different visions of political power bases. See Yizraeli in \textit{The Remaking of Saudi Arabia, The Struggle between King Sa’ud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953-1962}, pp. 29-36, and in Gary Samuel Samore, \textit{Royal Family Politics in Saudi Arabia: 1953-1982}, Dissertation, Harvard University, 1983, pp. 77-78.
proper governance and the respective role of the monarch were to become the central focus of the political battles that ensued.\textsuperscript{105}

The response to Eisenhower’s letter to the now late Abdul Aziz, and the President’s subsequent statement of condolences on King Abdul Aziz’s death, now came from Saud. After reflecting on the close relationship his father had developed with the U.S., and expressing his thanks for the Administration’s involvement in the Buraimi dispute, the King nonetheless sent an early signal registering his concern over the lack of any progress on the boundary problem, and by implication, of the need for greater U.S. support to Saudi Arabia.

\begin{quote}
It is very discouraging indeed, that all the efforts and approaches which have been made so far with the British Government, on the top level, have not produced any satisfactory results, a just settlement, or even a cessation of the acts of violence and brutality resorted to by the British Government in that region….We continue to maintain our position of reasonableness and restraint, and we regret that the efforts of your friendly Government with the British Government have not produced any tangible results so far, and that the British Government still continues its overt aggression on our country.\textsuperscript{106}

In the more narrow area of military assistance matters, as it was under his father’s last days reaching agreement on grant military assistance remained elusive. In some respects the prospects were set back. Saud considered the attached conditions “new obligations Saudi Arabia would have to assume” that “could not be put on shoulders of new regime.” Accepting these would reflect badly on the regime and its standing in the Arab World.\textsuperscript{107} This heightened sensitivity was in part believed due to King Saud’s early days on the throne and his lack of political stature compared with his father.\textsuperscript{108}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{106} King Saud to President Eisenhower, 22 November 1953, \textit{Dwight D. Eisenhower Library}, Whitman File, International Series, Box #46, Saudi Arabia
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., pp. 2451. This problem of Saud’s political stature and authority would not improve with age. It would ultimately lead to a series of internal political crises and his final removal by the Royal Family.
\end{flushright}
the truth in this, as future events would show the Saudis stuck tenaciously to their opposition to these provisions.

Saud would soon face far greater foreign policy challenges closer to home that would significantly complicate relations with Washington. Colonel Nasser was just beginning his ascent to prominence along with the concomitant rise in Arab nationalism. Saud and the Al Saud would soon find themselves trying to manage growing contradictions in Saudi policy; strong support for the popular Nasser and his nationalist ideology while protecting the conservative monarchy; backing Egypt in its conflict with Britain and ‘western imperialism’ while increasing its reliance on the U.S. for its future defenses to name but two. Against this backdrop Saud would use U.S. military assistance as a test of American support for Saudi Arabia and for his personal regime. Negotiations over renewal of the Dhahran Air Field agreement would help bring needed leverage. And all of this would be played out in the atmosphere of an intensifying struggle for power between the two eldest sons of Saudi Arabia’s founding King.

Observations on the Early 1950s

The period of the early 1950s bore many of the same patterns previously seen. The U.S. held to its position of very limited military liability toward Saudi Arabia, certainly in terms of its unwillingness to commit to a formal security pact or to allocate any serious forces directly to the Kingdom's defense in its war planning. As for military assistance in the early 1950s, efforts were formalized, but only after constant pressure from the Saudis and then largely due to the U.S. need for continued access to Dhahran. While there were those in the government promoting military assistance as an important tool of influence separate from U.S. military requirements at Dhahran, in the absence of the airfield requirement even the very moderate progress made to date would likely have failed to materialize. The record is clear on the foremost role of military assistance as the quid pro quo for access.
Equally apparent is the continuing pattern of political considerations in military assistance and the enduring tension between these considerations and requirements based on military effectiveness. The Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense regularly saw little or no military justification for military assistance to the Saudis. Political factors were almost always cited as the justification. Yet this use of political justification turned out to have concrete consequences in terms of what the Saudis were able to extract from the U.S., with important long-term implications as to the extent of American involvement in training and equipping the Saudi military.

Abdul Aziz's fundamental strategic calculation did not change during this period—close security ties to the U.S. were essential. Absent a formal defense pact which he could not get, military assistance provided him a principal mechanism for strengthening these ties, and increasing the prospects for a U.S. commitment to come to the Kingdom's defense. Perhaps more important, it served Abdul Aziz's political agenda. The single greatest reason for the U.S. to defend territory of the Kingdom remained American oil interests and Dhahran Air Field. As the Saudis themselves repeatedly pointed out, this was quite different from coming to the aid of Saudi Arabia and the Al Saud. Equally important, enemies of the Royal Family were likely to draw the same conclusion and use this as a weapon against the regime in its dealings with Washington, especially on the sensitive subject of foreign military presence. Military assistance from the U.S. was used as a means to broaden the base of commitment to the regime, or at least publicly demonstrate a broadened base. It was held up as tangible proof of the King's ability to extract material benefits in the defense domain from his association with the U.S.

In this regard Abdul Aziz proved quite adept at leveraging the twin issues of Dhahran and this need for demonstrable assistance to fend off political criticisms of the regime. He skillfully used these to substantially expand the military assistance provided—not only in material terms but also in growing U.S. involvement in the long-
term training and modernization of the Saudi armed forces. He was also able to do this while using the very same sovereignty issue to maintain the necessary distance. The end result was a deepening involvement by the U.S. well beyond a simple *quid pro quo*, but still one in which the Saudis could maneuver.

Toward the end of Abdul Aziz's reign, and certainly after his death, the dance became increasingly difficult. Whereas Abdul Aziz was able to command the influence necessary to assume certain risks in the level of support and exposure he could tolerate in his dealings with the U.S., his successor did not have such stature. Furthermore, whatever Saud's personal limitations, his Kingdom entered a much more complex and intense era of regional political change, much of it posing direct ideological threats to the conservative monarchy. Saud required much more concrete demonstrations of support from the U.S. as a result, but at the very time Arab nationalism heightened the risks of any perceived compromise on sovereignty in dealings with the West. Saud's ability to perform the intricate steps necessary was left wanting. Certainly an additional complication now would be Saud's frequent subordination of military assistance to the end of consolidating his own personal power against his rival brother Faisal. Shortly before his death Abdul Aziz, in a conversation with H. St. James Philby, quoted from the Koran; "Verily, my children and my possessions are my enemies."109 Unlike the dying King, the U.S. would have to live with the consequences of this prophetic judgment.

109 Jones to State Department, *Six Months of King Saud*, 10 May 1954, 786A.00/5-1054, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59), Confidential File.
CHAPTER 5

TROUBLED MOVEMENTS: MANEUVERING IN THE FACE OF INTERNAL STRUGGLES AND RISING ARAB NATIONALISM, 1954-1956

We need some justification, something concrete which our people and others can see and point to, something which will persuade them of the rightness of my judgment and action.
— King Saud on his need for sizeable U.S. military assistance to justify continued American access to Dhahran

We must let the Saudis know quite clearly that we are prepared to clear out—and mean what we say—if the Saudis feel that our presence there is contrary to their own interests.
— George Allen, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs

Strategic Setting

Just as U.S. military assistance to Saudi Arabia was formalized, the Kingdom and its inexperienced monarch were about to enter a turbulent and demanding period. The Eisenhower Administration would increasingly view the Middle East as a major venue for Cold War competition. As a consequence, the entire military assistance process—far more than it already was under Abdul Aziz—would become entangled in both Saudi dynastic and regional Arab politics. Although the U.S. placed clear emphasis on the northern tier states in its defense and containment concepts for the region, Saudi Arabia remained an important element in broader U.S. security planning. Dhahran continued to be the only U.S.-controlled airfield in the Gulf area, the regional political influence of the Al Saud—though significantly overestimated by both Eisenhower and Dulles—remained
a valued asset in balancing against radical forces, and of course the importance of Saudi oil as a strategic asset continued to grow.

These requirements meant that the U.S. was under considerable pressure to meet at least the minimum expectations of the Saudis for military assistance. But this in turn involved pulling the process even further into the political domain as the Saudis—and specifically the regime of Saud—dealt with their own increasingly complex political environment. A major aspect of this from 1954 through 1956 was the growing alignment and security ties between Saudi Arabia and Egypt. A contributing factor here was the growing U.S. and British emphasis on a northern tier defense strategy that, among other things meant strengthening Iraq, anathema to both Cairo and Riyadh. ¹ Any northern tier strategy also meant inclusion of, and dominance by, non-Arab states as a defense grouping. The end result was a polarization of the Arab states “along a neutralist versus pro-Western axis” that in turn stimulated “rival versions of Pan-Arabism.” Saudi Arabia found itself caught squarely in the middle, facing growing contradictions between the necessities to ally with Egypt and support to Nasser and the growing threat to the monarchy posed by his increasingly radical positions and influence.² They also found themselves in the middle in terms of support for Nasser’s neutralist line with the continuing quest for security ties to and military assistance from the U.S., in part now to offset the growing influence of Nasser. This link became even more important with the deteriorating relations between Britain and Saudi Arabia throughout this period, and the effective end of having London as a security pillar. Strategic challenges of the first order for any Saudi leader, they were greatly compounded by a monarch with no capacity for swimming in such deep waters.

The Buraimi dispute continued to be a significant complicating factor affecting U.S. military assistance to Saudi Arabia as well. The Saudis’ used the dispute as a test of Washington’s willingness to support them on this security matter. So too did the British, who in addition to seeking Washington’s political support—or at least neutrality--viewed some U.S. military hardware deliveries to the Saudis as posing a military risk to their operations and sought to prevent them.

As a result of these many competing factors, the military assistance process would become especially tortuous during this period. Even individual requests for and deliveries of equipment would take on external baggage and political meaning far removed from any actual military capabilities they represented. As a result, the already strained connection between practical military requirements and political necessities would become increasingly distorted.

**Early Days Under Saud: U.S. Military Assistance As A Test Of Support**

In early 1954 Saud was still establishing his rule. Already evident was that his powers, to say nothing of his capabilities, would not match those of his father. The new monarch found it necessary to expand his authority from a much narrower base of support. In his dealings with the U.S., King Saud had to be especially cautious, demonstrating that he was quite independent of America and always protective of the Kingdom’s sovereignty. At the same time, he had to maintain good relations with Washington, realizing there really were no attractive alternatives to reliance on the U.S. for external security.

The year did not begin well. In January, Saudi Arabia canceled its Point IV Agreement with the U.S. on developmental technical assistance. It also formally declined the proposed grant military assistance agreement with the U.S. initiated the previous year. The feeling among senior U.S. decision makers at the time was that this
reflected the growing unease of the new Saudi leadership with U.S. policies, especially as they applied to the Buraimi dispute. ³

Newly appointed Ambassador George Wadsworth⁴ reported that King Saud rejected the draft agreement on grant military aid because he considered unacceptable the legally-imposed obligations he would incur.⁵ In discussions with the Saudi Arabian Ambassador Shaykh Asad, NEA representative Andrew Fritzlan expressed surprise at this latest development. He noted to the Ambassador that over the last several months U.S. negotiators made many efforts to address the original objections raised by the Saudi negotiators, and now felt that the latest draft presented in September “went a long way to meet Saudi objections and constituted just about the irreducible minimum consistent with legislative requirements and administrative policy.” The Ambassador replied that he was also disappointed, would study the latest draft, and look for opportunities to encourage his government to reconsider the matter.⁶

While adopting this hard line, Saud was simultaneously pushing for American arms to bolster his internal political position. In so doing, his focus was on political form over military substance, seeking U.S. armaments for popular display. In March Minister of Defense Prince Mish’al met with General Grover to discuss the possibility of getting more military equipment to Saudi Arabia for the King to exhibit during the upcoming

---

³ Progress Report on NSC 155/1, *U.S. Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East*, 29 July 1954, Operations Coordination Board, *Records of the National Security Council* (RG 273). Later, in a memorandum to President Eisenhower King Saud wrote that the Saudis had originally welcomed the Point IV Program “but did not reap any advantages therefrom,” with Saudi expenditures exceeding those spent by the U.S. See *Memorandum From King Saud to H.E. President Eisenhower on His Views Concerning Saudi Arabian Relations with the U.S.A. And Affairs of the Middle East*, January-February 1957, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

⁴ George Wadsworth was appointed as Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Yemen on 9 January 1954.

⁵ Saud was not alone among Arab leaders in balking at the conditions. Nasser would soon reject U.S. offers of military assistance, refusing the Congressional requirement for a military mission in the host country to administer the assistance. How much Saud’s continuing resistance to the conditions was influenced by Nasser’s position is unclear, but it had to be a consideration. For Nasser’s refusal see Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 184-185.

Hajj. He was particularly interested in getting quick delivery of B-26s, noting that the necessary funds had already been deposited into U.S. accounts. Grover explained that he expected delivery of some of the aircraft soon, but that many factors made specific arrival times difficult to predict. Mish’al also requested the assistance of the MAAG in helping to prepare Saudi troops for the Hajj parade, which Grover agreed to.  

U.S. involvement in the training of the Saudi Royal Guard was raised in this same meeting. General Grover reported that “Prince Mish’al stated that His Majesty the King desired that the Royal Guard be integrated into the Army and that His Majesty would like the U.S. to train the Royal Guard starting as soon as possible.” He (Mish’al) would make the necessary facilities available to the MAAG to establish a training detachment in Riyadh for this purpose. From the available records this would appear to be the first Saudi request for training support from the U.S. for the Royal Guards. Given the importance of the Royal Guard in Saudi internal security, this request represented a major opening for U.S. involvement in this area.

Equipment deliveries under the reimbursable assistance program soon became a test of U.S. bona fides with the King. As a result, responding to individual armaments requests took on a symbolic importance far beyond the military capabilities themselves. This increasingly placed political and military justifications at odds now even at this level of individual deliveries. It also lead to juggling among not only U.S.-Saudi objectives,

7 The Saudis would receive six B-26 bombers, with the U.S. agreeing to the sale of three additional bombers in early 1955. Given the extremely limited capabilities of the Saudis, these aircraft were soon afflicted with major maintenance and repair problems that kept them largely grounded, further attesting to their “display” function. David E. Long, The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), p. 37.


9 In an early sign of internal power struggles and the divisions it would produce, Mish’al sought to concentrate responsibility for both internal and external security under his Ministry, with emphasis on the Army. Saud, on the other hand, would soon take actions to build up counterweights to the Army in the Royal Guard and White Army/National Guard. Saud had sound security reasons for doing so, including fears of a coup emanating from the Army. But it was also about reducing Mish’al’s power. This was made clear when he later installed his own twenty-two-year-old son Musa’id as Commander of the Royal Guard Regiment, effectively separating it from MODA and Mish’al’s control.
but British concerns as well. One illustration of the triangulation between domestic Saudi factors, foreign policy concerns of the British, and what an appropriate U.S. decision should be on delivering military equipment to the Kingdom was Riyadh’s request for sixty armored cars in April 1954. The Saudis requested that these be delivered in time for the military parade to be held at the close of the Hajj in early August. When informed of the request, London expressed its worries that these vehicles could find their way to Buraimi and lobbied the Administration to reject it. Ambassador Wadsworth argued that not fulfilling the request would be damaging to U.S.-Saudi relations and could jeopardize the entire MAAG program. General Grover considered the request a legitimate one, but also appreciated the British concerns. As a solution he suggested that the deliveries be staggered over a considerable period of time to alleviate London’s concerns while still satisfying the King’s internal needs. Explaining the delivery of these armored cars therefore requires reference to Saudi internal factors, the military concerns of an American ally, and U.S. needs to protect its political-military relationship with the Saudis. Also of interest here is the fact that while General Grover supported the request, the U.S. Army Section of the MAAG was pushing the Saudis to drop the idea of acquiring armored cars on military effectiveness grounds. They consider their mobility unsuitable for desert operations as well as being too vulnerable, recommending light tanks instead. But as was so often the case, military effectiveness considerations were in tension with, and subordinated to, other factors. Delivery of the armored cars went forward.

The Saudis now made explicit that equipment deliveries were a standard by which U.S. support for Saudi Arabia would be measured. At a May 23, 1954 conference between Saudi officials and U.S. MAAG representatives, Prince Mish’al presented a list

---

of what he considered “essential” equipment for Saudi military forces. He added that the ability of Saudi Arabia to acquire this equipment without delay would be a test of the sincerity of the U.S. government and the MAAG in assisting Saudi Arabian military modernization. MAAG Chief Brigadier General Grover remarked that the “Minister of Defense and Aviation is apparently threatening the MAAG to either produce or perhaps be ousted from the country.” General Grover strongly encouraged that the equipment be provided quickly or the U.S. would risk its good relations with the Saudis.  

At the time, General Grover had been making some modest progress with the Saudis. He was able to get a commitment from Prince Mish’al to set up another training area in the Dammam-Dhahran vicinity. By mid-1954 Saudi troops were being moved into this area and General Grover expected a total of about 1,000 officers and other men to be trained there. This force, once properly trained and equipped, would be used to maintain internal security in the area. Encompassing many of the oil fields and ARAMCO facilities as well as the Dhahran Air Field, it was also heavily populated by Saudi Shia’ Muslims. Furthermore, there was a sizable minority of Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrian workers whose political consciousness in terms of the larger Arab World was significantly higher than that of their Saudi counterparts.  

The year prior had seen labor disputes culminating in a labor strike aimed at ARAMCO but also with strong political overtones toward the regime.  

---

12 Sarah Yizraeli in The Remaking of Saudi Arabia, The Struggle between King Sa’ud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953-1962 (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1997), p. 44.  
13 The dispute began with a petition to ARAMCO for better working conditions and pay raises in June 1953. Arrests followed, triggering a general strike. Many of the minority Shi’ites concentrated around Al Hasa in the Eastern Province and employed by ARAMCO were already alienated by the regime and receptive to Arab nationalism, as were expatriate Palestinians working there. Labor challenges to ARAMCO therefore were politically charged. The workers ultimately received a 20 percent pay raise dictated by royal decree, ending the strike, but political activism continued. Mordechai Abir, Saudi Arabia (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 32-35.
therefore became an important objective of both the Saudis and the U.S. In a clear statement of the role of the MAAG in bolstering Saudi internal security and the importance of this to the U.S., General Grover stressed that the training of these troops was

the first opportunity that the United States has had to have trained forces available to protect American interests in this area, i.e., ARAMCO and Dhahran Airfield. As you will recall, this area was uncovered at the time of the strike last fall, and due to the strong possibility of recurrence of disorders in this area, I strongly believe that by the permanent stationing and training of these Saudi Arabian troops in this area, that the chances of a repetition of disorders at ARAMCO and Dhahran Airfield will be minimized.14

On this basis, Grover pushed hard for expedited delivery of the necessary equipment to perform this mission.

A series of foreign policy developments involving Egypt were also now increasingly affecting U.S.-Saudi relations. The replacement of General Neguib with Colonel Nasser as Egypt’s Prime Minister in mid-April marked the end of the internal power struggle in Cairo. Victorious, Nasser now asserted his authority in Egyptian foreign affairs. This entailed regional security policies at variance with U.S. and British designs, the emphasis being on independent Arab initiatives with himself as the leader against western imperialism.15 Along these lines, Egypt and Saudi Arabia in June agreed to a unified military command designed to pool their resources, to include military training and to coordinate military activity.16 To a significant degree this reflected Saud’s political calculation on the need to align with Nasser. At the time Nasser was also actively engaged in negotiations with the British to replace the 1936 treaty and secure the

16 This would soon lead to the arrival of an Egyptian military training mission in Saudi Arabia in early 1955, which had the added benefit of allowing the Saudis to play the Egyptians and Americans off against each other. This Egyptian military mission would continue until the political deterioration in Saudi-Egyptian relations in 1957-58. Long, The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies, pp. 36-37.
removal of British troops from the Suez Canal zone. He also came out in favor of the Algerian rebellion against French rule and denounced French imperial policies.\textsuperscript{17} Aimed at reducing western influence, these developments placed additional political pressure on Saud in his dealings with the U.S., especially on military matters.

Saud’s greatest challenges, however, involved internal Saudi matters. In coming to the throne Saud had set himself four major goals: 1.) introduction of a formal, rational government structure; 2.) large-scale development programs focused on transportation, agriculture, education, health and communications; 3.) the eradication of government corruption; and 4.) the strengthening of the Saudi defense forces. An early assessment by the Chargé in Saudi Arabia was not promising. Many grandiose plans existed, including those for military modernization, but “little in tangible results has as yet been achieved.” As to the King’s goal of eradicating official corruption, “on the contrary, he seems to have been even more lavish in his spending from the Saudi exchequer both during his recent visits abroad and in Saudi Arabia itself than he was prior to his father’s death.”\textsuperscript{18}

Among his councilors remained many of the old faces that had mastered the art of poor administration and corruption, while his new appointments showed “little, if any, evidence that these new officials will have any more solicitude for the weal of state, rather than the enlargement of their own fortunes, than did the old.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} As an interesting aside on the French, during the Dien Bien Phu crisis then underway in Vietnam the U.S. was transporting French paratroops to Asia via MATS through Dhahran. Jidda to Secretary of State, 15 April 1954, 711.56386A/4-1554, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).

\textsuperscript{18} On his recent visits to Egypt and Pakistan for example, the King spent an estimated $1.5 million for the nine and eleven day trips, much of it on extravagant gifts. See Jones memo, Expenditures of King Saud on Egypt and Pakistan Visits, 13 May 1954, Department of State, 786D.11/5-1354, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). Perhaps Saud’s greatest monument to personal excess was his renowned Palace at Nasriyah, a massive structure estimated to cost 10 million pounds sterling and surrounded by a seven-mile pink wall. It was built atop the 4 million pound palace he occupied as Crown Prince and had raised to make room for the new structure. This was in addition to his other nine Palaces. The annual kitchen bill for the ten palaces was reportedly $5 million. For a litany of Royal spending under Saud and the corruption of those surrounding the King see David Holden and Richard Johns, The House of Saud (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), pp. 176-184.

\textsuperscript{19} Jones to State Department, Six Months of King Saud, 10 May 1954, 786A.00/5-1054, Confidential File, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
In the area of foreign policy, the Chargé recorded that Saud was already much more involved in regional Arab affairs than his father had been. In terms of relations with the U.S., the monarch had made repeated statements on the continuing need for close friendship with America, a position the Chargé saw no evidence to refute. But he did note the growing disappointment among senior Princes at the lack of benefits derived from this relationship, whether it be in terms of military assistance, limited help on the boundary dispute with Britain, or continued U.S. support for Israel. He concluded that this disgruntlement could turn into a significant internal problem for the King.20

The first internal test of wills between Saud and Faisal came early and was over the position of Prime Minster and who should occupy it. As previously noted, when the Council of Ministers was first created in October 1953 Saud, in his capacity as Crown Prince, was appointed President/Prime Minister of the first cabinet. When a new cabinet was formed in 1954, Saud was now of course King but decided to also retain the position of Prime Minister. In so doing, and consistent with his vision of governance, he concentrated decision making authority in his own hands. To the extent the new Council of Ministers was to represent a centralized body for better coordinating the affairs of the Kingdom, it was clear that Saud would control its decisions, certainly to include any defense matters.

The first formal meeting of the new Council was held on March 7, 1954, presided over by Saud. Ten days later the formal Regulations of the Council of Ministers were announced. While it is difficult to verify with any certainty the intent of the language in the Regulations, that language strongly emphasized the subordination of Faisal to Saud, and could be interpreted as a further effort by the monarch to consolidate his power relative to his younger brother. In addition to designating the King as head of the Council, the Regulations stated that “The Deputy President of the Council of Ministers is

20 Jones to State Department, Six Months of King Saud, 10 May 1954, 786A.00/5-1054, Confidential File, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
responsible to His Majesty the King” as were all the ministers. The power to appoint, substitute and dismiss ministers all resided with the monarch. Any decisions made by the Council were not effective until they received final approval by the King.  

Faisal strongly resisted this power play by Saud, specifically the King’s effort to hold the title of Prime Minister of the Council. Faisal proved capable of building a coalition that effectively forced Saud to appoint him as Prime Minister, which Saud did by royal decree in August 1954. But this simply postponed the problem, as Saud had no intention of having his authority curtailed. He quickly used his power of appointment to place loyal commoners on the Council, among them Shaykh Yusuf Yassin, thereby checking the authority of Faisal.  

Soon to follow were appointments of his sons to key positions in the security and defense sectors; these appointments in particular would effect the evolution of the defense forces, and consequently, U.S. military assistance to them.

**Royal Guard, National Guard, and Regular Armed Forces**

In tracing the contours of U.S. military assistance to Saudi Arabia during this period, it is essential to keep in mind not only the different Saudi security elements involved in the process but also the internal political context in which they operated. The Royal Guard, National Guard, and regular Armed Forces would increasingly be used as part of the internal dynastic power struggle. As such, requests for U.S. assistance to these

---


23 Commonly referred to as the ‘National Guard’ the proper Saudi names during this period were the ‘White Army’ or ‘Mujahidin’ troops. The designation ‘National Guard’ came later. One State Department source cites the name change as being part of the reorganization of the troops in the mid-1950s. Most western secondary literature simply uses the term National Guard universally throughout the post-1945 period, which will also be used here to avoid confusion. For State Department source see American Embassy to Department of State, *Further Information on Anti-Subversive Measures by Saudi Government*, 26 July 1955, 786A.52/7-2655, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59).
different groups can not be separated from this struggle. The result was to further politicize U.S. military assistance, adding another important layer necessary for understanding why military assistance evolved as it did. Consequently, it is useful to trace some of the more salient features of this here in order to provide context for the history that follows.  

The Royal Guard always was entrusted with the function of protecting the King and members of the Royal Family. As such it formed the innermost ring of the regime’s defenses. Its guardsmen were drawn from the tribes of the Nejd and fierce loyalty to the House of Saud was an essential requirement for recruitment. Throughout most of Saud’s rule, certainly in the latter half of the 1950s once it was under the command of his son Musa’id, the Royal Guard received the best equipment and training. Relative to the National Guard and regular armed forces, it was considered the most capable force by far. Always headed by a prince, it was not subordinated to the Ministry of Defense. This reflected the distinction between protection of the House of Saud and protection of the Kingdom itself, in addition to dividing power internally among different princes.

Throughout Mish’al’s tenure as Minister of Defense (1951-1956), the prince fought for a much more centralized approach, advocating that his Ministry have

---


25 Although technically the true innermost ring consisted of the royal bodyguard, a few hundred armed men dedicated exclusively to protecting the King himself, primarily against threats of assassination. Safran, *Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, p.106.

26 In terms of budgeting practices, up to 1952 funds for the Royal Guard were apparently under the overall Ministry of Defense budget. That year the Royal Guard became a permanent separate budget category, reflecting its increasingly independent status. This continued until 1964, when following the culmination of the power struggle between Saud and Faisal, including a final military standoff between Royal Guard forces loyal to Saud and National Guard forces loyal to Faisal, the Royal Guard was ordered by the Council of Ministers to be placed under the Ministry of Defense where it was incorporated into the Army. However it remained directly subordinate to the King and, in a continued separation of power, retained its own communications network. Current Saudi defense organization charts continue to list the Royal Guard Regiment as its own entity under the Army commander. Safran, *Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, pp. 70-71, 102, 109, and Helen Chapin Metz, ed., *Saudi Arabia, A Country Study* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1993), p. 254. Parenthetically, during Desert Shield/Dessert Storm the three light infantry battalions of the Royal Guard Regiment remained in Riyadh, presumably to protect the Royal Family.
responsibility for both external and domestic security threats to the Kingdom. In this vein it is worth recalling his request to General Grover for U.S. assistance in training of the Royal Guard that was to be integrated into the Army. As such, he strongly resisted the preferential strengthening of the Royal Guard and its separation from the army. His dismissal in December 1956 and replacement with Saud’s eldest son Fahd effectively eliminated these prospects. Saud’s request for U.S. support in training of the Royal Guard has also been interpreted as an effort by him to more tightly tie the U.S. to his personal security and the internal security of Saudi Arabia.

Saud’s efforts to consolidate his personal and direct family line over the security apparatus continued with the National Guard. The National Guard suffered from constrained resources and neglect under Mish’al’s tenure as Minister of Defense; like the Royal Guard, he saw it as competing with his principal objective of building up the Army. Exercising his considerable authority as a Prince (versus the commoner tribal Shaykh who always commanded the National Guard), he could lay claim to and divert funds from the Guard. Countering this trend, Saud began to make his move to strengthen the National Guard in May 1955 when he issued a royal decree calling for a modern Guard, followed by another decree in July 1956 outlining the Guard’s future structure. The real marker came in June 1957 when he appointed his sixth son Khalid as Commander. This change was particularly significant in that for the first time the National Guard was under direct dynastic control, replacing the traditional command by a

---

27 At the time Mish’al claimed he was acting on behalf of the King who desired this integration. Whether this was actually the case is unclear, but it certainly suited Mish’al’s vision and ambitions.

28 Mish’al’s dismissal was preceded by the easing out of his brother Mit’ab as Deputy Minister of Defense, clearing the way for Saud’s son to take over once Mish’al was sacked.

29 Yizraeli, The Remaking of Saudi Arabia, The Struggle between King Sa’ud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953-1962, p. 153. It is also worth noting that the O’Keefe Report of 1949 made no mention of the Royal Guard. While this is partially explained by the clear focus on the strictly military armed forces of Saudi Arabia, the report did seek to include a comprehensive survey of the Kingdom’s overall security capabilities. The absence of any discussion of the Royal Guard is therefore curious. This, combined with the lack of any subsequent documentation of U.S. involvement in either the training or arming of the Royal Guard suggests that there was little if any link to U.S. military assistance prior to the 1954 request for American training.
tribal shaykh. With his son now in charge, the Guard for the first time would receive a substantial influx of funds to improve its quite limited capabilities.\(^{30}\)

By mid-1957, then, Saud had placed his sons in control of three of the four major elements of Saudi security.\(^{31}\) But as much as this was a raw grab for power by Saud, it also reflected larger security developments affecting the Royal Family as a whole. Regionally, Nasser’s power and influence continued to grow. His calls for change found advocates among some senior Saud princes. Counted among these were Mish’al and Nawwaf (Royal Guard), viewed as having pro-Egyptian and progressive views. This also raised fears that the monarchy could itself prove susceptible to an internal officers’ plot. These fears were given substance in April-May of 1955 when anti-regime leaflets were distributed throughout the Kingdom. In the hunt for corrupt elements fifteen army officers were arrested at Taif (populated by a large number of Egyptian military instructors at the time) and charged with subversion.\(^{32}\) These larger family fears therefore eased the way for Saud to create both competing military centers and ones more closely tied to him directly, even when family members were opposed to it on other grounds.\(^{33}\)

As for the regular armed forces, which for all practical purposes meant the Army, there was a major divide between the conservative political forces who viewed it primarily as a threat to the regime and therefore to be kept weak, or at least checked by


\(^{33}\) Faisal, for example, was not only against the build-up of the National Guard because of the power it invested in his rival Saud, but also because he strongly believed in more centralized and modern control of the government apparatus. Tribal armies by contrast were bound to resist both central control and modernization. There was also the issue of duplication of effort, which given constrained Saudi resources meant a diffusion of military effectiveness. See Yizraeli, p. 156.
other military elements, and what were termed the more progressive forces who subscribed to the general political philosophy that government operations needed to be centralized and modernized across the board. This group held that the Army should not only be included in this process, but be one of the primary vehicles for assisting Saudi state modernization and centralization. Multiple, independent and internally competitive military organizations ran counter to this, as well as being a diversion of precious resources. It meant both a weak self-defense capability and an outdated approach to effective government operations. A more centralized MODA with a modernized army was therefore desirable. Viewed from this level of competing views, then, conflicts over the Army’s strength and future relative to its counterparts were surrogates for the larger political struggle between the conservatives and modernizers.\(^{34}\)

But of course separating struggles over philosophy from struggles over power is never easy, the two frequently being one in the same. This was certainly the case here. Saud’s decisions on the future organization, allocation of resources, and missions of the Saudi security apparatus had as much or more to do with his interest in concentrating his personal power and that of his sons as it did with any larger governing philosophy or ideas of how best to achieve the military effectiveness required of the Saudi state. Likewise, Faisal, Mish’al and other senior princes were actively seeking to concentrate their own internal power and limit the growing dominance of Saud; this was reflected in their own corresponding positions on security matters.\(^{35}\)

U.S. military assistance was directly affected by this mix of philosophy, personalities and internal power struggle over the future of the military forces of the Kingdom. One major issue for the Saudis in this regard was the extent to which the U.S. should be involved in the training, support and equipping of any Saudi forces beyond the regular armed forces. Clearly Saud was pushing for direct U.S. involvement with the

\(^{34}\) Ibid., pp. 156-158.  
\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 156.
Royal and National Guards; others opposed this move to associate the U.S. with the internal security function. Another was the extent to which the Saudis should rely on the U.S. even in the case of the regular armed forces. Mish’al wanted to diversify to avoid becoming too dependent on the U.S., arguing this would allow Washington to constrain the modernization of the armed forces as well as threaten Saudi sovereignty. Diversification also gave him pathways to Egypt which he desired for political reasons. Whenever the U.S. did not appear responsive enough to Saudi requests for arms this further fueled internal political differences over dependency on the U.S.  

The U.S. once again found itself caught in the middle of these many competing factors. Saud’s early policies of limiting the Army’s capabilities comported rather well with Washington’s desire to move slowly in modernizing the Saudi military. Principal among them was avoiding excessively large requests for military assistance in return for continuing access to Dhahran. Yet this slower approach opened the King to criticisms that the U.S. was not being sufficiently responsive to Saudi needs. The U.S. also had no desire to stake all of its fortunes on Saud, already regarded with some trepidation, and wanted to avoid antagonizing other senior princes. All of these internal Saudi political considerations certainly colored the form and substance of U.S. military assistance.

A larger strategic issue facing the Saudis was the degree to which they should depend upon the U.S. for direct defense against even external threats. If all princely factions agreed that matters of internal security and countering domestic threats should be the exclusive domain of Saudi forces (which may provide one of the principal explanations for the lack of any significant U.S. involvement in training and equipping these forces up to the mid-1950s), this was no such unified view on defense against external threats. Indeed since the passing of Abdul Aziz the problem of dealing with external defense had grown in complexity. Throughout much of his reign Abdul Aziz’s

36 For Mish’al’s position and the larger debate see Ibid., p. 161-162.
choices here were made easy by the Kingdom’s military weakness; he relied on the British to counter any serious external threat, as there was no viable alternative. This, combined with personal diplomacy to head off any such threats was his modus operandi. But by the time of his death the British were viewed as far less capable and reliable in this role, if not actively collaborating with enemies of the Kingdom. Equally serious, the emerging political climate of Arab nationalism posed a direct impediment to too heavy or obvious a reliance on outside, western powers for basic security. Such reliance opened leaders up to the dual criticisms of being dependents of such outside powers and of being unfit rulers because they could not modernize and provide for the self-defense of their own countries and peoples. Especially for the Saudi monarchy, as oil revenues grew a lack of resources no longer could be an argument for having a feeble military.

Arrayed against pursuing a strong military were of course all the arguments that a well-organized and competent force was a risk to the monarchy, especially after the Free Officers experience in Egypt. Herein was the fundamental dilemma; while an increasingly capable army could pose a greater threat to the monarchy, a weak army presented its own military and political liabilities for the leadership. Further aggravating matters, given the many systemic weaknesses of the Saudi armed forces, a modernizing army would have the capacity to threaten the monarch well before it had the capability to mount any serious defense of the Kingdom. Thus for the next generation of Saudi leaders, who all also lacked the personal stature of Abdul Aziz, how to deal with the external defense of the Kingdom became a most delicate matter indeed.

**The Road to Dhahran Renewal: Paved With Conflicting Pressures**

As 1954 wore on, the sense of growing tensions in U.S.-Saudi relations mounted. Following discussions with King Saud, the Saudi Ambassador to the United States Sheikh Asad Al-Faqih reported that while the King wished to maintain good relations, a number of issues were creating obstacles. These included Washington turning down a request from the newly crowned King for economic assistance, the limited U.S. support
on the Buraimi dispute, and the detailed and “onerous conditions” still surrounding U.S. military grant aid to Saudi Arabia. On this last point the Saudis could not understand why such legalisms were required among friends, especially given the sovereignty sensitivities these raised. Adding to the negative atmosphere was the sensing of Saud that some American diplomatic efforts were underway to cultivate Prince Faisal at his expense. Media reports in the U.S. that a revolution in Saudi Arabia might soon take place due to Saud’s poor leadership certainly did not help, especially as they gave the impression that these rumors have been inspired by official Washington. In a meeting with Ambassador Wadsworth, King Saud added to his list of concerns that Israel and its supporters in the U.S. were increasingly opposing Saudi efforts to strengthen its armed forces. All of these matters soon found their way into the Dhahran and military assistance negotiations.

Though still well over a year off, by late 1954 the expiration of the Dhahran agreement was already making its presence felt both in efforts to adjust ongoing military assistance activities and in the posturing for new negotiations. At the same time, several other pressures were now bearing down that further strained efforts at sustaining a coherent military assistance program. As it turned out, military assistance was not only affected by these pressures but used to alleviate them.

October saw formal agreement between Nasser and Downing Street for the withdrawal of British troops from the Suez Canal within twenty months. Met with an outpouring of popular Arab approval, this further boosted Nasser’s prestige. For the Saudis it meant increased exposure to the contentious regional issue of hosting a western military presence. Meanwhile the Saudis continued to refuse U.S. grant military aid with

---

its attached conditions while resenting the grant aid provided to other states in the region. 39

A second strategic source of pressure came in February 1955 when Iraq and Turkey signed a treaty of alliance, effectively creating the Baghdad Pact. Cairo strongly condemned the treaty, as did Riyadh. For Egypt, Iraq’s membership represented a challenge to her leadership in the Arab World and Cairo’s efforts to exert its dominance among the Arab states through the Arab League. For the leadership in Saudi Arabia, the threat posed by the Pact was much more concrete; it represented the potential nucleus for a Hashemite-led union with Jordan and perhaps Syria. The involvement of the British in the Pact’s formation simply heightened these Saudi suspicions. The response came on March 6 when Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia announced creation of a new tripartite treaty on political, economic and military cooperation. This was specifically aimed at replacing the Arab League collective security pact (now badly fractured by Iraq’s participation in the Baghdad Pact). In addition to splitting the Arab World, then, one other consequence of the Baghdad Pact was to draw “conservative Saudi Arabia into an unnatural alliance with revolutionary Egypt” with all that implied for U.S.-Saudi relations. 40

Predictably the Baghdad Pact became a further source of friction between Washington and Riyadh. As a State Department memorandum noted at the time,

Although King Saud has been irked by our neutral position in the Buraimi dispute and on occasion alludes to our support of Israel in bitter terms, the principal cause

39 Not surprisingly, U.S. grant military assistance for the Near East in the period March 1950 through December 1954 shows a clear distribution heavily oriented toward the ‘northern tier’ states of Turkey ($563.7 million) and Iran ($81.4 million), followed distantly by Pakistan ($1.9 million) and Iraq ($1.5 million). In terms of reimbursable military assistance, as of 31 December 1954 fifty countries had participated in the program, resulting in total purchases since the program’s initiation of $705 million, $437 million of which was in the last 4½ years. During this period Saudi Arabia purchased $2.5 million in military material and spent $1 million in the Training Program. Status of Military Assistance Programs as of 31 December 1954, Department of Defense report to National Security Council, NSC 5509, Part 2, Office of Secretary of Defense, 1 March 1955, p. 94, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: Records, 1952-1961, NSC Series, Status of Projects Subseries, Box 5, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

for his current anti-US feelings is to be found in our military aid program for Iraq and our support for Iraqi participation in the “northern tier” defense arrangement.

Foreign Minister Faisal expressed “deep bitterness against the U.S.” to Ambassador Wadsworth. For his part the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S. noted that the King was upset not only by American support for the recent Turk-Iraqi pact (amplified by the Saudis’ strong reactions to Iraqi premier Nuri al-Said’s pro-British attitude), but also by his belief that the U.S. had not supported him adequately since assuming the throne.41

Still, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs George Allen thought it important for the U.S. “to avoid giving any indication that our interests in Saudi Arabia are of such a magnitude that we would be warranted in resorting to extreme measures to satisfy Saudi demands.” While there were concerns over the possibility of the Saudi Arabian Government canceling the ARAMCO concession and nationalizing the oil industry, considered more likely was additional pressure on Dhahran with the Saudis driving a harder bargain for upcoming renewal of the agreement. But as Allen pointedly noted, the Pentagon was already indicating that it no longer placed the same strategic significance on Dhahran that it had in the past.

Furthermore, while acknowledging that the U.S. might consider expanding its military training program in Saudi Arabia as a way to “help to temper Saudi feelings toward us,” he concluded that “such types of help in themselves will not reverse the present trend.”42

The resulting State Department guidance to Ambassador Wadsworth reflected the belief that the purchasing power of military assistance appeared to be waning:

record our recent relations with Saudi Arabia does not encourage belief that sizeable economic or military assistance would give our position in country solid strength for any appreciable period of time. On contrary we question whether willingness our part give such assistance (which cannot be justified either from

financial or military-potential point of view) would not be interpreted as degree of weakness… and would pave way for future heavy demands.  

In the event Wadsworth encountered Saudi tactics calling for major compensation for continued access, State’s instructions were clear; the Ambassador should express his sorrow that a mutually beneficial arrangement of many years was apparently coming to a close, and that “we would feel obliged leave Dhahran and withdraw our training mission without recrimination or hard feeling.” Such an approach “might do great deal to dispel Saudi idea Dhahran is so important to us we would gratify exorbitant demands in order retain it. Effect might enhance our chances of retaining airfield.” While clearly a negotiating ploy, the U.S. willingness to pull the plug on Dhahran was real enough.

Still further pressure came in early April when Britain signed a mutual defense agreement with Iraq, joining the Baghdad Pact. The U.S. Joint Chiefs recommended that the U.S. now join as well. That same month Nasser staked out his position as a leading advocate of neutrality in the East-West competition and as leader of the Arab world at the Bandung conference in Indonesia. His star continuing to rise, the Baghdad Pact became a growing symbol for nationalists to point to as detrimental to Arab interests, and a major policy divide between Washington and Riyadh.

**Developing the Next ‘Five Year Plan’**

While these major political events were generating strains on military assistance from the West, the Saudis were actively working on another variant for expanding their armed forces. Working off of then-existing plans and activities and in consultation with both the U.S. MAAG and Egyptian advisors, the Saudis produced a revised “Five Year Plan.” It called for building a total armed force of 35,000 well-armed and trained

---

44 Ibid., p. 256.  
45 For a review of U.S. thinking on defense of the Middle East at the time and the corresponding role of the recently-established Baghdad Pact, including JCS support for joining, see Kenneth W. Condit, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1955-1956*, Volume VI (Historical Office, Joint Staff: Washington, D.C., 1992), pp. 154-156.
soldiers, including 1,000 men for the Saudi Arabian Air Force. Under this plan the Saudi Arabian Army was to be organized into five and 1/3 infantry regiments, seven artillery and two tank battalions, plus supporting technical services. The total cost for the purchase of arms and equipment necessary for completing this Five-Year Plan was estimated at about $200 million, including $50 million for the Air Force. This ambitious plan clearly was aimed at anticipated negotiations on Dhahran renewal, with the then current agreement open to modification or termination on June 17, 1956.

The concept of ‘Five Year Plans’ requires some explanation. In the Saudi context such plans were more an artifact of the time blocks between political negotiations on existing agreements than a function of what made sense from a military modernization program perspective. Military assistance plans were built around a five-year horizon in recognition that this was the likely extent of any future agreement. It also was a reasonable period of time for implementing at least elements of a coherent program. Clearly political exigencies kept extension of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement in a perpetual five-year state of renewal. Given that U.S. military assistance was essentially a quid pro quo for continued access, military assistance plans were built around these five-year cycles, with the level and type of assistance to be provided the principal point of negotiation. Therefore the military assistance commitments linked to any given five year ‘plan’ represented what could be agreed to as a quid pro quo and reasonably

---


47 The Dhahran Airfield Agreement did not have a specified end date of June 1956. Rather, the language stated that it “shall continue in force for a period of five years, and shall remain in force for an additional period of five years thereafter unless, six months prior to the termination of the first five year period, either party to the Agreement gives to the other notice of intention to modify or terminate the Agreement.” Given past trends and regular Saudi expressions of dissatisfaction with the levels of ongoing U.S. military assistance, it was generally expected that the Saudis would exercise the “modification” clause. The revised Five-Year Plan was itself a strong indication of this.
accomplished within that politically-determined time frame, and not the time and activities necessary to accomplish a militarily desirable level of size, modernization and proficiency. This was one of the great challenges facing the MAAG and later USMTM; striving for as much military continuity and progress as possible in the face of this repeated turbulence. Further exacerbating the problem were constant efforts to alter programs within the five-year cycles. Driven heavily by oftentimes Byzantine political factors, the entire process was antithetical to any methodical, long-range modernization plan.

Saudi Arabia was arguably in a class of its own in terms of the uphill road to military modernization. However, it is important to remember that throughout the Arab Middle East the U.S. was facing major limitations in what it could accomplish. The U.S. retained as a goal the use of military assistance to help bring about a collection of regional states capable of mounting effective defenses. But given “the limited amount of military assistance available to this area, the emphasis has been upon assistance directed toward the primary objective of strengthening forces required for the maintenance of internal security within the countries concerned.” The stated military objectives of developing a regional defense capability remained a distant goal: “When fully accomplished, the current programs probably will insure forces capable of maintaining internal security. They will, however, be of extremely limited value in strengthening forces to combat external aggression of any magnitude.”

---


49 Ibid., pp 19-20, 23. Saudi Arabia is not even mentioned in the text of any of the security assistance summaries for the Near East.
Pressure for Accelerated Arms Deliveries: Saudi Domestic Factors, Soviet-Bloc Offers

In another turn that would affect the military assistance program, in April and May of 1955 a group of senior Saudi Army officers reportedly undertook a plot to assassinate Prime Minister Faisal and a number of other Ministers. The purported objective was to force abdication of the King, replacing the regime with an Egyptian-style Revolutionary Command Council. Betrayed by an informer, the plotters were arrested at Taif and Court Martialed, and the Army officer corps purged. This episode provided Saud with even more of an incentive to build up the Royal Guard and irregular Mujahidin White Army troops at the expense of the suspect regular Army. This was codified in the appointment by Royal Decree on May 27 of Abdullah bin Faisal as Chief of the White Army, now to be more formally organized and designated the National Guard. American officials in Saudi Arabia reported that the view in Saudi circles was that with the events in Taif the King “had lost confidence in the Army” and was looking for a counterweight.

Far less dramatic but still indicative of how internal political factors wrenched military assistance planning schedules, in May the Saudis requested authorization to purchase M-41 and M-47 tanks from the U.S. These tanks were part of the then current long-range plan for modernization of the Army. But in what was becoming a pattern, the Ministry of Defense and Aviation expressed the importance of being able to impress the King and the Muslim pilgrims with a display of this new equipment at the close of the

50 American Embassy to Department of State, *Further Information on Anti-Subversive Measures by Saudi Government*, 26 July 1955, 786A.52/7-2655, Records of the Department of State (RG59), and *Saudi Arabia: A Disruptive Force in Western-Arab Relations*, Intelligence Report No. 7144, Department of State, Office of Intelligence Research, 18 January 1956, p. 7.

51 Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, p. 104. During this same period many Palestinians working for ARAMCO in the Eastern Province were arrested and charged with “communist activities.” In late May about 1500 “mujahidin” arrived by railroad to assist the police and deter any disruptive activity in the area. *Weekly Report of Political and Economic Developments in the Dhahran Consular District*, 1 June 1955, 786A.00/5-2555, Records of the Department of State (RG59).

52 American Embassy to Department of State, *Further Information on Anti-Subversive Measures by Saudi Government*, 26 July 1955, 786A.52/7-2655, Records of the Department of State (RG59).
Hajj in August. The proposed timetable for delivery therefore became a function of the political requirements of the Hajj, not phased delivery based on a military planning schedule. Yet as one MAAG officer summed up, “[a]s is so often the case, however, hope has outrun practical possibilities.” There was no chance of delivering on such a timeline, nor did it make military sense to do so. Not surprisingly, this became another instance of Saudi irritation and criticism over the “delays” in U.S. assistance, and yet another example of the tension between political and military justifications. While deliveries would not be made in time for the Hajj, Secretary Dulles later did support an accelerated schedule. He argued his case to the Secretary of Defense on the grounds that “We have recently reacquired a certain measure of influence with the Saudi Government” and that “making the tanks available will help maintain or even enhance our position in the eyes of the Saudi Government.”

A still further dimension that now began to intrude into the U.S.-Saudi jockeying on military assistance and Dhahran renewal came with the Soviet and Czech arms offers to Egypt in September of 1955. These were widely perceived by the Saudis and other Arab states as coming on highly favorable terms and with no strings attached. The Saudi hatred for communism, frequently reiterated by Saud, predictably did not preclude the Saudis from using these arms deals as another source of pressure in its dealings with the U.S. Following a Russian proposal to Riyadh to exchange diplomatic missions, and with this a willingness to supply arms to Saudi Arabia, the King’s Royal Counselor, Khalid Bey Gargani, explained to Wadsworth that His Majesty’s first desire was to maintain U.S. friendship. The Russian offer could therefore be put off if the U.S. was willing to

---

53 Memorandum, Tanks for Saudi Arabian Army, 17 May 1955, Records of the Department of State (RG59). In the MAAG’s calculation, if the M-47s were delivered at all it should not be for several years. In September 1955 approval was granted for Saudi purchase of the eighteen M-41 tanks. Hoover to Embassy Jiddah, 3 September 1955, FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol XIII, Near East: Jordan-Yemen, pp. 265-266. See attached footnote for original May request and subsequent Dulles letter to the Secretary of Defense.

54 King Saud was originally presented with the Russian offer in August 1955 while on a visit to Tehran, where he was approached by the Soviet Ambassador there.
start a new chapter “benefiting us as other states have benefited, by supplying us with arms so we may better contribute towards area defense, and help us rehabilitate our country and raise living standard[s].” Wadsworth challenged Gargani on the implied Saudi turn to the Russians, stressing the King’s remarks on the importance of religion in any such calculation. Gargani’s response was a shrewd riposte: “Islam hates Communist principles; King will consult Ulema and act in accord Sharia precepts, but Ulema view with great satisfaction everything which makes Islam strong.”56 In responding to the King’s apparent flirtation with a Saudi-Russian arms deal, the State Department considered exploiting the King’s fears of internal subversion and suspicions of Egyptian advisors to help dissuade the monarch, emphasizing the related “extreme danger in permitting Soviet influence penetrate any Arab country through arms deals.”57

A concrete test came a few weeks later when Ambassador Wadsworth was informed by Prince Mish’al that Saudi Arabia now wanted accelerated delivery of 18 M-47 tanks. As previously noted, these tanks were part of the arms the U.S. agreed to provide, but were not scheduled for delivery until much later in the program. While the specific case is of relatively minor importance, it again illustrates the repeated manner in which even small military assistance issues took on considerable significance in the eyes of American diplomats when combined with other events. Ambassador Wadsworth argued that the Saudis likely considered the U.S. response to this request an important signal, especially in the face of the recent Soviet-Egyptian arms agreement. In advocating his support for the request Wadsworth believed that Prince Mish’al saw this as a “test bona fides USG repeated assurances its desire cooperate in building Saudi defense.” He went on to add that “as Department already realizes, early favorable answer might tip scales our favor in what today must be great debate in highest Saudi court

circles: shall they in turn accept Soviet arms offer?” The accelerated delivery of 18 tanks was now being elevated to the status of high policy in U.S.-Saudi relations. A few days later Mish’al added a request for a fighter squadron of F-86s, explaining to Wadsworth that favorable action on this request and the M-47s “would go far towards easing current tensions caused by Russian arms offers and charges US policy was to deny arms to Arab countries so as keep Israel relatively strong.”

Meanwhile the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S. also approached Secretary Dulles with a request for additional U.S. arms under the existing reimbursable contract, the Soviet offer again providing the backdrop. In considering this latest approach, Dulles would later argue to the NSC that it was “of the greatest importance to avoid a situation in which the Saudi Arabians could say that they had tried to buy arms from the U.S. and failing in that effort, had been obliged to turn to the U.S.S.R.” The Saudi Ambassador also raised the issue of grant aid to Saudi Arabia. Dulles once again pointed out to the Ambassador that such grant aid had previously been offered to the Saudis, but that Riyadh had refused this because of its unwillingness to accept the Congressionally mandated conditions placed on such aid. The Ambassador replied that the Kingdom would now renew its request for grant aid and restudy the problem of compliance. Dulles later explained to the NSC that “Saudi Arabia was in no need of any kind of economic assistance from the United States” as it “had plenty of resources which were expended very foolishly by its government.” As for grant military aid, “it had plenty of ready money to buy all the armaments which it believed it needed.” Just the same, Dulles was inclined to acquiesce to the Saudi request for grant assistance “so that there could be no

58 Wadsworth to Secretary of State, 5 October 1955, 786A.5-MSP/10-555, and Wadsworth to Secretary of State, 9 October 1955, 786A.5-MSP/10-955, Records of the Department of State (RG59). Wadsworth also noted that the M-47s “are for stationing at Al Kharj where they will be welcome added factor for maintenance internal security eastern area.”
Thus it would appear the Saudis were using to good effect the Soviet and Czech arms deals and Dulles’ fear of any resulting influence.

While the Saudi Ambassador intimated that the Saudis might show some flexibility on the compliance requirements, he in fact explained to George Allen at NEA that it was the U.S. that had to show more flexibility. If the Secretary of State’s repeated position on the continuing conditions for grant aid was Washington’s final answer, the Ambassador explained that His Majesty would treat it as a refusal and hope the U.S. would understand why he would pursue arms elsewhere. Allen responded that this was of course a decision any sovereign government was entitled to make, adding “We are not begging anyone to accept a U.S. military assistance agreement.” Just the same, he felt compelled to point out that despite repeated statements that the U.S. had failed to provide Saudi Arabia with military equipment, the fact remained that $20 million had been sold over the last few years.

Further Strains and Estimating Dhahran’s Continuing Importance

As anticipated, the Saudis made official their intent to renegotiate on October 4. In expectation of this, back in August the Deputy Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs had requested Defense Department and Air Force estimates as to the importance of Dhahran to future U.S. strategic interests. These estimates were to help inform the U.S. position in any upcoming negotiations to renew. Two weeks after the Saudi announcement the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force outlined the USAF’s position on

---

59 Discussion at the 260th Meeting of the National Security Council, 6 October 1955, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Papers as President of the United States, 1953-61 (Ann Whitman File), NSC series, NSC Summaries of Discussions, Box #7, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

60 Memorandum of Conversation, Acquisition of Arms by Saudi Arabia, 14 October 1955, 786A.5 MSP/10-1455, Records of the Department of State (RG59).

61 On Saudi notification see footnote in FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol XIII, Near East: Jordan-Yemen, pp. 278-279. Following this announcement, the Joint Strategic Plans Committee (JSPC) was tasked with studying the renewal issue and based on various inputs make recommendations concerning the U.S. negotiating position.
its future needs at Dhahran. While the Air Force had been able “to develop most of the facilities required,” the agreement permitted only limited use of them in peacetime. Also, U.S. personnel stationed at Dhahran were under serious restrictions. “Therefore in the forthcoming negotiations, the United States should seek more favorable terms with regard to military operating rights and the status of U.S. personnel in Saudi Arabia.\(^62\)

The assessment contained a number of possible Saudi demands for renewal of the agreement, among them additional reimbursable aid equipment beyond that which the Saudis could reasonably absorb, renewed requests for grant aid, or even “large outright rental payments” for use of the facilities. In addition, “because of her ever-increasing nationalism the Saudis may desire to participate more fully in the operation of Dhahran which would have the result of further restricting operational flexibility in the U.S. military use of the base.” Taking all of the factors into account, the Air Force Chief of Staff concluded

While there is a continuing need for Dhahran Airfield in order to provide for and support strategic, communications, intelligence, MATS, and area logistics operations, there appears to be little military justification for the continuation of the reimbursable aid program and the Army-Air Force training mission, except as they may be necessary to promote other U.S. interests in Saudi Arabia. Important as the rights at Dhahran are to fulfill U.S. military requirements, if Air Force requirements were the only consideration I would recommend that no heavy additional obligations to Saudi Arabia be assumed by the United States in order to maintain or improve our position at Dhahran. It is recognized, however, that fulfilling U.S. Air Force requirements is not the only military consideration in determining whether we maintain our position in Saudi Arabia. U.S. strategic interests in the Middle East area as a whole must also be considered.\(^63\)

With this in mind the USAF Chief of Staff recommended that the Joint Chiefs conduct a study of the overall military and strategic importance to the U.S. of Dhahran and other U.S. military programs in Saudi Arabia, and on this basis, prepare a memorandum for the

\(^62\) Renegotiation of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement, memorandum of the Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, J.C.S. 1881/52, 19 October 1955. For reference to USAF and the U.S. Navy only having approved ICS requirements in Saudi Arabia see J.C.S. 570/377. As already noted, the Navy had a communications facility at Dhahran.

\(^63\) Renegotiation of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement, memorandum of the Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, J.C.S. 1881/52, 19 October 1955, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218).
Secretary of Defense to assist him in formulating the future U.S. negotiating position. This assessment shows that at least from the Headquarters USAF perspective, USAF access to Dhahran was no longer a justification for military assistance to the Kingdom.

While internal U.S. assessments of Dhahran’s future military value continued along with estimates of corresponding military assistance compensation, another external pressure point now hit, this time coming from the British. On October 26 British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Anthony Eden announced the collapse of arbitration efforts over Buraimi and the occupation of boundary areas by Trucial levies in an assault code-named OPERATION BONAPARTE. This action included the removal of Saudi security forces from the disputed territory, flown out as prisoners of war aboard British aircraft. The action inflamed the Saudis, who wanted the U.S. to intervene on their behalf against the British. The U.S. found itself squarely in the middle, managing to aggravate both Riyadh and London. A major U.S. concern was that the action would further push the Saudis into the arms of Nasser, fostering Egyptian influence in the Gulf. This fear seemed to be materializing when the day after Britain’s military action Egypt and Saudi Arabia signed a military pact, with Nasser coming out in strong support of the Saudis against the British. Another concern in Washington was that it risked being

---

65 A description of the military operation itself, especially the air dimension, is in Air Chief Marshal Sir David Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, Air Historical Branch, RAF (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1980), pp. 121-122. Lee also describes in detail operations against the Saudi-supported opposition in central Oman from July 1957 through February 1959, including the use of air-launched rockets for ‘fire power demonstrations’ and the coordination of air reconnaissance and small ground force teams to harass and interdict enemy forces. It was during this same period that the British were strengthening the Sultan’s ground forces and created his small air force, the Sultan of Oman’s Air Force (SOAF), which became operational in 1959. The hope was to build up the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) to the point at which he would not have to call on British forces in future challenges to his authority. The Saudis certainly had to worry about these developments relative to their own military capabilities in potential future disputes with the Sultanate. See pp. 125-137. Saudi support to the opposition was driven in part to make Britain’s (and the Sultan’s) life difficult following the humiliating expulsion of Saudi forces suffered earlier over Buraimi, though there were deeper issues involving oil prospecting, the status of the imamate, and direct challenges to the Sultan’s rule. On these latter issues see Joseph A. Kechichian, *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1995), pp. 42-44.
implicated in the British action given Saudi perceptions of the close U.S.-U.K. relationship; or at a minimum of siding with Britain if it did not immediately bring strong pressure on London.  

Right on the heels of this action came the first formal meeting of the Baghdad Pact in November, now composed of Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Iraq and Britain. While the U.S. (and Secretary Dulles in particular) remained focused on the importance of this for containing the Soviet Union, local regimes outside of the Pact viewed it through a very different lens and one far more relevant to them--the implications of the Pact on local balances of power. As one State Department intelligence report at the time noted, “Efforts on the part of the US and UK to bring a defense organization into being in the Middle East have exacerbated existing rivalries in the Arab world and in most of it have intensified suspicions of Western motives.” In the case of Saudi Arabia, the Pact had already set off visceral reactions with visions of Iraq, now with western assistance, seeking to forge a Hashemite coalition to include Jordan and Syria aimed at recovering the Hijaz and dismembering the Kingdom. All of this added to Riyadh’s already substantial stock of distrust of the British as it further distanced itself from the U.K. Now it would use the recently concluded mutual defense treaty with Egypt, along with Nasser’s mounting regional influence, to help isolate Iraq.  

Needless to say, these events further complicated already strained U.S.-Saudi relations, and certainly the handling of Dhahran and future military assistance. An intelligence estimate on base access in the region now made the following observations regarding Dhahran:

68 The Outlook for US Interests in the Middle East, Intelligence Report No. 7074, Department of State, Office of Intelligence Research, Division of Research for Near East, South Asia, and Africa, 14 November 1955, p. 1.
US base rights in Dhahran are likely to be increasingly precarious even over the short run. Mounting distrust of the US by the Saudi Government as a result of alleged favoritism for Israel and Iraq and for the UK in its boundary disputes with Saudi Arabia, have led to a more and more intransigent position from which the Saudi Government would find it difficult to retreat. While there may not be outright cancellation of base rights, the price asked for a renewal of the base agreement in course of the renegotiation recently demanded by the Saudi Government might be exorbitant in terms of aid and other specified conditions.  

In late November Secretary of the Air Force Donald Quarles met with State Department officials to discuss various issues in the Near East, to include the subject of Dhahran. The Secretary expressed the Air Force’s desire that basing rights there be maintained but “were not willing to pay an exorbitant price therefor.” If agreement could not be reached on equitable terms, alternative locations included Iraq (where inquiries were already being made), Iran, Lebanon and Qatar. Once again it was made clear that while Dhahran was quite valuable and represented a substantial U.S. investment, it certainly was not indispensable.  

The Joint Chiefs provided its guidance in December. They continued to adhere to the formula that Dhahran’s enduring military importance “is sufficient to warrant granting moderate economic, military and/or diplomatic concessions” to the Saudi regime, and “that over-all U.S. national objectives may warrant the making of still further, and perhaps major, concessions to Saudi Arabia in order to protect U.S. national interests in the Middle East and strengthen the special U.S. position in Saudi Arabia.”  

As for ongoing U.S. military assistance activities, 

The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that there is little military justification for the continuation of the U.S. Army-Air Force Training Mission to Saudi Arabia. However, they would not oppose maintenance of the status quo, moderate increases in the size of the mission, or changes in the composition of the mission.

---

70 Probable Availability of US and UK Bases in the Arab East and Cyprus Until 1965, Intelligence Report No. 7075, Department of State, Office of Intelligence Research, Division of Research for Near East, South Asia, and Africa, 3 November 1955, p. 2.

71 Memorandum of Conversation, 22 November 1955, FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol XIII, Near East: Jordan-Yemen, pp. 290-291. As to dollar investment, the Secretary estimated that the U.S. had spent about $50 million on Dhahran and that duplicating the facilities would now cost about $100 million.
if these concessions become necessary to promote other U.S. military interests in Saudi Arabia.  

Consistent with these views, they did not reject grant military assistance but continued to advocate keeping it to “token amounts” with reimbursable military assistance being the principal mechanism for any Saudi military procurement. They did opposed any increased Saudi use or control of Dhahran and its facilities that would interfere with U.S. military operations. Finally, while willing to accept the status quo rights and restrictions at Dhahran, the Joint Chiefs recommended that U.S. negotiators seek more favorable terms, including the right to station combat elements at the base, expanded overflight and landing rights, and “[e]limination of restrictions on numbers of military and civilian personnel and types and numbers of aircraft assigned to Dhahran.”

Continuing Saudi Dissatisfaction and Movement Toward Formal Negotiations

On the Saudi side, despite the many tensions with Washington—indeed in part because of them, for they served as potential points of leverage—the call was for an expanded military assistance program with the U.S. In November 1955 the King proposed that upcoming negotiations on Dhahran include discussion of U.S. assistance for the revised five-year Saudi armed forces development plan. In discussions with Ambassador Wadsworth, Foreign Minister Faisal emphasized “that the renewal of the

---

72 Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Renegotiation of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement with the Government of Saudi Arabia, 13 December 1955, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files. Middle East. As of October, the U.S. MAAG in Saudi Arabia consisted of twenty-one USAF and sixty-eight U.S. Army personnel. Additional USAF personnel served as trainers for Saudi Arabians in management and administration of air fields. These individuals were under the supervision of the 2nd Air Division and supported out of USAF funds. See Renegotiation of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement, memorandum of the Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, J.C.S. 1881/52, 19 October 1955, and Memorandum for Admiral Radford from MG Cannon, Special Assistant to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for MDA Affairs, 29 November 1955, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), Chairman’s File, Admiral Radford, 1955-1957, 091 Saudi Arabia.

73 Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Renegotiation of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement with the Government of Saudi Arabia, 13 December 1955, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files. Middle East. In terms of combat elements, the JCS had in mind a fighter squadron and ground-based air defenses to protect Dhahran. At the time, aside from firearms no ordnance was stored at Dhahran. Memorandum for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, from the Chief of Staff, USAF, USAF Arms and Ammunition at Dhahran Airfield, 31 March 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), Chairman’s File, Admiral Radford, 1955-1957, 091 Saudi Arabia.
[Dhahran] agreement would serve no useful purpose unless the United States would agree
to assist Saudi Arabia in ‘building our strength.’” He believed that an agreement could
be reached with the U.S. using a "new formula" based on U.S. use of the airfield in
exchange for American assistance in building up the Saudi armed forces. Wadsworth
considered the new proposed ‘Five-Year Plan’ as “likely to be necessary quid pro quo for
renewal Dhahran airfield agreement.”

The new Five-Year Plan, prepared with the assistance of the MAAG-Saudi
Arabia, was now estimated to cost upwards of $400 million. The Saudis apparently
expected the U.S. to pay for this program outright, without any of the conditions
currently attached to even grant aid, arguing that access to Dhahran was compensation
enough for the U.S. As Wadsworth summarized, “[t]oday, question of grant military aid
(in strict MDAP sense of term) does not arise, because King Saud, no more than Nasser,
would consider signing conventional grant military aid agreement.” To do so “would
establish wholly unacceptable satellite relationship.” In Saudi thinking, the new slant
consisted of “the very simple proposition that, if we will supply gratis and without grant
aid agreement all equipment needed to implement King’s 5-year plan, SAG will renew
DAF agreement for another 5 years with but minor modifications in its present form.”
Certainly from the Saudi perspective this was a simple proposition indeed. Wadsworth
argued that in broad outline the U.S. “would do well to go along with this new formula”

[See footnote reference to Faisal’s position as conveyed to Wadsworth, and Wadsworth to Department of
Long, The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies, p. 38, and Operations Coordination
Board, Detailed Development of Major Actions Relating to NSC 5428 (Near East) from July 1, 1954
through February 28, 1955, 21 March 1955, White House Office, National Security Council Staff,
Operations Coordination Board Central File Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library. On December 15,
1955 the Director of NE, Mr. Fraser Wilkins, sent a memo to Allen on the proposed Saudi Five Year Plan
noting that while the U.S. MAAG had assisted in preparing the recommendations of the plan, the plan had
not been approved by either the MAAG or the U.S. Department of Defense. See footnote reference in
because it provided a framework for negotiation from which acceptable terms might be arrived at, for example, a 50-50 split on financing equipment.\textsuperscript{76}

Secretary Dulles strongly disagreed. He instructed Wadsworth that “no formula should be proposed by either US or SAG at this time” adding that “Ultimate US role in any formula should of course be in accord with current US legislation regarding military assistance and in general harmony with US military aid in other areas of NE.” He reiterated that the U.S. was “not prepared retain DAF at any price” and that “any formula requiring commitment on order $200 million in grant aid or otherwise even for favorable long-term extension would be entirely out of question.” To drive the point home he noted that a planned $44 million cash subsidy to Libya for use of Wheelus Field was to be made in the form of economic aid, to be provided over a twenty-year period, with the U.S. receiving far broader operating rights than at Dhahran; and even then the subsidy faced strong questioning from both Defense and Congress.\textsuperscript{77}

While the Saudis were leaning on Washington for greater political and military support, the British were expressing increasing alarm to the White House over Saudi involvement in subverting their position in Jordan, to include offers to make payments to Amman then being provided by London. Now as Prime Minister, Eden wrote President Eisenhower to argue that the Saudis were making mischief in a number of ways, to include financing the extreme left opposition press in Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon that could only end up benefiting the Russians; “if the Saudis go on spending and behaving as at present there will be nothing left for anybody but the Bear, who is already working in their wake.”\textsuperscript{78} Some of this hyperbole was likely aimed at deflecting the repeated U.S. efforts to push London to resume arbitration and reach an accommodation with the

Saudis on the Buraimi crisis. But the deepening hostility between Riyadh and London was real enough. In a discussion between representatives of the British Foreign Office and the State Department in which Buraimi was a principal issue, the British representatives referred to King Saud and his advisors as “corrupt, medieval, playing the Communist game, and completely anti-Western.” This was followed by Assistant Secretary of State Allen’s description of how the Foreign Office and State Department views differed, with the latter portraying the Saudis as reactive and defensive in their motives and behavior:

We differ somewhat about the Saudis. The picture as painted by the British is more black and white than in our conception. The British have described Saudi Arabian activities in terms of...evil, whereas we attribute many of the Saudi actions to Arab nationalism. The British have pointed out that the Saudis have voted with the Communist satellites. Our best judgment is that this is so not because the Saudis have an affinity for Communism, but because of their extreme nationalism. Instead of being motivated by Marxist idealism, we believe the Saudis are chiefly moved by: (1) their irritation against the U.S. for preservation of Israel; (2) their fear of British domination of the Persian Gulf.

Yet despite these noted differences and less malevolent view of the Saudi leadership, there was growing concern at State over Saud’s regime. An INR Intelligence Report concluded that “Saud’s failure to make a constructive approach to the Saudi internal situation has led to the development of dissidence in all levels of Saudi society,” that in the future could “engage in assassination or terrorism as a prelude to complete overthrow of the regime.”

---

79 Aside from the desire to improve the general political atmosphere through such arbitration, concerns were being raised over the impact of the dispute on U.S. access to Dhahran. In the midst of negotiations over renewal, Admiral Radford believed that U.S. support for the British position would seriously harm U.S. prospects for staying. Memorandum for Record, 26 January 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), Chairman’s File, Admiral Radford, 1955-1957, 0911 Saudi Arabia. In retrospect these concerns appear overblown given the repeated Saudi emphasis on military assistance as the most important quid pro quo for Dhahran. While Buraimi was a useful—and no doubt truly felt—issue for raising questions about U.S. political support for the Kingdom, in the specific context of Dhahran it more likely served as another pressure point to be used by the Saudis for getting arms, rather than as an acid test in and of itself for renewing U.S. rights.

Citing Saud’s increasing flirtation with neutralism, noting it was not out of ideological conviction but as a tactic to pressure the West on its Middle East policies, the report further predicted that “no significant improvement in relations between the US and Saudi Arabia is likely to come about so long as the regime remains in power.” This pessimism continued on the subject of Dhahran, the report arguing that the Saudis wished to use its leverage on the airfield to bring about fundamental shifts in U.S. regional policy, to include U.S. support of the Baghdad pact. According to this strongly pessimistic view, the Saudis would be willing to actively pursue a collapse of the agreement in order to force broad policy changes on the U.S.

Ambassador Wadsworth met with the King in late January. In clear reference to the perceived lack of U.S. support, Saud invoked the red menace; “Be sure we will fight Communism and Russia like the plague” exhorted the King, “but don’t force me, by your acts of omissions, to take the plague. All the Arab countries, except Saudi Arabia, have caught it and are already, in varying degree, cooperating with Russia and its allies.” How much of this was deeply felt by Saud, and how much posturing for the upcoming Dhahran negotiations is difficult to know. Regardless, the hard press for arms was now on.

At this very time the Administration also was facing mounting pressure from the Israeli and Jewish-American lobby in the U.S. to the arming of Arab states. Saudi Arabia was singled out as the U.S. prepared to ship the first American tanks to the Kingdom, 18 M-41 light tanks. Criticism of the delivery came from the press, Congress and the Israeli Ambassador, forcing a temporary suspension of all export licenses to the Arab states and Israel pending review. Senior State Department officials were deeply concerned that a

---

81 Saudi Arabia: A Disruptive Force in Western-Arab Relations, Intelligence Report No. 7144, Department of State, Office of Intelligence Research, 18 January 1956, pp. iii, 17.
83 In Congress the tank sale came under scrutiny primarily in terms of the potential military threat the tanks might pose to Israel, but concerns were also raised over how they might be used internally in Saudi Arabia.
failure to deliver the tanks would jeopardize future U.S.-Saudi relations to the point
where renewal of Dhahran could well prove impossible, and Riyadh turn to the Russians
for armaments. Following the review the licenses were reinstated and the deliveries
made. But it was an important reminder of the tension between U.S. military assistance
to Saudi Arabia and larger regional political considerations, to include their domestic
political consequences.  

In March 1956 the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security
Affairs Gordon Gray laid out in detail the Defense Department’s views on potential
military assistance options to support renewal negotiations on Dhahran. Defense was
willing to commit to providing the majority of the remaining equipment for the current
Saudi five-year plan for its armed forces on a cash reimbursable basis. This referred to
the ongoing plan and equipment deliveries derived from the 1951 survey. Commitments
beyond that (i.e., the new Saudi ‘Five Year Plan’) could not be approved absent specifics
on what this would entail. In the absence of any outright grant military assistance
agreement, the Defense Department was also willing to consider expanding the USAF
airport training program for Saudi personnel, the construction of additional facilities at
U.S. expense, expand the Army-Air Force training mission to the Saudi armed forces,
and entertain the prospect of sharing use of the Dhahran facilities with the Saudi Arabian
air force as it began to mature.  

Throughout early 1956 the Saudis continued to take a hard line over what would
be required to renew the Dhahran agreement. Internal and regional political calculations,
as always, were at the forefront of factors affecting the Al Saud’s approach toward the

---

Given that one of the U.S. justifications for selling the tanks was based on internal security considerations, Congressmen wanted to know if the weapons could be used against dissident groups seeking more
democratic representation and human rights. See for example the questioning of Secretary Dulles on this
day in *Situation in the Middle East*, Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Congress,
Senate, 84th Congress, 2nd session, 24 February 1956, pp. 65-66.

84 Long, *The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies*, p. 37, and Memorandum for the Record
pp. 341-343.

negotiations. With the practical need to embrace the relationship with Nasser, they were being pulled into espousing his now increasingly popular ideology of nationalism, neutralism, and anti-imperialism. The U.S. presence at Dhahran cut directly against the grain, and following the expiration of the original agreement in June 1956 this helped contribute to the Saudi’s decision to extend the lease for only one more year pending further, more attractive conditions.\(^86\) They were now talking in terms of U.S. payment for continued use of Dhahran. Despite the fact that most of the funds for constructing the air field and its facilities had come from the U.S., America should still pay additional subsidies or grant aid as “rent” for the rights to use the facility.\(^87\)

In early April Wadsworth met with the King just prior to the Ambassador’s departure for Washington. Saud restated his enduring desire for friendship and cooperation with the U.S. as long as three conditions were met: “that the independence of my country be maintained; that my Sovereignty be respected; and that there be no interference in our internal affairs.” Meeting these conditions now entailed concrete actions by the U.S.:

I want, in turn, three things: that it back me as I am backing it; that that part of my country (Buraimi) which has been taken by force be restored; and that the United States Government supply my army with the arms it needs, because I don’t want to take them from others….To me the obtaining of arms is vitally important. If it is a question of paying, I can pay. Among the Arabs I am the richest, but my army is the weakest. I can get arms elsewhere, with training mission as well, but I want only American arms. And you may be sure I shall never use them to attack; I want them for defense….As for Dhahran Airfield, anything which will help reinforce Saudi-American relations I will never hesitate to give.\(^88\)

Wadsworth responded that the U.S. was committed to the long-term strengthening of the Saudi Arabian armed forces, noting that Saudi Arabia had already purchased between $20 and $30 million in equipment and arms from the U.S., with another $30-$40

---


million already requested and under review as part of the original five year plan. Once provided, the remaining $30-40 million in purchases would largely complete the equipment portion of this program. Wadsworth told the King that upon his return to Washington he would hope to get assurance that all of these would be provided according to the plan’s phased delivery schedule.

The Ambassador’s review of U.S. actions did not impress the King. Saud told Wadsworth that he wanted to be treated like other countries (e.g., Turkey, Iraq and Iran) that did not have conditions attached to arms deliveries. And in his case he was paying for the arms, not receiving them as gifts! The King also raised a distinction between the five-year plan and the various phases of modernizing the Saudi military. Prince Mish’al envisioned a five-phase effort leading to a fully modernized force, of which the current five year plan was merely the first phase. Furthermore, neither Mish’al nor the King were at all satisfied with the progress towards realizing the five phases. They considered the current plan as too slow in its implementation. Wadsworth explained that the U.S. plan was “designed to build the best possible army in five years, within what we conceived to be the country’s capabilities.” In response the King raised three points: 1) that his army was not modernizing as fast as other Arab armies; 2) Why should he be forced to stay with the schedule of the original five year plan if Saudi forces can move faster; 3) Is the U.S. prepared to provide his government arms in return for renewal of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement? Wadsworth responded that it had always been the U.S. intent to provide the equipment and arms included in the Five-Year Plan, with the expectation of meeting additional needs in the future to the extent the Saudis were able to absorb them. The King was unmoved.

---

89 Recall that the 1951 survey estimated the equipment purchases at $69 million.
With Saudi sentiments fresh at hand, Ambassador Wadsworth arrived in Washington on April 6 to discuss renegotiation of Dhahran with State, Defense and Air Force officials. He presented his view that the U.S. Government should commit to sell all of the arms required to fulfill the existing five year plan, estimating this at $70 million phased over the next five years. He also recommended as additional incentives in the negotiations constructing a civil air terminal at Dhahran and providing the Saudis with T-33 jet trainers, six C-119 aircraft and 18 M-47 tanks. The Ambassador received detailed guidance on how to proceed, along with a letter from President Eisenhower to the King. The President’s letter expressed to His Majesty that “[t]he United States continues to be deeply interested in the territorial integrity, prosperous development and independence of Saudi Arabia.” Therefore in the specific area of defense Eisenhower wrote that Ambassador Wadsworth was now empowered to discuss “how the United States may be of assistance to you in the strengthening of your defense force.”

Initial Negotiations on Renewal

Preliminary negotiations with the Saudis on renewal of the Dhahran agreement and corresponding military assistance began on May 28 when Wadsworth met with the King and presented the letter from President Eisenhower. Saud expressed as to how he was facing extreme pressure both externally and internally to any extension of the Dhahran agreement, and could do so only with very tangible evidence of the benefits to Saudi Arabia; “We need some justification, something concrete which our people and others can see and point to, something which will persuade them of the rightness of my judgment and action.” The King’s idea of concrete was for the U.S. to pay for the new, much more expansive, five-year plan. In a series of follow-on meetings with the King’s

Royal Counselors the Saudis staked out their position: The U.S. should agree to provide the Kingdom with sufficient arms to equip a 13-regiment Saudi Army, or pay the Saudis $50 million/year for a five-year renewal of the Dhahran agreement, the resulting $250 million being the estimated cost for the 13-regiment force.  

**Internal U.S. Deliberations**

While the Saudis placed their demands on the table, the U.S. military continued to present mixed views on Dhahran’s value. CINCUSAFE staked out the strongest position for retaining rights. Citing the importance of Dhahran as an enroute support base for MATS, for intra-theater lift operations, as a vital post-strike Strategic Air Command (SAC) recovery base for medium and heavy bombers, and as “a base for the support of potential contingency tactical operations and regional deployments” he wanted “to make it abundantly clear that I consider the DAF to be militarily indispensable.” As to future rights and capabilities there, the “present mission and manning at DAF are considered to be rock bottom” for meeting U.S. military requirements. Therefore he was strongly opposed to any further restrictions on activities or additional limitations on the size of the mission as the price for securing political agreement with the Saudis: “[W]e simply cannot accept any regression in our current military position in Saudi Arabia....The US must retain the DAF in at least its present status and only a mutually acceptable quid pro quo arrangement will ensure this.”

SAC, the other air force party with the greatest operational interest in Dhahran, was actually more flexible. Given Dhahran’s geographic location relative to final refueling points for bombers enroute to targets SAC did consider it “vital as a post strike

---

94 Ibid., p. 374.
95 Under MATS the U.S. had set up three local area transport lines; one to Iran, one running to Beirut, Adana and Athens, and one servicing the U.S. military missions in Saudi Arabia that went on to Asmara in Eritrea, and Addis Ababa. See testimony of Ambassador Wadsworth, *The President’s Proposal On the Middle East*, February 1957, Hearings before the Committees on Foreign Relations and Armed Services, U.S. Congress, Senate, 85th Congress, 1st session, p. 656.
96 CINCUSAFE to CSAF, 29 June 1956, *Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files, Middle East.
base.” SAC also considered any additional restrictions as jeopardizing its Emergency War Plans (EWPs). But it did believe substitute bases could be found, though certainly at a cost in time and money. This led SAC to conclude that “it is clear that while Dhahran is a most important post strike base, there are acceptable alternatives in the area; it is not thought, therefore, to be in our national interest to submit to blackmail to preserve our position when it may be possible to negotiate elsewhere.”

The Secretary of the Air Force, considering the problem as more political than military, thought it best resolved as a national decision rather than a Defense Department or Air Force determination of needs. Secretary Quarles expressed interest in putting the daily operation of Dhahran more on a civilian basis to reduce the current presence of some eleven hundred USAF men in uniform there. Assistant Secretary of State for NEA, George Allen, stressed that as a policy matter the U.S. needed to step up to the problem of internal opposition to U.S. military presence and should force host nations like Saudi Arabia to do the same. If those nations truly do not want us there, he contended, then the U.S. should be prepared to get out, rely on alternatives, and state this clearly to the governments concerned. By using this approach American negotiating positions would also be strengthened. But as Deputy Undersecretary of State Robert Murphy pointed out, part of the problem was that when asked about the importance of various bases the JCS always responded “that the base in question is considered absolutely essential and that the U.S. must continue to have use of it.” As a result, negotiating leverage and maneuver room were greatly reduced.

In Dhahran’s case the views were arguably more conflicted, although even here the skeptics tended to shift when it looked like Dhahran might actually be lost. Murphy’s observation certainly captured the tension between

---

97 CINCSAC to HG/USAF, 28 June 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files, Middle East.
strongly advocated U.S. military requirements and the corresponding price a host nation could seek to extract.

This condition also raised another element affecting base negotiations at the time. Individual countries granting U.S. base access in the region became increasingly sensitive to, and sophisticated about, the terms and levels of compensation offered by the U.S. to other states granting access. Throughout the Dhahran negotiations the Saudis would ask the U.S. for detailed information on other base access agreements and when advantageous, use this information to drive a harder bargain. Likewise, when particularly attractive terms of compensation were being considered inside the U.S. Government to secure continued access to Dhahran, the consequences of such favorable treatment had to be weighed against the potential reactions of other countries granting access. The Joint Chiefs regularly expressed its concern that too many concessions risked prejudicing other base arrangements. Terms and conditions for Dhahran were therefore directly linked to the status of much broader base access arrangements, presenting an additional complication.

In its continuing effort to retain Dhahran but without justifying this on military grounds alone, the JCS reaffirmed its view that they considered the military importance of Dhahran “sufficient to warrant granting moderate economic, military and/or

---

99 See for example the correspondence from General Radford in Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Renegotiation of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement, 6 July 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files, Middle East. This interaction was also nicely summarized in a 1957 report to the President on the future of U.S. overseas bases: “It has become increasingly difficult to secure more favorable arrangements in one country where US forces are stationed than in another. It is remarkable how closely one country follows the arrangements reached with another. This ‘common denominator’ pattern means that compromises adopted to secure agreement to urgently needed requirements are being reflected more and more in the demands of other countries with whom we are negotiating and in several instances have suggested to other countries the advantage of renegotiating agreements already in effect. It means too that what one US military service negotiations on a technical level in one country can become a condition imposed on another US military service halfway around the world….The time has long since passed when one service can make its own arrangements with a particular country, or, indeed, where the United States, as a government, can make arrangements with one nation without regard for possible repercussions with another.” The report also made the point that the U.S. had to be prepared to walk away once the host nation price for base access became too high “since otherwise we may price ourselves out of all facilities similarly situated.” Of course this was easier said than done. United States Overseas Military Bases, Report to the President (Nash Report), December 1957, pp. 5-6, 50. Copy retained at Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.
diplomatic concessions to Saudi Arabia.” The Joint Chiefs also “recognized that over-all U.S. national objectives may warrant the making of still further, and perhaps major, concessions to Saudi Arabia in order to protect U.S. national interests in the Middle East and strengthen the special U.S. position in Saudi Arabia.” So once again the senior military leadership was advocating that any major extension of military assistance to the Saudis be in terms of larger national interests, with U.S. military requirements a secondary consideration. Still, the JCS then went on to describe the military importance of Dhahran, and in particular, the linkage between U.S. presence there in peacetime and its availability in a war:

The wartime use of Dhahran is not based upon the Dhahran Airfield Agreement, but rather upon the word of King Ibn Saud and his successor, King Saud, that, in the event of war, all facilities of Saudi Arabia will be made available to the United States. The use of Dhahran Airfield fulfills current U.S. wartime requirements for an in-being, operating, and manned base in the area. Such a base must be developed during peacetime. Without the peacetime facility at Dhahran, capable of providing an immediate wartime use, wartime use of Dhahran will be limited to emergency landing rights.

It is presumed from the above statement that it was not merely the facilities themselves that were important in peacetime, but the presence of U.S. military personnel that would allow for a rapid transition and effective use of those facilities in time of war, a very important distinction. According to this position, quite aside from the primary peacetime military activities being run by the U.S. at Dhahran (e.g., inter-theater air transport, intra-theater air logistics operations), peacetime presence and access was in and of itself a military requirement for insuring an effective transition to war.

---

101 Ibid., p. 384.
102 Short of major war, the importance of this distinction in facing a regional contingency was about to be demonstrated with the Suez crisis, addressed later in this chapter.
Further laying out their views, the JCS also submitted its official response to a set of negotiation suggestions made by the Department of State. Both questions and answers provide an interesting review of the various objectives then being pursued. In response to State’s suggestion that the Saudi Arabian Air Force might utilize the Dhahran Airfield, the JCS reiterated its opposition to any sharing that would interfere with U.S. military operations. Still, it could accept such use “if this were coupled with rights for the United States to station air defense units at Dhahran.” Nor would they oppose Saudi use associated with a U.S.-led Saudi Arabian Air Force Training Program if such a program was considered necessary for extending U.S. rights at Dhahran. In fact the Chiefs viewed such a training program as allowing the U.S. to counteract Egyptian influence, with the added advantage of “enabling the United States to keep military personnel in Saudi Arabia and in Dhahran for a considerable period of time.”

Regarding State’s continuing interest in limited grant military aid as an incentive, the JCS believed that in the face of recent decreasing funds and increasing competition for such aid, now even token grant assistance could not be supported. Aside from Saudi Arabia’s status as a “low priority for funds” given other world-wide requirements, “current U.S. military plans do not provide for the employment of Saudi Arabian forces, and from this standpoint grant military aid to Saudi Arabia cannot be justified.”

103 This was in response to a 29 June request by the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (ISA) who received the State Department suggestions along with State’s request for the DoD’s views on them.
104 Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Renegotiation of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement, Appendix, 6 July 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files, Middle East.
105 Within the region itself the JCS continued to rank the country priorities for military assistance programming as Iran first, Pakistan second, and Iraq third. In an effort to help bring Teheran into the Baghdad Pact, the U.S. committed to providing additional military assistance funds and training teams. Iraq’s strategic importance to the U.S. continued to hinge on its proximity to the USSR, its oil resources, and its status as the only Arab state to align itself with a western defense arrangement. Its political and military leaders were now increasingly registering their own dissatisfaction at the rate and scale of military assistance from the West, especially given Iraq’s exposure due to its involvement in the Baghdad Pact. With demands for military assistance far outstripping available resources, even relatively small diversions to Saudi Arabia were viewed as costly. Status of Military Assistance Programs as of 30 June 1956, Department of Defense Report to National Security Council, NSC 5611, Part 2, Office of Secretary of Defense, 15 September 1956, p. 33, 39-43. White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for
Recognizing the need for concessions, however, the JCS was not opposed to the Defense Department offering up to $25 million over a five-year period to assist in financing mutually agreed-upon programs. As for State’s suggestion of augmenting the current Army Training Program, “there is little, if any, military justification for any increase...since such training could not be expected to develop forces which would contribute in a significant way to Allied military strength.” A moderate increase could be supported on the grounds that doing so would serve larger U.S. military interests in Saudi Arabia. But the Chiefs hastened to add that “[i]n this connection, U.S. negotiators should use extreme care so as not to present an over optimistic picture to the militarily inexperienced and opportunistic Saudis. The determination, ideological orientation, and fighting capability of the Saudi Arabian Army are highly doubtful.” Any increase should therefore be quite modest in scope. Finally, regarding the prospect of an agreement involving a reduction in peacetime rights and facilities, this was rejected outright by the Joint Chiefs; “While the minimum type operations suggested in the State proposal might serve U.S. national interests by maintaining a foothold in Saudi Arabia and some control of Dhahran, it would not fulfill military requirements and would be of doubtful value for military operations.”

One final dimension to deliberations over Dhahran involved the prospect of its falling under the operational control of an unfriendly government. The leading near-term candidate here was Egypt, still actively involved in military assistance to the Saudis despite the suspected involvement of some of its in-country personnel in subversive

---

106 Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Renegotiation of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement, Appendix, 6 July 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files, Middle East. While these military assessments on Dhahran were underway, members of Congress were lambasting the Administration for paying too high a moral price for Dhahran by accepting the Saudi prohibition on American Jews in Saudi Arabia. This was deemed as the U.S. Government acting to discriminate against its own citizens based on religion. For a lengthy discussion of this issue see Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Historical Series), Volume VIII, 84th Congress, 2nd session, 1956 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), pp. 537-602. For another critical treatment along these lines see The Dhahran Airfield—What Price Bias? (New York: American Jewish Congress, June 1957).
activities. Such a possibility had both military and political ramifications. Militarily, this could jeopardize U.S. air lines of communication throughout the region, provide a flanking position for an adversary seeking to defeat the Zagros mountain line of defense, and threaten American oil interests in the immediate vicinity. Politically, an expanded Egyptian presence and operational control of the principal air facility in Saudi Arabia would increase the decision making influence of Cairo in Saudi Arabia. Quite aside from regional security considerations, the implications for American oil interests were clear enough. Accordingly, retaining U.S. rights at Dhahran was not only a mechanism for maintaining American influence but for also keeping threatening influences out. The U.S. had an enduring interest in staying at Dhahran as a means to deny it to potential

---

107 As a result of growing ties with Nasser, an Egyptian military training mission was first sent to Saudi Arabia in January 1955, which according to David Long at least temporarily eclipsed the U.S. MAAG in influence. In addition to their advisory roles on Saudi military modernization, the Egyptian military personnel were primarily involved in training Saudi paratroopers. An unconfirmed—and likely high—report estimated that in mid-1956 there were 60,000 Egyptians in Saudi Arabia, 5,000 of which were army officers, advisors and instructors. By contrast Safran cites a figure of 200 Egyptians in the training mission (p. 105). Saudis were also being trained at military schools in Egypt. During the negotiations on Dhahran the Saudi Minister of Defense and Aviation claimed that he had 1800 students in Egypt, considered by U.S. officials to be a highly inflated figure. During the negotiations the Egyptians also approached the Saudi Government with a so-called 2-year 2-divisional plan in which two Saudi divisions would be organized and trained in that time frame. On Egyptian military mission influence see Long, *The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies*, p. 36: For unconfirmed estimate of Egyptians in Saudi Arabia see footnote in *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Vol XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen*, p. 379. The 2-year 2-divisional plan is referenced in Saudi Arabia to Department of State, 7 July 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Vol XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen*, p. 386.

108 Interestingly, however, a national intelligence estimate on the importance of Saudi Arabian oil to the free world concluded that “Loss of Saudi oil would not be economically or militarily critical to the West in view of the possibilities for quick expansion of production elsewhere in the Middle East.” At the time Saudi production was at 1 million barrels/day, representing only 7 percent of the free world’s total output, while refining capacity was less than 2 percent of total free world capacity. It was estimated that in the event Saudi oil production ceased, almost immediately 700,000 barrels/day could be secured from other sources in the Middle East, with the full one million barrels/day made up within six to twelve months. These data were derived from Department of Defense and Interior calculations of Middle East capabilities under conditions of global war. One problem with the analysis highlighted by Deputy Under Secretary of State Murphy was that it assumed other middle eastern sources of supply would be unaffected by the events causing Saudi Arabia’s oil production to cease, i.e., it treated the loss of Saudi production in isolation. See Memorandum From the Special Assistant for Intelligence Armstrong to Murphy, 11 June 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Vol XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen*, pp. 375-376
adversaries. This objective added yet another layer to Dhahran and military assistance calculations.

Reflecting earlier positions, including those of Dulles, on July 9 Allen informed Wadsworth that the Defense Department was unwilling to consider the Saudi proposal of $250 million in rent for use of Dhahran. He added that while Defense was exploring possible concessions, as a general proposition at both State and Defense there was little support for rent, grant aid, cash payment or credit to the Saudis. Allen explained that State’s position was to retain rights at Dhahran on any reasonable basis, but we must let the Saudis know quite clearly that we are prepared to clear out—and mean what we say—if the Saudis feel that our presence there is contrary to their own interests. The petition by 600 people against the DAF agreement makes the field of less interest to us because we do not like to operate in a hostile atmosphere. Our experience is that the supplying of guns does not cure a situation of this kind—not for long anyway.

In arguing along these lines Allen took the issue of internal opposition, frequently used by the Saudis as a lever for getting military assistance, and turned it on its head. Rather than seeking to appease the opposition with demonstrable arms support from America, deal with the problem at its source, the U.S. presence at Dhahran. If the Saudi leadership was so strongly feeling the hot breath of opposition (or at least argued that it was), perhaps the best solution for all parties was for the U.S. to leave. While again

---


110 See footnote reference in FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol XIII, Near East: Jordan-Yemen, p. 387. Allen was likely referring to petitions that were circulated in the Eastern Province in May containing complaints about labor conditions in the Eastern Province and disapproval of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement. Biweekly Report of Political and Economic Developments in Eastern Saudi Arabia, 26 May 1956, 786A.00/5-2656, Records of the Department of State (RG59). This was followed in June by a series of demonstrations and a three-day strike by ARAMCO workers over transportation issues leading to renewed demands for better overall working conditions. In the midst of Nasser’s increasingly powerful political rhetoric and references to revolution, the Saudis came down hard, reportedly arresting 200 and having another three publicly beaten to death. This was followed by a Royal Decree making strikes a punishable offense. Holden and Johns, The House of Saud, p. 188. As previously noted, significant numbers of oil workers were from the Levant and as such much more attuned to political developments and Nasser’s influence. This posed a clear danger from the monarchy’s perspective.
undoubtedly used as an argument to counter Saudi efforts to squeeze the U.S. on military assistance, it would appear Washington was in fact prepared to abandon Dhahran.

Wadsworth was instructed to convey the following official U.S. position to the King:

As regards His Majesty’s reference to recently developed pressures against renewal of DAF agreement, we, too, are disturbed by this development. Although it is first indication of local opposition to DAF to come to our notice in 11 years our presence, we have no desire to continue the operation of DAF in unfriendly atmosphere….US-Saudi cooperation at Dhahran has been on basis mutual benefit. When, in minds Saudi Arabia, our presence no longer desired, US would not wish remain. Further, if our presence can only be justified by substantial financial assistance, question arises whether we should be there at all.\footnote{Dulles to Wadsworth, 11 July 1956, \textit{FRUS}, 1955-1957, Vol XIII, \textit{Near East: Jordan-Yemen}, pp. 389-390.}

On the Saudi domestic political front meanwhile, Saud was increasingly flexing his muscles to solidify his power base. Using his authority to appoint, he moved to fill key positions with his own sons, most notably in the defense and internal security sectors. In August 1956 he appointed his son Musa’id commander of the Royal Guard, replacing Saud’s brother Nawwaf. Saud explained this move to the U.S. Deputy Chief of the MAAG Lieutenant Colonel Woodyard as necessary to separate the Guard from the Ministry of Defense, then under the control of Prince Mish’al. Shortly after his appointment Musa’id asked Woodyard for American officers to train the Guard.\footnote{As noted earlier, this was not the first time a request for U.S. involvement in training of the Royal Guards was solicited. Prince Misha’al had first done so in 1954. It appears that between the period following Mish’al’s original request in 1954 and Musa’id’s in 1956 the U.S. was involved at some level in training the Royal Guard. A July 1954 NSC document states that the U.S. had recently expanded the Army section of the MAAG from 52 to 68 spaces “and has recently taken over the training of the King’s Royal BodyGuard.” Progress Report on NSC 155/1, \textit{U.S. Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East}, 29 July 1954, Operations Coordination Board, \textit{Records of the National Security Council} (RG 273). The only alternative explanation is that the term “Royal Body Guard” referred to the King’s own small personal bodyguard.} In December Mish’al himself was dismissed, ostensibly for reasons of health, and replaced with Saud’s eldest son Fahd. While this represented another power move by Saud, Mish’al had made himself vulnerable through his pro-Egyptian sympathies. As one student of the period noted, “Conservative-minded princes came to regard the promotion
of Saud’s sons a lesser evil than the potential dangers of Mish’al’s policy.” That held true at least for the time being.

Following the King’s request for assistance in training the Royal Guard, the U.S. Army explored sending an additional eight Army personnel to the MAAG for this purpose. The King’s intent was to have the U.S. “assist in the expansion of the Regiment and to train it to be an elite corps.” The Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations considered the cost in increased personnel for this task (estimated at $13,000/year) “minimal compared to the benefits to be derived therefrom.” This was a sound judgment, for quite aside from any political benefits and good will engendered by responding to the King’s request, this also placed U.S. military trainers and influence at the innermost ring of Royal Family security; in the words of the U.S. Embassy “to train a unit which is close physically and psychologically to His Majesty.”

U.S. Offers and Saud’s Continuing Objections

The State Department remained hard at work on an acceptable overall package with other government agencies, to include construction of a civilian air terminal at Dhahran and a modest air training program at U.S. expense as compensation to the Saudis. Dulles added that if approved, this represented the total extent of economic aid the U.S. could provide in exchange for Dhahran Air Field rights. At the end of August Wadsworth was given the specific list of items the U.S. Government was now prepared to offer in exchange for extension of the DAF Agreement. Establishing an air training program was approved, to include instructors, facilities, and training aircraft for basic

---

114 Memorandum for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Augmentation of United States Army Section, MAAG-Saudi Arabia, 27 October 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), Chairman’s File, Admiral Radford, 1955-1957, 091 Saudi Arabia.
flight training, possibly extended to advanced training as qualified candidates emerged. Construction of a civilian air terminal at a cost not to exceed $5 million was also approved, deemed an important contribution given the growing civilian traffic passing through Dhahran (then estimated at 3000 landings/month). This package, when combined with the services already being rendered by the USAF at Dhahran and by the MAAG mission, represented a cost to the U.S. of $25 million over the next five years. In addition, upon approval of a five-year extension, the U.S. would immediately release letters of offer on $35 million in reimbursable military aid already on order from the Saudis for equipment and seek to provide delivery of the material within six months. Finally, U.S. technical teams would be dispatched to work with the Saudis to determine any further arms requirements of the Kingdom within the previously established equipment procurement ceiling of $85 million (including the $35 million already on order), and to plan implementation of the Saudi Arabian Air Force training program and civilian air terminal construction programs.  

Ambassador Wadsworth met with the King and his Royal Counselors on September 11, 1956, where this latest U.S. proposal was presented. “I wish to speak frankly” the King announced upon hearing the proposal, “I do not see anything really new…it gives me nothing to show my people, no justifications for accepting.” He notified the ambassador that he would make one last offer which the U.S. could accept or reject; “I will accept extension of DAF agreement for 5 years on this basis—that, besides the $25 million, you furnish me with the $85 million worth of arms as a grant.” Putting aside the issue of even getting such a dollar figure, Wadsworth explained that an amount of this magnitude would certainly require a grant military aid agreement, something the Saudis and the King himself had consistently opposed. Saud replied that the solution was to pay him the money directly, which he would then use to purchase the arms. Later in a

private audience with Wadsworth absent the Royal Counselors, the King explained that he wanted the U.S. to remain at Dhahran as demonstrated by the fact that he had not asked the U.S. to leave, despite the agreement’s expiration. And still the U.S. was not helping him “in delicate situation in which I am placed today.” What he needed was “something to justify my position” on extending Dhahran.

Wadsworth managed to get the King to concede that $25 million was reasonable compensation for Dhahran when compared to other nations extending airfield privileges. In the parlance of the souk Saud agreed “that fair price for the carpet is 25 guineas.” But this did not address the central issue, namely the King’s need to justify renewal to his people which “was quite another matter.” Wadsworth considered this an important difference, arguing it would allow him to more effectively present the King’s “plea for ‘justification’ as being on [a] higher political plane than quid pro quo for extension [of] DAF agreement.”

So now the argument appeared to run that while the carpet was really worth only 25 guineas, the seller had to demonstrate to the onlookers his mastery in getting much more. Oddly enough, this was an argument Wadsworth considered supportable back in Washington. The ‘dance’ had descended to this level of tedium and convolution. For many of those back in Washington focused on the bottom line, these finer movements were lost.

Despite previously expressed reservations by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, another incentive under consideration remained the augmentation of the U.S. Army Section of the MAAG. This was tied to the King’s intense interest in developing his Army and the limited visible progress to date. Admiral Radford concluded that the U.S. MAAG was not presently equipped and staffed to do this. The King was also increasingly suspicious of the Egyptian military advisors, and looking for alternatives. Therefore Radford recommended that the MAAG focus on training the Saudi Arabian Army, that an Army

brigadier general be designated as Chief of the MAAG, and stationed in the capital, Riyadh.\textsuperscript{119}

During these preliminary maneuverings between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, British and Egyptian relations rapidly deteriorated with cascading effects in Riyadh. Following Nasser’s nationalization of the Suez Canal in late July, the ensuing crisis culminated in the October Israeli attack into the Sinai and the French and British operations against the Canal zone. In support of Egypt, on November 6 Saudi Arabia severed its diplomatic relations with both the United Kingdom and France, also burying for good any prospect of active Saudi support for the Baghdad Pact. Britain’s “treacherous act” and willingness to “give Israel anything it wanted” meant that “We [Saudi Arabia] can never have confidence in BP [Baghdad Pact] as long as Britain is member of it.”\textsuperscript{120} The political wreckage from the military misadventure was increasingly apparent. Far less visible was the role Dhahran played in U.S. military planning during the crisis. This brought home another aspect of Dhahran’s value; its operational military importance for U.S. regional contingency planning.

\textbf{The Suez Crisis and Dhahran}

Shortly after Nasser’s nationalization of the Canal the Joint Chiefs of Staff began formulating a number of proposed military responses, both in support of a negotiated political solution as well as military courses of action in the event negotiations failed and armed intervention was resorted to by Britain and France.\textsuperscript{121} As political events further deteriorated, senior U.S. decision makers became increasingly concerned over the safety

\textsuperscript{119} Memorandum for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, \textit{Augmentation of United States Army Section, MAAG-Saudi Arabia}, 27 October 1956, \textit{Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff} (RG 218), Chairman’s File, Admiral Radford, 1955-1957, 091 Saudi Arabia.
\textsuperscript{121} For an overview of these see Kenneth W. Condit, \textit{History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1955-1956}, Volume VI (Historical Office, Joint Staff: Washington, D.C., 1992), pp. 178-182.
of American nationals in the area and of potential threats to ARAMCO facilities in Saudi Arabia. At the time there were approximately 7,500 American civilians in the Kingdom, most working in and around Dhahran, the second largest number of U.S. nationals in the region following Israel. Given the long history of Arab-Israeli tensions and the possibility for reprisals aimed at the U.S., routine contingency planning was done on how to protect and evacuate U.S. and other western nationals as well as guard U.S. interests.  

But now with the escalating situation in Egypt, this planning moved from the hypothetical to the operationally concrete. On August 15, 1956 the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that the CINC for U.S. Naval Forces, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean (CINCNELM), in his capacity as Commander of the Specified Command, Middle East (CINCSPECOMME), take measures to protect U.S. interests in the region. This included preparing to evacuate U.S. nationals and having means “to protect oil fields and installations in the vicinity of Dhahran, Saudi Arabia,” using up to a full Regimental Combat Team (RCT).  

In response to this directive CINCNELM stated that his existing plans for evacuating U.S. nationals from the region contained in CINCSPECOMME Operational Plan 215-56, Military Operations in Support of U.S. National Policy Relative to the Arab-Israeli Conflict, already insured a high degree of readiness to undertake this mission on short notice. Regarding Saudi Arabia, modifications to his broadly developed plans for protecting U.S. interests in the region “can be developed in detail to accomplish specific mission of protecting oil fields and installations in vicinity Dhahran.” CINCNELM

122 For example just prior to the crisis the Joint Chiefs approved a planning document for these missions entitled Plans for Protective Military Measures in the Middle East. It provided guidance for detailed Service and CINCNELM planning for such contingencies. A copy of the plan is attached to Memorandum For the Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean, 27 April 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files.  
123 Contained in Confirmation of CINCNELM’s Planning Assumptions for Protective Military Measures in the Dhahran Area, J.C.S. 1887/249, 22 August 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files. Also cited in Condit, History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1955-1956, Volume VI, pp. 182-183. Beyond reference to the JCS directive to initiate planning, the official history does not contain any details of subsequent planning specific to Dhahran.
informed the JCS that this detailed planning was now being undertaken as a matter of priority.  

CINCNELM updated the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) on his interim planning on August 22. In that message he defined his Concept of Operations as follows:

1. General area of responsibility is defined as area vicinity Dhahran to include Rastanura, Dhahran and Abqaiq.
2. Priority of security oil installations as follows:
   a. First priority refineries and stabilizers Rastanura and Abqaiq, dock facilities Rastanura, Dhahran air base and oil installations Dhahran.
   b. Second priority protection oil pipelines and contiguous oil fields. This mission will be accomplished in so far as possible consistent with forces available and sub-priority to be established by task force commander in consultation with Aramco.
3. Entry into area will be virtually unopposed, acquiesced in but not necessarily supported by Saudi Arabian Government.
4. Enemy threat to security oil facilities Dhahran area limited to local mob action and attempts sabotage and does not include military action by an organized military.
5. Initial actions will be accomplished by Army forces deployed, with Naval and Air Forces maintaining capability to support operations as required.

CINCNELM went on to note that while it was highly desirable to get authority from the Saudi Government to deploy U.S. forces in the ARAMCO area, it was not essential to success of the mission. He also concluded that “US forces now present on Dhahran air base considered sufficient to prevent serious interference with landing under stated assumption that Saudi Govt will not oppose landing or subsequent operations with organized military forces.” As noted above, the CINC anticipated only mob action.

124 CINCNELM to CNO, 17 August 1956, Enclosure “B” to Confirmation of CINCNELM’s Planning Assumptions for Protective Military Measures in the Dhahran Area, J.C.S. 1887/249, 22 August 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files.
125 The CNO acted as Executive Agent for the Joint Chiefs in dealing with CINCNELM throughout the crisis.
126 CINCNELM to CNO, 22 August 1956, Enclosure “C” to Confirmation of CINCNELM’s Planning Assumptions for Protective Military Measures in the Dhahran Area, J.C.S. 1887/249, 22 August 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files.
against U.S. forces. Consequently, he maintained that much of the heavier fire support associated with the RCT could be eliminated.\(^{127}\)

The CNO and JCS concurred with most of CINCNELM’s planning assumptions, but had some important amendments. Among these was that an unopposed entry depended critically on surprise. To this was added the tactical assumption that “Occupation of Dhahran area by U.S. forces may not only be unsupported by Saudi Arabian government but may be resisted after the initial entry through military action by available organized Saudi Arabian military forces.” Therefore local mob action represented only the initial threat. Given these factors, “[o]ptimum surprise is desired in this operation to lessen or avert opposition. Therefore, secrecy in planning and execution is a paramount consideration.” In terms of logistics, CINCNELM was also directed to make “maximum use…of all Air Force supplies in the Dhahran area.”\(^{128}\) This was in part to reduce the demand and timelines on airlift.

CINCNELM responded that the change in assumptions to include the possibilities of an opposed landing in the event surprise was lost and of organized Saudi military resistance would generate much larger ground force and airlift requirements. Given these consequences, the CINC wished to know what the intelligence basis was for this change in threat. The intelligence he had access to indicated the “threat to US interests Dhahran area is slight because of King Saud’s concern over maintenance of oil revenues, his absolute control of security forces which he has promised will protect Aramco installations, and his effective banning of strikes and demonstrations.”\(^{129}\)

Military planning also involved ARAMCO. Given the desire to minimize total lift requirements for an already sizable Army force, reliance on ARAMCO facilities and

\(^{127}\) CINCNELM to CINCUSAFe/CNO, 25 August 1956, and CINCNELM to CNO, 25 August 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files.

\(^{128}\) CNO to CINCNELM, 25 August 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files.

\(^{129}\) CINCNELM to CNO, 29 August 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files.
vehicles was an option to significantly reduce total requirements as well as provide an immediate in-place transportation capability for early arriving forces. The planned force for Dhahran included an airborne infantry regiment, combat engineering battalion, airborne field artillery battalion, light helicopter company, plus combat support and combat service support elements—a force of 7100 soldiers if all elements were deployed. To this end ARAMCO officials were contacted on a top secret basis to determine the availability of these company assets. In an intriguing bit of orchestration, the Chairman of the ARAMCO Board told the U.S. military representatives that ARAMCO was not willing to voluntarily commit its assets given its ongoing need for good relations with the Saudi Arabian Government and the obvious reaction of the Saudis to any such action. However, if the commanding officer was to commandeer ARAMCO's facilities and vehicles, well that was another matter over which ARAMCO would have no control. It was with this approach in mind that the company provided a detailed listing of its facilities, supplies and vehicles to American military planners.

As events later proved, despite the conflict of October-November no action was taken to seize and secure the Dhahran area and there was no need to evacuate American personnel. But this episode clearly demonstrated the value of the U.S. presence at Dhahran. First was the leverage provided by having an airfield near critical resources and over which the U.S. military already had substantial operational control. Second, as CINCNELM noted, the peacetime military presence of largely USAF personnel

---

130 These were the force elements and estimated spaces as prepared by the Army and recommended to CINCNELM. See Memorandum for the Director, Joint Staff, Personnel and Major Items of Equipment for Movement of Army Force to Dhahran, 19 September 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), Chairman’s File, Admiral Radford, 1955-1957, 091 Saudi Arabia. Included are specific force elements, their deployment time-phasing, and airlift requirements. The memorandum was a product of the Joint Middle East Planning Committee, prepared by General Grover, former Commanding General of Dhahran and Chief, MAAG.

131 CINCUSAFE to CINCNELM, 30 August 1956, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1954-1956, Geographic Files.

132 On 7 December the Joint Chiefs ordered that TAC and SAC return to a normal state of readiness, and on 21 December canceled the alert for the regimental combat team in Europe. Memorandum for the Director, Joint Staff, Alert Status of U.S. Military Forces, 27 December 1956, 381 E.M.M.E.M., Middle East, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218).
(approximately 1200) was deemed sufficient under most likely threat conditions to secure and protect the airfield against any local resistance to initially arriving troops. Given the importance of speed, surprise, and the need to make the most of restricted airlift, having this resident capability already on the ground clearly was a valuable operational asset.

Third, the USAF facilities, vehicles and other supplies already in place would contribute to easing the deployment, reception and early support of the landing force.

The differences over the likelihood of mob-only violence versus the potential for organized resistance by the Saudi military is interesting in its own right. CINCNELM’s arguments as to why mob-only opposition could be expected appeared to rest on a judgment as to what was in the King’s self-interest combined with his control over the security forces. But the domestic and regional political forces unleashed by any such U.S. military action, now already inflamed by western intervention with Israel, could well have forced Saud’s hand, regardless of how he perceived his self-interest. It was one thing to ban peacetime strikes and enforce it, quite another to put down popular opposition to outside military intervention. The domestic and regional political consequences of doing so could well have been fatal.

As to the notion that entry would be “acquiesced in but not necessarily supported” by the Saudi Arabian Government, it is unclear whether CINCELM had in mind some form of passive collaboration on the part of the King or that the military intervention would present the Saudi Government with a fait accompli it could do little to challenge. While the record is very incomplete, it is hard to imagine the King’s collaboration, or even U.S. willingness to approach him on the subject. All indications are that extraordinary efforts were made to keep the operation highly secret for fear of any disclosure to the Saudis. What is clear, however, is the importance Dhahran could play

---

133 The level of knowledge, for example, of the American Embassy concerning the proposed operation is unclear. In one message CINCELM reports to the CNO that following discussions on logistics and support aspects with Embassy and ARAMCO personnel on a strict need-to-know basis, the American Ambassador requested he be advised of any emergency plans. CINCELM expressed his concern “that briefing of AMAMB concerning this plan might well open floodgates for requests from other heads of..."
in regional contingencies, including the need to directly secure U.S. oil interests. Failure to renew the agreement had to weigh these factors as well.\textsuperscript{134}

\textbf{Saudi Balancing Act: Supporting Nasser, Relying on the U.S.}

On a higher strategic plane, the Suez crisis effectively ended the great power status of Britain and France in the region, leaving a vacuum in its wake. While many in the region welcomed this, seeing it as an opportunity to be filled with increasingly independent Arab states and Arab nationalism, the reality was that cleavages among regional states intensified. The Eisenhower Administration also saw a vacuum, along with the imperative to fill it before Arab governments were pulled toward Cold War neutrality or orientation toward the Soviet Union. The administration saw a diminishing distinction between the forces of Arab nationalism and communism, or considered them mutually reinforcing. A Cold War lens was increasingly used to view regional developments in which the cleavages among regional states were evaluated in Washington in terms of how they helped containment or alternatively provided openings for Moscow.\textsuperscript{135} The Eisenhower Doctrine, with its emphasis on containment, could not be separated from Arab nationalism and the regional rivalries stimulated by that nationalism (and its leader Nasser).

\textsuperscript{134} In future operational planning by CINCELM/CINCSPECOMME a specific Course of Action was developed for a Dhahran contingency and formally incorporated into operational plans. In addition to protecting Dhahran and surrounding oil facilities, this included operations to “Support friendly SAUDI ARABIAN Government to deter or prevent a coup d’etat” and “Reestablish the authority of a SAUDI ARABIAN Government friendly to the U.S.” See Commander in Chief, U.S. Specified Command Middle East (CINCSPECOMME) Operational Plan 215-58, Annex A—Courses of Action, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), CINCELM, CINCEUR.

One immediate effect of Suez was to elevate Nasser into an Arab icon. This rapid rise in popularity placed the Al Saud in an acute predicament. Given popular sentiments the Al Saud had no choice but to support him, but in doing so, were increasingly endorsing a leader and ideology posing a direct threat to the monarchy. This was brought painfully close to home with Nasser’s visit to Dammam in September 1956 where he was met with an outpouring of popular sentiment by thousands of Saudi Arabs in “the biggest demonstration the Kingdom had ever seen” while the Saudi monarch Saud “was utterly overshadowed.”

This situation was not sustainable.

Military relations with the U.S. further exacerbated the problem and the dilemma. On the one hand, the willingness of the Saudis to host a continued U.S. presence at Dhahran opened them up to increasing criticism from the nationalists. On the other, it meant that procuring substantial arms from the U.S. was more important than ever—both to demonstrate the King’s ability to get the arms as ‘justification’ and to involve the U.S. even more closely in Saudi military modernization as a counterweight to Egyptian military influence inside the Kingdom. It was to prove a balancing act that would not last long.

Wadsworth had another audience with the King at Saud’s desert hunting camp on December 13, 1956. Saud handed his reply to the President’s November 16 letter to the Ambassador in which he conveyed his high expectations of his upcoming visit with the President and of his “urgent desire” for arms. To the Ambassador himself Saud was sharper in tone:

[The] most important subject now is arms. I am ashamed of how my army compares with those of other Arab and Moslem countries. All are equipped by United States, Britain or Russia. Saudi Arabia is only country to adhere only to United States. Are your delaying tactics proper way to repay our friendship?

136 Holden and Johns, The House of Saud, p. 188.
As the year closed major differences clearly remained between the two parties. The stage was now set for several more months of intense negotiations, to include direct involvement by the two heads of State. With King Saud’s upcoming State visit to the U.S. in late January, arms for Saudi Arabia would be a major priority in his agenda. The fact that the Eisenhower Administration was about to announce its new containment policy for the Middle East, with Saud envisioned to be a key supporter despite the predictably negative reaction of Nasser to the new doctrine, also meant that military assistance could not escape being linked to this larger U.S. regional strategy. Nor for that matter could it be separated from the escalating internal power struggle between Saud and Faisal. All of these factors made for the involved backdrop to what would be the most high-level efforts to date to reach closure on the future of Dhahran and long-term military assistance.

**Observations**

In many respects Saud continued the approach of his father when it came to his dealings with the U.S. He accepted the continuing need to maintain good ties to Washington and that the U.S. should be the principal source of his arms and military training. One important difference, however, was that Saud had to exercise a level of caution in these matters much greater than that of Abdul Aziz. Lacking both the experience and stature of his father, the new monarch had to avoid undue risks that might bring into question Saudi Arabia’s role as the defender of Islam, or politically threaten the regime amidst the rising tide of Arab nationalism. This translated into stronger demands and less flexible positions relating to Dhahran and what was an acceptable military assistance quid pro quo from the U.S.

Saud’s enduring need for internal reassurance also meant that military arms took on even more of a display function than in the past. These early years of his reign were characterized by repeated requests for accelerated deliveries of weapons to both demonstrate his prestige and ability to acquire advanced weapons to his people and to
help solidify his position among the senior ranks of the Al Saud and among fellow Arab leaders. Saudi mastery of those weapons was very much a secondary consideration.

Under these circumstances, U.S. efforts to restrict or pace such deliveries were immediately treated as acts of bad faith or signals of a lack of support for the Saudi regime. As a consequence, U.S. responses to even minor arms requests took on considerable policy weight. Military effectiveness considerations suffered at the hands not only of higher political priorities but also higher military ones. The U.S. military’s desire for continued access, to include maintaining close working relationships with senior Saudi leaders responsible for the Kingdom’s armed forces, far exceeded the objective of building a competent fighting force.

Saud’s latitude was also increasingly constrained by the rise in Nasser’s political influence throughout the Arab World. The Al Saud had little choice but to be at least outwardly supportive of his policies. Furthermore, some senior princes in the Kingdom were believers in elements of Nasser’s philosophy and actions. His strongly held views on independent paths from both East and West, his successful efforts to greatly reduce the British military presence in Egypt and the Suez canal area, and his vehement opposition to the Baghdad Pact did resonate. The Suez outcome of 1956 simply reinforced the popularity of these trends. And while there was no remote comparison between the long British presence and control in Egypt and the U.S. presence at Dhahran, in the increasingly charged political atmosphere of Egyptian and Arab nationalism the Al Saud could ill afford to dismiss criticisms of allowing a western military presence and the appearance of too great a reliance on western protection. This acted to further constrain the Saudis while also giving them an additional point of leverage in their negotiations with Washington over Dhahran and military assistance.

The best example of the use of this political pressure as leverage was the Saudi drive for a new five-year military modernization and assistance plan. Calling as it did for a major expansion in U.S. arms and training to the Saudis, it was pushed at the very time
there was mounting regional opposition to security ties to the West. Similarly, the Soviet-bloc offers of arms were used by the Saudis to stimulate U.S. fears of Riyadh’s having to “take the plague” (i.e. cooperate with the communists). To a significant degree Washington’s own anxiety over Soviet penetration of the region did much of the Saudi work for them, reinforced by the views of U.S. officials in Saudi Arabia as to the weight arms transfers had in shaping the larger Saudi political orientation. All of these external factors were now heavily influencing the military assistance process.

Internally, the early dueling between Saud and Faisal (and the conservatives and modernizers) was already affecting the leadership, organization, and relative role and power of the various Saudi military and internal security bodies. Saud sought to control these organizations and set their agenda through the appointment of his sons. His initial successes in doing so in turn directly influenced the direction and execution of U.S. military assistance. The U.S. had to take into account these internal political dynamics and the shifting priorities they introduced, again oftentimes at the expense of longer-term military development plans.

Yet at the same time, and in part due to growing Saudi pressures for more assistance in return for continued access, the U.S. did reevaluate the need and viability of its continuing presence at Dhahran. But definitive judgments remained elusive. Mixed signals emanated from both political and military authorities. The latter in particular seemed to wax and wane on the military importance of Dhahran. The JCS continued to link Dhahran’s value to overall U.S.-Saudi relations and the U.S. ‘special position’ in Saudi Arabia. Stressing this ‘strategic’ role, they resisted justifications for further military assistance to retain Dhahran based on military presence and access grounds alone. CINCUSAFE meanwhile deemed Dhahran operationally “indispensable,” while SAC viewed it as “most important “ though not irreplaceable. The picture was equally mixed on the political front. The State Department had strong advocates for continuing and expanding military assistance to the Kingdom. Though linked to maintaining future
access to Dhahran, the principal motivation for such assistance was to strengthen political relations. But others, such as George Allen, took a much harder line. Secretary of State Dulles was himself divided between what he considered excessive and unacceptable Saudi demands and the imperative to cultivate Saud and the Saudis in the battle to contain Soviet influence. In sum, while the more extreme Saudi demands on Dhahran were rejected, the U.S. continued to search for new proposals to keep access and the military assistance process alive.

The Eisenhower Administration, as with its predecessors, also had to navigate the delicate issue of enduring British interests on the Arabian Peninsula. This proved especially demanding with the dispute over the Buraimi Oasis, directly pitting the interests of London and Riyadh against each other and with Washington in the middle. Once the dispute escalated to military conflict, the level of U.S. military assistance to the Saudis became an issue for both protagonists, pulling U.S. policy in opposite directions. The Suez crisis had much larger ramifications, reinforcing as it did for the Administration the sense of volatility in the region, the eclipse of British and French political dominance in the Middle East, and the corresponding value of an enduring influence and military presence in Saudi Arabia. While the Administration still very much understood the important role of British political and military influence in the Gulf, Suez did help codify the need for a U.S.-lead containment policy in the region.

By the end of 1956 then, the U.S. found itself facing an ever-more complex array of considerations in dealing with Saud and the Saudis on military assistance. Just the same, time was running out for exploring additional options. The King’s visit was now imminent, while the larger march of events highlighted the risks of any further delays.
CHAPTER 6

ADJUSTING TEMPO: Responding to Shifting Priorities and Partners, 1957-1960

When unwise people stir the fire it is wise people who get burned
— Arab proverb spoken by Crown Prince Faisal to Ambassador Heath

Strategic Setting

King Saud’s January 1957 state visit set the stage for reaching some type of closure on military assistance and future U.S. access to Dhahran. But clearly the past tensions endemic in U.S.-Saudi security cooperation showed no signs of abating. Indeed, despite initial success in reaching a new agreement, the entire process would soon become even more mired in inter-Arab regional affairs and in the internal political affairs of the Kingdom. Not surprisingly, these factors shaped the form and substance of U.S. military assistance far more than any considerations of actual military requirements and effectiveness.

The years 1957-1960 can usefully be divided into two distinct time periods. The first is from January 1957 to March 1958. During this time Saud retained control over the Kingdom’s affairs and continued to consolidate his personal power. The Eisenhower Administration supported Saud, working hard both to reach a final agreement on military assistance that was acceptable to the King and to carry out that agreement in ways that accommodated the diverse needs of the monarch. To a large degree this support was
driven by the larger defining aspect of this period for U.S. regional policy, the birth and early implementation of the Eisenhower Doctrine in the Middle East.

The second period is from March 1958 to December 1960. This is distinguished by the shift in authority for running Saudi affairs from Saud to Prince Faisal. Following growing irritation at Saud’s general mismanagement of the government, and capped by a foreign policy debacle in which the monarch was implicated in coup planning against the Syrian regime and in an assassination plot against Nasser, the senior Al Saud moved against the King. While Saud was not dethroned, he was forced to turn operating authority for the Kingdom’s affairs over to Faisal. The U.S. largely welcomed the change. Saud’s incompetence had been a source of mounting concern, though Washington arguably contributed to his foreign misadventures against Nasser and Syria. Faisal was widely regarded as better suited to govern effectively. Though not hostile to the U.S., Faisal took a much harder line when it came to U.S. support for Israel and was far more inclined to put some distance between the Kingdom and the U.S. This, combined with his focus on Saudi Arabia’s internal problems—particularly its financial difficulties—and the need to mend fences politically with Egypt and Syria would result in significantly reduced plans for Saudi military modernization. The pace and emphasis on U.S. military assistance was diminished accordingly. This second period can therefore be characterized as a hiatus in U.S.-Saudi military assistance. But it would end with Saud’s wrestling of control back from Faisal. Throughout this four-year period U.S. military programs and training activities would be captive to these larger political swings.

The King’s Visit and Opening Positions

For the U.S. Administration, Nasser’s meteoric rise following Suez threatened American interests, and Eisenhower looked to Saud to counter him. In an exchange of notes with Secretary of State Dulles shortly before the monarch’s state visit, Eisenhower summed up his feelings on Nasser and the British-French attack on Suez; while “we regard Nasser as an evil influence” and “share in general the British and French opinions
of Nasser…they chose a bad time and incident on which to launch corrective measures.”

The disagreement with London and Paris was principally one over means, not ends. As a longer term response to the Egyptian leader, Eisenhower opined to his Secretary of State that

I continue to believe, as I think you do, that one of the measures that we must take is to build up an Arab rival of Nasser, and the natural choice would seem to be the man you and I have often talked about [King Saud]. If we could build him up as the individual to capture the imagination of the Arab World, Nasser would not last long.1

In point of fact there was little evidence at the time that Saud was up to such a role, even assuming he wanted it. But such high-level expectations did imply a strong incentive to support Saud, with clear implications for military and economic assistance. A further backdrop to the king’s visit was the continuing troubled state of Saudi finances. Hit first by loses of oil revenue due to the closing of the Suez Canal, this was followed by ARAMCO’s cut in Saudi production for 1957 in accordance with world marketing plans. As a result, while in 1955 Saudi oil revenues were $340 million, by 1956 this dropped to $290 million and would remain at this lower level for the next two years. The outcome was a mounting public debt, severe inflation, a drop in the value of the riyal, and denial of credit. Exacerbating the problem was the lack of any reduction in spending, especially in the King’s own profligate Royal purse.2 The Saudis would use this revenue condition as leverage to push for sizable grant military aid from the U.S., arguing that the required modernization of Saudi forces would put a great strain on the rest of the economy.

Despite these Saudi difficulties and the role envisioned for the King as a counter to Nasser, the mood in Washington remained conservative on the military assistance front. Just prior to Saud’s arrival the internal U.S. position was that grant aid of the type

---

2 Data based on OPEC Annual Report, cited in Nadav Safran, Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 87. Safran notes that in the midst of these financial problems “numerous palaces were being built and the orgy of royal spending remained otherwise unabated.”
and magnitude desired by the King was not on. In response to Secretary Dulles’ request for information on the Defense Department’s position on grant military assistance for extension of the Dhahran agreement, Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson reported back that “we should not, in view of the status of our other base arrangements in that area, offer the Saudi Government substantially more than $35 million from all sources over a five-year period.” This was, according to Wilson, in line with compensation then being given to Libya for U.S. base rights at Wheelus “which are considerably more favorable than any the Saudi Government has thus far offered.”

Accordingly, in anticipation of the upcoming negotiations and in response to the King’s latest urgent request for arms, Ambassador Wadsworth was instructed to explain to the monarch that the limited rights enjoyed by the U.S. at Dhahran did not provide a basis for grant military aid on the scale desired by the King. A more creative solution had to be found. The Administration concluded that an enhanced training program was that solution. This approach sought to address both real Saudi military requirements as well as Saud’s political imperative for visible evidence of support, all within an acceptable level of assistance. As such, it was characterized by Secretary of State Dulles as a “unique idea involving substantial contributions by US and tailored to meet long-range needs of Saudi Arabia and King’s desire for conspicuous demonstration [of the] value [of] cooperation between Saudi Arabia and US.”

In the midst of these internal U.S. deliberations President Eisenhower formally announced what came to be known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. Stressing the critical importance of the independence of states throughout the Middle East and of the need to resist communist expansion there, the proposal included the use of U.S. military force to

---

4 Dulles to Wadsworth, 7 December 1956, 786A.5-MSP/12-756, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
meet this end.\footnote{The doctrine was then submitted to Congress where it was debated extensively and oftentimes critically. President Eisenhower had previously outlined the new approach in a letter to Saud in early January before his arrival in the U.S. and its formal presentation to Congress. \textit{President Eisenhower to King Saud}, 3 January 1957, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Papers as President of the United States, 1953-61 (Ann Whitman File), International Series, Box #46, Saudi Arabia, King Saud 1957, \textit{Dwight D. Eisenhower Library}.} This further elevated direct U.S. involvement and responsibility for the security of the region. It also placed Washington on a collision course with nationalists in the region who considered the new policy a cover to crush their movement. As for Saudi Arabia, one immediate consequence was the Administration’s effort to enlist the King’s support during his visit. Needless to say, this could not be separated from Saud’s agenda for arms.

A briefing memorandum prepared for the visit emphasized that the “King’s primary pre-occupation is the equipping of his army” and that the monarch’s “pride suffers in the company of other Arab leaders because his own army is so deficient.” In his quest to modernize

He wants arms—showy arms like tanks and jet aircraft. He is less concerned about who will operate them or whether they will ever see combat. His friends in Egypt and Syria have arms from the Soviet Union. It is only proper that his friend, the United States, will similarly supply him….This is his pattern of thought.\footnote{Briefing Memorandum, undated, in Dwight D. Eisenhower, Papers as President of the United States, 1953-61 (Ann Whitman File), International Series, Box #46, Saudi Arabia, \textit{Dwight D. Eisenhower Library}.}

The memorandum went on to note that with his pragmatic appreciation of the popularity of Arab nationalism “he does not believe he can openly align himself in the East-West conflict. He thus does not believe that he can sign the kind of agreement which the United States says it requires for grant military aid.” His Majesty also deemed such an agreement unnecessary as he felt the President could freely help him if he chose to do so.\footnote{Briefing Memorandum, undated, in Dwight D. Eisenhower, Papers as President of the United States, 1953-61 (Ann Whitman File), International Series, Box #46, Saudi Arabia, \textit{Dwight D. Eisenhower Library}.} This evaluation attributed the King’s desire for U.S. armaments directly to his efforts to strengthen his personal political position among his fellow Arabs and as a sign of support from an outside power. Actual military utility was very much a secondary consideration.
The conditions under which he received the armaments (heavily subsidized by grant aid) was also politically important. The King was therefore expected to bring along a revised Five-Year Plan drawn up by the new Minister of Defense and Aviation reflecting these perspectives.  

Saud arrived on January 30 in Washington where he was met by President Eisenhower at the airport. In their first meeting that day, Secretary Dulles explained to the King and his Counselors the intent and objectives of the new U.S. doctrine as applied to the Middle East. While Eisenhower and Dulles reportedly did a “hard sell campaign” of the new policy, seeking to enlist the King as principal Arab spokesman for it, the monarch insured that a great deal of the time was spent on the more narrowly focused (but of course related) issue of arms for Saudi Arabia. If there were any remaining doubts as to this emphasis these were dispelled in a separate private meeting between Saud and Eisenhower later that day. The President records Saud’s bitterness toward the British and their policy of deliberately keeping the Arabs weak by denying them arms in

---

8 *Arms for Saudi Arabia*, Position Paper, Briefing Book for King Saud Visit, Central Files, Confidential File, Subject Series, *Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.*

9 Some authors have stressed the significance of this action by the President, viewing it as a signal of the extraordinary importance attached to the King’s visit. The record is in fact more mixed. The King was originally scheduled to be met at the Military Air Transport Service Terminal by Vice President Nixon. To Eisenhower’s annoyance, the King insisted on a personal reception by the President himself, arguing that his prestige was at stake. See Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Vol XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen*, p. 413.

10 The King was accompanied by Prince Musa’id, Prince Fahd, and the ubiquitous Shaykh Yusuf Yassin, among others. In light of the new doctrine, and indicative of the balancing act on security support to the Saudis, just prior to the meeting President Eisenhower mentioned to Dulles that certain portions of the briefing book prepared for him suggested that “we should not be over-friendly with the Saudi Arabians.” Dulles defined the situation as one in which “we are ready to protect the Saudi Arabians against the USSR, but are not anxious to get into their quarrels with Britain.” *Memorandum of Conference with the President, January 29, 1957*, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, Subject Series, State Department Subseries, Box #5, *Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.*

11 For accounts stressing the focus of the meeting being on the Eisenhower Doctrine see David Long, *The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies* (Westview, 1985), pp. 112-113, and Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, pp. 82-83. Safran, citing Sherman Adams’ *Firsthand Report*, states that “the Americans invited Saud to Washington with the aim of building him up as a counterpoise to Nasser in the Arab world.” While certainly true in a general sense, the visit was put into the works well in advance of the Eisenhower Doctrine (for example Wadsworth raised it with the President in a May 1956 meeting with Eisenhower). While other matters of state were surely to be discussed, the original objective in extending the invitation was to help bring closure to the Dhahran agreement.
any meaningful number, forcing them to suffer many indignities as a result. The King relayed as to how British opposition to U.S. arming of Saudi Arabia was primarily responsible for the lack of progress to date in transferring arms. This of course was the segue to pressuring for American arms. Eisenhower recalled Saud’s rendering that the situation has grown steadily worse over the years. His people have become more and more restless, more demanding that he do something, and there has arisen a strong element in his country demanding that he even deal with the Soviets in order to get the necessary arms….Now, he says, the question has gotten to be a most sensitive one in his country. He simply must do something about the matter. He referred repeatedly to the demands of his people and the strength of public opinion. He talked about such matters far more than one would expect from a ruler who is so patently a dictator.  

He also conveyed to the President that “When we get this strength it will always be with yours” seeking to make it clear as Eisenhower records “that whatever strength we built up for him would always be available to us.”

Following this meeting the King delivered a private memorandum to Eisenhower. One of its central themes was his need for arms and the failure of U.S. military assistance to date. Emphasizing the threat he faced from British, Israeli and Communist aggression, the King expounded on his poor treatment at the hands of America when it came to providing for his defenses. Following his accession to the throne he had made clear through many efforts his “pressing desire to be armed by the United States.” But now he felt deep regret at the limited progress, and wanted “to receive a final reply from the United States Government as to whether or not it intends to provide Saudi Arabia with the necessary equipment within a definite period.”

---


14 Memorandum From King Saud to H.E. President Eisenhower On His Views Concerning Saudi Arabian Relations With The U.S.A. And Affairs Of The Middle East, John Foster Dulles Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Alphabetical Subseries, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.
His Majesty also tied protecting Dhahran Airfield to the Saudi request for arms, stressing both the military and political importance of the Saudi role in this. The King noted that his existing forces could not defend Dhahran. He also could not delegate this defense to foreign troops, as this could trigger unfavorable political repercussions.\(^{15}\)

Saud then went on to describe his “minimum” military requirements. For the Army, this consisted of thirteen infantry regiments, along with all supporting units, in addition to the Royal Guard Regiment. As for the Royal Air Force, one hundred aircraft of various types were needed. Finally, the King stated that the Saudis had to begin developing a navy in response to the now pressing need to protect its coastlines.\(^{16}\) All of this the King had to accomplish by the end of the Arabic year 1380 (June 1961), from whence emerged what came to be known as the ‘1380 Plan.’

At a meeting the following day with Secretary of State Dulles and other State Department officials the issue of arms remained prominent. The King’s memorandum to Eisenhower served to set much of the agenda, now sharpened by the monarch’s presence. He considered his listed requirements as the basis for discussion and wanted to know if the U.S. truly intended to arm Saudi Arabia, noting that he was unable to wait any longer. In the midst of U.S. arms supplies to Iran, Greece, Turkey and Iraq he had to face his people who “have no confidence in the army” which most recently proved incapable of responding to an attack by the Israelis on Saudi territory.\(^{17}\) Surely the Secretary could understand the pressure he was under to acquire arms elsewhere.

Secretary Dulles responded that the countries identified by the King were closest to the military might of the Soviet Union, in greatest danger and therefore in greatest

\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) No doubt the King was referring to the recent actions of the Israelis stemming from the Suez crisis. Earlier in the memo he spoke of “the Israeli repeated aggression on the Saudi Coast in the Gulf of Aqaba, which aggressions were not answered by our troops because of lack of efficient equipment.” The Israelis occupied the Saudi islands of Tiran and Sanafir which were being used by Egyptian troops.

\(^{17}\) The King was referring both to the island occupations and routine Israeli air sorties over Saudi Arabia, especially around Tabuk.
need at the moment. Saudi Arabia was fortunately not in the front lines. Such reasoning was unpersuasive to the King, however, arguing as he did that he had his own security problems coming from Israel on the one hand, British-sponsored threats to his boundaries on the other, all of which kept Saudi Arabia in a constant state of danger. Unspoken were the internal sources of pressure bearing down on him as well.

Dhahran, never far removed from any discussion of arms, was now first raised by Dulles. In a perfunctory effort to separate U.S. access from military assistance, Dulles expressed as to how the air field represented the close cooperation between the two countries and as such “had important symbolic value and demonstrated to the world that it would be a mistake to attack Saudi Arabia, friend of the U.S.” But Saud was not going to buy so easily into the position that the U.S. military presence was a mutual good in and of itself. In response he affirmed his desire for renewal of the agreement provided the conditions he outlined on arms were met. Other security-related topics discussed included Buraimi, the recent Iranian seizure of the Farsi and Arabi Islands, relations with Iraq and the Baghdad Pact. On the last topic, Dulles acknowledged the King’s continuing opposition to the Pact as well as his reasoning. Indeed he explained “that it was primarily in deference to his Majesty’s views that the U.S. had not joined the Pact.” But the Secretary added his hope that these views would change as the security arrangement evolved in ways beneficial to the region and to Saudi security.

---

19 Ibid., p. 435. Interestingly, the argument that the American military presence at Dhahran signaled a strong U.S. interest in Saudi Arabia and served as a deterrent to potential adversaries did not appear in any of the military documents reviewed. One could maintain that American oil interests and the presence of ARAMCO represented a far greater symbol of national interest and hence a deterrent to attack, even granting that this was not a government-to-government or military symbol.
20 Ibid., p. 439. In his 30 January memorandum to Eisenhower Saud’s views on the Baghdad Pact remained hostile: “The Pact has divided the Arab League through Iraq’s participation. It has become a symbol of imperialistic aims in this area; hence, every support or assistance rendered to it is considered in the Arab world as support and assistance to imperialism….the consequences of this pact have been against Arab and not Russian interests. For instead of opposing Communism it has become an indirect cause for spreading Communist influence in the area.” *Memorandum From King Saud to H.E. President Eisenhower On His Views Concerning Saudi Arabian Relations With The U.S.A. And Affairs Of The Middle East*, John Foster Dulles Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, Alphabetical Subseries, *Dwight D. Eisenhower Library*. 

297


**The 1380 Plan: Centerpiece of the Negotiations**

During the King’s stay separate teams were set up to discuss various issues, most notably military and economic assistance and future U.S. access to Dhahran. In detailed discussions over military assistance, the Saudi position was laid out as in the King’s January 30 memo to President Eisenhower. It requested the following:

1. Agreement on the supply of sufficient arms for 13 regiments, excepting the Royal Guard and the Royal Air Force;
2. Furnishing armaments for 2 complete divisions in accordance with the program as developed in Riyadh, within two years;
3. Equipping the SAG Airforce on the basis of 100 planes of different types;
4. Fulfillment of this program in two years, emphasizing that the completion of regimental plans and airforce plans should follow the delivery of arms for the two divisions;
5. Development of the nucleus of a SAG Navy to defend the coast.\(^{21}\)

Two U.S.-Saudi committees were set up to address the Kingdom’s military requirements, one to examine the 13 regiment plan, another to develop an expanded military training program. They would conduct a series of intense and frequently acrimonious negotiations over the next two weeks in an effort to reach closure on the military assistance to be provided in exchange for continued U.S. access to Dhahran.

**Background to the ‘1380 Plan’**

What came to be known as the ‘1380 Plan’ was in fact a running series of new proposals under constant revision. As such, like much of the rest of the military assistance process it lacked a stable set of well-defined objectives and steps necessary to achieve them. What emerges is an oftentimes muddled picture. As noted earlier, the Saudis had been working on a revised modernization plan in the mid-1950s. The initial Saudi product from this was a so-called “Five Year Plan” of expansion consisting of five phases. The Army portion of the plan called for creating two infantry divisions, one headquartered at Taif (West) and one at Riyadh-Al Kharj (East). These two infantry

divisions would be based on a total of five and one-third regiments plus supporting services, with Army personnel numbering 15,000. On the Air Force side, the plan called for some 80-90 aircraft based around four squadrons (trainers, transports, light bombers and jet fighters) with total personnel of 1,500. It was this Five Year Plan that became the immediate basis for upcoming negotiations with the U.S. following the October 1955 Saudi notification of its intent to renegotiate the Dhahran Agreement. Further confusing matters, this same plan was also used to push a series of near-term arms requests within the already existing reimbursable military assistance program under the June 1951 agreement. So in effect the revised Five Year Plan became a mechanism both for staking out a position in the upcoming negotiations over Dhahran and for applying pressure to ongoing programs.

This Five Year Plan subsequently evolved into the 1380 Plan. According to Major General Tassan, Chief of Staff of the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces, the 1380 Plan was originally designed to be implemented over a four-year period (and therefore came to be known at the time as the “4-year, 2 divisional plan”). However, since then the King

---

22 Saudi Arabian “Five Year Plan,” 6 January 1956, 786A.5/1-656, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). According to the Air Section of the MAAG, at the time the Royal Saudi Air Force had an assortment of some 50-odd aircraft, many of them trainers. On paper the RSAF was organized into a First Composite Group consisting of five squadrons: bomber, fighter, transport, maintenance and supply, and the Royal Saudi Flying School. Its headquarters was in Jeddah, the location of the Director General of the RSAF, Maj Gen al-Tassan. Al-Tassan also served as Director General for Civil Aviation. The total personnel of the Group consisted of 41 Saudi officer pilots. There were no NCO or enlisted personnel. An additional 25 cadets were being trained at the Royal Saudi Flying School. Most mechanics were civilian and non-Saudi (e.g., American, Egyptian, German). American Embassy to Department of State, Organization of the Royal Saudi Arabian Air Force, 22 January 1957, 786A.55/1-2257, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).

23 This highlights the larger point that the various plans and agreements arrived at were more like ever-moving targets than well-established blueprints that were followed. This helps to also explain the frequent differences in the costs cited for particular programs. This point was nicely captured in a comment by the Chairman of the U.S. Drafting Committee for the negotiations, David Newsom. When pressed by Yusuf Yassin to commit to still further Saudi requirements in the future beyond those currently in the 1380 Plan, Newsom remarked that in his one-and-a-half years working on Saudi affairs “he had seen many plans and many revisions of plans” and expected more in the future. The 1380 Plan was simply the latest, and it would most likely change over the next few years. Comments in Meeting of the U.S.-Saudi Arabian Drafting Committee at the State Department, 13 February, 1957, 786A.5-MSP/2-1357, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). The Saudis proved particularly adept at regularly coming up with reasons why things had changed and of unscheduled “emergency needs.” In reconstructing the record one must therefore be careful to avoid overly ordered reference to specific plans and sequences that oftentimes belied reality.
had insisted that the expansion be carried out in two years. Given His Majesty’s repeated statements regarding the lack of progress relative to other Arab forces and the importance of demonstrable U.S. support, his decision was very likely driven far more by political needs than by practical military considerations and response to military threats. The effect of adhering to this demand now meant ever-more compression of the timetable for executing the 1380 Plan. Meanwhile, as a follow-on to the proposed 2-division 1380 Plan the Ministry of Defense and Aviation was also preparing a longer-term Army program aimed at doubling its size with a total force goal of 13 regiments, requiring the formation of an additional eight regiments beyond those in the 2-infantry divisions. This was to result in a total Army force of roughly 36,000. This latest addition was in part personality driven, set as a goal by the recently appointed new Minister of Defense and Aviation, the King’s eldest son Fahd Ibn Saud. While technically separate from the near-term 1380 Plan, the equipping of these eight additional regiments was merged by the Saudis into the February talks, and at times all were subsumed under the nomenclature of the ‘1380 Plan.’ All in all, the process resembled more a meandering camel market than any methodical ‘plan.’

---


25 Fahd Ibn Saud was appointed to the position by Royal Decree on 26 December 1956, and given the rank of General. He was in his late twenties at the time.

26 Illustrative of this merging (if not purposeful blurring) was Saud’s 30 January private memo to President Eisenhower on the topic. In it he stated that 13 regiments were required as the minimum Army force. He wanted the President’s assistance in getting agreement for the U.S. to start arming the additional eight regiments “immediately after the completion of arming the two Infantry Divisions.” At the time the Saudi Arabian regular Army was estimated to be comprised of about 15,000 men organized into five infantry regiments. In testimony before Congress Ambassador Wadsworth explained that it had taken two years to draft the new five-year plan, which had just been revised in the last few months by the new Minister of Defense into the so-called 4-year, 2 divisional plan. And of course now the King was mandating a further revision that this be accomplished in two years. Testimony of Ambassador Wadsworth, *The President’s Proposal On the Middle East*, Hearings before the Committees on Foreign Relations and Armed Services, Part II, U.S. Congress, Senate, 85th Congress, 1st session, February 1957, p. 644.
Encountering Further Frictions

The February negotiations were intended to narrow remaining differences and finalize details of the military assistance and training programs. The U.S. had already agreed through prior negotiations to support the general contents of the two division Army portions of the 1380 Plan, as well as the proposed training and equipping of the Saudi Air Force. Not surprisingly, however, the details imposed their own tyranny as did the oftentimes ambiguous compromise solutions. During the negotiations, for example, U.S. representatives expressed their concern that the two-year timetable for the two-division force was overly ambitious, especially from a training standpoint. But they agreed to supply to the extent possible all of the necessary equipment to fulfill the plan within two years as desired by the King. From a military effectiveness and absorption standpoint, this decision was clearly misguided. Just the same, discounting the King’s insistence on accelerated deliveries was not a viable political alternative. The compromise of delivering the equipment in two years solved the immediate problem, but opened the U.S. to later charges of inappropriately equipping the forces, providing inadequate training and thereby retarding progress in the actual fighting capabilities of the Saudi armed forces.  

Throughout the negotiations the Saudis proved to be tough, shrewd and resolute in pushing their positions. The negotiating record also highlights some of the persistent differences with the U.S. over both the acceptable form and substance of any resulting agreement. Much of this appears to be over minutia, and one is tempted to dismiss it as typical middle eastern ‘haggling’ to get the best deal possible. There was enough haggling to be sure, but the issues had real meaning and help provide a window into

27 The U.S. continued to maintain that once arms deliveries began, practical considerations by both parties would mean extending the timetable well beyond the two-year goal. Furthermore, the U.S. also committed to a five-year training program in support of the 1380 Plan.
28 Extensive summaries of the negotiating sessions can be found in the February 1957 786A series, Internal Affairs of State, Saudi Arabia, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
deeper concerns that plagued U.S.-Saudi efforts to arrive at mutually acceptable conditions. A few of the more prominent ones therefore merit brief coverage.

One contentious issue was the long-standing Saudi insistence on the need for new equipment. They rejected U.S. arguments as to the high quality and more immediate availability of first-class reconditioned equipment, equipment of the exact type being issued to American forces. Always mindful of being saddled with obsolete material as in the past, they also argued that there was an important and practical point of pride involved. The Saudi Army had to be equipped with new arms to avoid being “taunted by other countries that it had received old arms from its friend.” While no doubt in part a bargaining ploy, it would be a mistake to see it as representing nothing more. The political content attached to any equipment received—or denied—was real enough.

Another controversy arose over the sensitive sovereignty issue involved in the so-called “arbitration of differences” between U.S. and Saudi military authorities over when the Saudis were ready to absorb additional equipment. The U.S. MAAG had a responsibility to make professional military judgments as to the progress the Saudis were making in manpower, training and maintenance, and on that basis, recommend delivery schedules for future armaments. This was aimed at insuring the success of the military assistance program and avoid situations in which equipment piled up uselessly. The Saudis, on the other hand, viewed the MAAG’s authority in this area as a direct infringement of their sovereignty. As Yusuf Yassin explained,

since Saudi Arabia was an independent country and was paying for the arms and equipment it had ordered, it felt strongly that it should be able to ultimately decide itself on its own capability to use the arms and equipment….Saudi Arabia was prepared to accept advice from U.S. military authorities about the capabilities of its personnel with respect to training and maintenance but it reserved the right to

---

29 Memorandum of Conversation, Military Talks between Prince Fahad, Saudi Minister of Defense, Shaikh Yusuf Yassin, and Mr. Murphy at the Department of State, 5 February 1957, 786A.11/2-557, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
determine when Saudi Arabia was ready to accept additional arms and equipment.\(^\text{30}\)

This determination, Yusuf argued, “was related to Saudi Arabia’s own sovereignty, its own money and its own men.” The alternative meant “Saudi Arabia would be like a minor dealing with his guardian.” The two sides continued to struggle over this, the U.S. emphasizing the importance to Saudi Arabia of expert judgments by American officers and American responsibilities here. Shaykh Yusuf responded with proposed language stipulating that any future disagreements not resolvable at lower levels be presented to His Majesty for final decision. American negotiators diplomatically answered that while the U.S. had great respect for the King’s judgment, it was not appropriate for only one party to an agreement to have final authority over decisions. Yassin demurred; the King was buying the arms for his country and so it was not “an equal and bilateral situation.”\(^\text{31}\)

The deep disagreement pitted one of the MAAG’s primary functions of insuring arms were effectively absorbed against the political requirements of the King to demonstrate he was regularly acquiring new arms and exercising his rights as a sovereign to determine when these arms were received.

Yet another problem area was over how to characterize the relationship between military assistance and U.S. access to Dhahran. The Saudis had been fairly explicit that military and economic assistance (including grant assistance) was the price for continued U.S. access to Dhahran. U.S. negotiators, on the other hand, rejected this characterization, holding fast to the position that both parties recognized the mutual benefits of a U.S. presence at Dhahran and that this presence “was not on the basis of a rental, lease, or of accepting one service for another.” Yassin replied that while the Saudis understood the need for such an interpretation, “it was also a fact that there was no

\(^{30}\) Meeting of the U.S.-Saudi Joint Drafting Committee, 17 February 1957, 786A.5MSP/2-1757, 18 February 1957, 786A.5-MSP/21857, and 20 February 1957, 786A.5-MSP/2-2057, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).

\(^{31}\) Ibid.
place in the world where the U.S. had a military base to which the U.S. gave nothing in return for the facilities offered.” To this State Department representative Newsom felt compelled to point out

that from the military standpoint, Dhahran was of marginal value to the U.S. If the U.S. had been interested only in the Dhahran Airfield, it would not have been willing to offer as much assistance as it was in fact prepared to give Saudi Arabia under the present agreement. The U.S. saw a great deal more in its relationship with Saudi Arabia than the Dhahran Airfield itself. Dhahran was the symbol of U.S.-Saudi Arabian cooperation, not the aim....The United States would work hard to strengthen Saudi Arabia, but this did not mean that the two sides were trading one specific commitment for another specific commitment in cold calculated terms.32

Yassin considered this difference in viewpoints as “one of the most delicate problems” yet faced in the deliberations. While acknowledging the mutual benefits of a U.S. presence, he reiterated as to how the U.S. must understand that “Under the eye of its own people and its neighbors, Saudi Arabia would need justification for its political and military course of action.” The two parties thus found themselves with competing if not contradictory demands. The U.S. felt the need to portray U.S. military assistance to the Saudis and the American military presence at Dhahran as mutually beneficial in their own right, and not one as a *quid pro quo* for the other. By contrast, the Saudi political imperative was for arms transfers to be treated as concrete, visible evidence of what it was getting from the U.S. in return for allowing it access to Dhahran (i.e., a demonstrable *quid pro quo*). Only in this way could the Royal Family allay criticisms that they were compromising Saudi sovereignty. Accepting the “mutually beneficial” strategic argument would leave them exposed.33 This debate perhaps more than any other best captures the enduring nature of the dance.

A final, more general observation from the negotiations is the extreme attention to detail on the part of the Saudi team. Much has been made of the Saudi penchant for

---

32 *Meeting of the U.S.-Saudi Joint Drafting Committee*, 18 February 1957.
33 Ibid.
general understandings, of the importance attached to intentions and one’s word to resolve later details, borne of a long history of Beduin tradition. Whatever the validity of this view, when it served their purpose the Saudis never hesitated to press hard for details. On the issue of new versus reconditioned equipment, for example, they demanded itemized lists specifying which category individual pieces of American equipment fell into. Likewise, they wanted information on exactly when equipment would be delivered, and examined proposed U.S. military assistance language with a jeweler’s eye.

**Struggling for Closure**

As negotiations proceeded, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Gordon Gray felt that the Defense Department should restate its current position on military assistance to the Saudis. This was in part due to concerns that the now rapidly moving talks could lead to commitments not approved by Defense. The Department agreed to both an expanded Air Force and Army training program, which when combined with current training plans, would cost approximately $45 million over a five-year period. The additional $5 million approved by the International Cooperation Administration (ICA) for construction of the civilian air terminal at Dhahran would bring the total five-year grant aid package to $50 million, the original amount of aid requested by Secretary Dulles.\(^{34}\) As to the specific plan brought by the King, Defense warned that it involved a complete reorganization of the Saudi armed forces and contained unrealistic timetables.\(^{35}\) As to any *quid pro quo* for extending the Dhahran agreement, Gray

\(^{34}\) Gray to Murphy, 4 February 1957, *FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol XIII, Near East: Jordan-Yemen*, p. 454-455. The $45 million in military training costs was broken down as follows: Projected five-year costs for current Army and Air Force training programs, $5.5 million; augmented Air training program, $32.8 million; augmented Army training program, including an Army mapping project, $6.7 million.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.
continued to adhere to the existing position of avoiding any grant aid for military equipment and retain the focus on expanded military training programs.  

After several more days of hard bargaining, the U.S. team forwarded a proposed position to President Eisenhower just prior to his final meeting with the King. As regards arms, the U.S. would commit to selling the weapons required for the two division ground force program, estimated at a cost of $110 million. In the naval area the U.S. was willing to sell patrol craft and assist in the military training necessary for their use. Credit up to $41 million for purchase of arms was offered on a 24-30 month term, with “sympathetic consideration” to be given to similar terms for the remainder of the total $110 million purchase. As for military grant aid, the U.S. was prepared to pay for initial training and maintenance of the Saudi Arabian Air Force and for an augmented Army training program (to include assigning eight additional Army personnel for training the Royal Guard Regiment). In the case of the Saudi Air Force, this would include providing 8 T-33 aircraft and 10 propeller training aircraft on a grant basis as part of the program. Finally, the proposal called for including the $5 million in ICA funds for constructing an air terminal at Dhahran. Taken together, these activities constituted a U.S. expense of $50 million over a five-year period. In return, Saudi Arabia would agree to a five year extension at Dhahran.

While these positions were being finalized, in a typical example of Saudi “emergency” requests separate from ongoing plans and schedules, Shaykh Yassin and

---

36 Ibid. Italics added. The King was of course intent on receiving grant aid for the equipment as well, a point made by the Chief, MAAG, Saudi Arabia. See Memorandum for Admiral Radford, 1 February 1957, Chairman’s File, Admiral Radford, 1955-1957, 091 Saudi Arabia, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218).

37 These aircraft were to remain under U.S. license and ownership, but provided free of charge for training.

38 Dulles to Eisenhower, 7 February 1957, FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol XIII, Near East: Jordan-Yemen, pp. 478-479. The U.S. also agreed to some grant economic assistance via the Mutual Security Program for specific projects, in particular development of the Dammam port. Details of the candidate training programs for the Saudi Army and Air Force were prepared by OSD/ISA and are in Proposed Training Program For Saudi Arabia, RADM Bergin to Murphy, 7 February 1957, 786A.5-MSP/2-757, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). A separate attachment identified the basic requirements of the Saudi Navy, the need for a study to determine detailed plans, and the willingness of the U.S. Navy to designate the Commander Middle East Force to advise and assist the Saudis in developing the Royal Saudi Arabian Navy.
General Tassan raised a problem they needed “immediate” help on—the supply of several thousand small arms and ammunition for the Royal Guard Regiment. A further 20,000 rifles and other small arms were requested for the National Guard. The Saudis were willing to pay for these requests, but needed prompt delivery.  

Ironically, the ongoing negotiations were now also helping to expose some early contradictions in the recently announced Eisenhower Doctrine. One of the often cited benefits of the doctrine was that it would make it possible for Middle Eastern states to reduce their individual national expenditures on unnecessary weaponry. This would be accomplished through a combination of increased reliance on the U.S. retaliatory capability and a cooperative sharing of defense responsibilities among the regional states. This was especially important given the weak economies of most of these states, the instability this produced, and therefore the premium on non-military economic development. The new policy was also to reduce the cost to the U.S. of military assistance programs by making them more efficient and complementary through a combined regional defense planning approach. The Joint Staff argued that as mutual confidence set in “there comes a willingness to subordinate strong national views to the over-all objectives” of mutual defense. Furthermore, once the U.S. announced its willingness to supplement indigenous forces resisting Soviet aggression with American military power, this would result in regional defense forces “more compatible with their economies and technical capabilities.”


40 See for example Dulles’ argument along these lines in Discussion at the 312th Meeting of the National Security Council, 7 February 1957, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Papers as President of the United States, 1953-61 (Ann Whitman File), NSC series, NSC Summaries of Discussions, Box #8, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library. Dulles and Admiral Radford also made the case in testimony on the Joint Resolution before the Congress. See The President’s Proposal On the Middle East, Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations and Armed Services, U.S. Congress, Senate, 85th Congress, 1st session, p. 68 (Dulles) and p. 405 (Radford).

41 Military Planning Talks with Middle Eastern Countries, Report by the Joint Strategic Plans Committee, J.C.S. 1887/347, 14 March 1957, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218, 1957), Geographic Files.
This logic suffered from a number of flaws, not least of which was the fact that local leaders pursued arms for many reasons. Efficient procurement of weapons for collective security against a potential Soviet military aggression was likely to be well down the list—if on it at all. Eisenhower himself was now feeling pessimistic as a result of his dealings with Saud. Despite the President’s extensive lectures to the monarch on the heavy cost of maintaining advanced equipment, Eisenhower remained “exasperated over the fact that King Saud had insistently demanded new and additional military equipment from the United States.” Yet at the same time the President found credible the King’s argument that “he would face a genuine crisis in Saudi Arabia if he did not secure the latest military equipment from the United States,” especially after the Soviet offers. And so the U.S. fear of Soviet expansion, Moscow’s use of arms for influence, inter-Arab jockeying for power, and domestic Saudi affairs all conspired to keep the pressure on to supply modern arms even as the U.S. pursued a larger regional defense policy in part designed to reduce the demand for such arms. It is another illustration of the multiple factors driving the supply and demand for military assistance, and the conflicting policies those factors could produce.

At the very time the Administration was working to reach agreement with the Saudis on a military and economic assistance package, the Kingdom became embroiled in the now months-long Congressional debate over the Eisenhower Doctrine. While most of the accumulated testimony did not focus on the country, Saudi Arabia did come up on a number of occasions and usually for criticism. The ruling family itself was subjected to considerable rebuke. Much of this focused on the undemocratic nature of the regime, its

---

Middle East. Elsewhere the Joint Chiefs noted that with few exceptions in the Middle East “Military Assistance Programs should avoid providing additional military equipment, support of which would aggravate already serious economic conditions.” Report by the Joint Committee on Programs for Military Assistance, J.C.S. 1887/340, 31 January 1957, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1957, Geographic Files, Middle East.

42 Discussion at the 312th Meeting of the National Security Council, 7 February 1957, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Papers as President of the United States, 1953-61 (Ann Whitman File), NSC series, NSC Summaries of Discussions, Box #8, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.
hostility toward Israel (as well as Jews in general), and the prospect that the new doctrine would permit the Administration to provide grant aid to a King and a collection of rich princes who were squandering the nation’s oil wealth for their own aggrandizement.

“We ought to have our heads examined” responded one Senator (Wayne Morse, Dem. Oregon) at the prospect of providing Saudi Arabia with “millions of dollars of the taxpayers’ money to maintain the military forces of a dictatorship.” 43 The King’s visit during the debate drew even more attention to the monarchy.

Aside from this vitriol, there were other aspects to the debate over the Resolution that bore more directly on the level of U.S. commitment to the Kingdom’s defense and on the mechanics of U.S. military assistance to Saudi Arabia. In his testimony Secretary Dulles referred to President Truman’s letter to the late King Abdul Aziz concerning U.S. interests in Saudi Arabia’s territorial integrity and independence. Now, he noted, “there is some doubt in their [the Saudis] minds as to whether that policy can be effectively carried out unless there is some congressional action of the kind suggested here.” 44

Likewise, Ambassador Wadsworth opined in his testimony that in Saudi Arabia “we want to build up something strong which will resist this nebulous force of aggression which we sense building up.” 45 The message was that the new doctrine would help solidify the sense of U.S. commitment to the Kingdom’s defense. 46

---

44 Economic and Military Cooperation with Nations in the General Area of the Middle East, Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Affairs on H.J. Res. 117, U.S. Congress, House, 85th Congress, 1st session, p. 73.
45 The President’s Proposal On the Middle East, Hearings before the Committees on Foreign Relations and Armed Services, U.S. Congress, Senate, 85th Congress, 1st session, p. 665.
46 These statements on the need to strengthen the U.S. commitment to Saudi Arabia’s defense and territorial integrity were somewhat contradicted later by Dulles when asked why the U.S. did not simply seek a formal security treaty with the Kingdom. Dulles recalled how the Saudis, again invoking Truman’s letter, had asked for direct support in response to the Buraimi dispute with Britain. He argued that this exemplified the types of problems the U.S. could get into when boundaries were in dispute (as they were throughout the region) and why formal treaty commitments were risky. See p. 141.
An important and related legal issue had to do with the Administration’s desire to get relief from specific restrictions imposed by the Mutual Security Act of 1954 (as amended) in providing grant aid. As with previous legislation any country receiving grant aid had to agree to certain conditions. The 1954 legislative language, then still operative, included among those conditions that recipients agree to “continuous observation and review by United States representatives of programs of assistance” or alternatively provide the U.S. with “full and complete information with respect to these matters.” The Saudis consistently rejected these conditions as an intrusion on their sovereignty. This was the basis for their repeated refusal of grant aid under these provisions. In his testimony before Congress, Secretary Dulles sought relief from this statutory language, arguing that “They [Middle Eastern states] are extremely sensitive about their own sovereignty, and do not want to be accused of having bartered away their own sovereignty in order to get this assistance.” Citing the monitoring language, Dulles argued that many in the region saw this as extremely intrusive and felt it “permits you to go like spies all through our country.” The Secretary maintained that the original agreement language was drawn up in the early 1950s with the Europeans in mind and that such conditions “just do not fit the situation in the Middle East at the present time.”

While Dulles was making a larger point applicable to many middle eastern countries, Saudi Arabia was foremost in mind on this point. Relief from these conditions would remove the single greatest obstacle to Saudi acceptance of military assistance on a grant basis.

After its extensive hearings, Congress passed the Joint Congressional Resolution on economic and military assistance to the Middle East. It was signed into law by

---

47 The degree to which the Administration—or Congress—was willing to provide such grant aid to Saudi Arabia irrespective of reporting requirements was of course a different matter. The specific reporting language is in Chapter 4, Section 142 of the Mutual Security Act of 1954 (Public Law 665), United States Statutes At Large, 1954, Vol. 68, Part I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1955). Secretary Dulles’ discussion of this language is in The President’s Proposal On the Middle East, Hearings before the Committees on Foreign Relations and Armed Services, U.S. Congress, Senate, 85th Congress, 1st session, pp. 213, 386-387, 459.
President Eisenhower on March 9, 1957. With this approval, planning began for addressing the military aspects of the Resolution.\textsuperscript{48} The emphasis was on the current members of the Baghdad Pact and the ‘Northern Tier’ region and on a common defense plan for the Middle East.\textsuperscript{49} This included determining the availability of regional facilities for use by U.S. forces in the event of war. Also undertaken were assessments of individual country military capabilities. In a useful reference point Saudi Arabia, while deemed strategically significant, was considered to have “no real military capability” and able to “offer little military strength to any regional defense organization.”\textsuperscript{50}

**Formal Agreement and Early Implementation**

While the Joint Congressional Resolution was still being debated on the Hill, the meetings between the Saudi and U.S. teams concluded in February, with the King agreeing to the substance arrived at. After several more weeks of back-and-forth over language pertaining to defense of the Dhahran Airfield, the two parties reached formal agreement with an exchange of notes on April 2, 1957.\textsuperscript{51} This consisted of two notes, one public and one classified. The public portion of the agreement spelled out in general terms the understanding that the U.S. would continue to provide military equipment to Saudi Arabia on a reimbursable basis, as well as provide at no cost to the Saudis additional construction to improve civil aviation facilities at Dhahran (air terminal),\textsuperscript{52} a

\textsuperscript{48} The Secretary of Defense immediately tasked the Joint Chiefs to provide such an assessment, undertaken in *A Study of the Military Implications of House Joint Resolution 117 for the Middle East Area*, J.C.S. 1887/363, 29 May 1957, *Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (RG 218), 1957, Geographic Files.

\textsuperscript{49} Throughout the Suez crisis and its immediate aftermath the JCS reiterated its position that the U.S. should formally join the Baghdad Pact. Although now overtaken by the more unilateral approach of the Eisenhower Doctrine, regionally the military emphasis remained on the Northern Tier members of the Pact. Kenneth W. Condit, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1955-1956*, Volume VI (Historical Office, Joint Staff: Washington, D.C., 1992), pp. 163-164.

\textsuperscript{50} *Military Planning Talks with Middle Eastern Countries*, Report by the Joint Strategic Plans Committee, J.C.S. 1887/347, 14 March 1957, *Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (RG 218), 1957, Geographic Files.


\textsuperscript{52} As it turned out, construction of the air terminal was done by a commercial firm ((Oman-Farnsworth-Wright) with a Saudi subcontractor (Saudi Enterprises), but managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Robert P. Grathwol and Donita M. Moorhus, *Bricks, Sand, and Marble: U.S. Army Corps of
program of training for the Saudi Air Force, augment the current training program for the
Saudi Arabian Army and train Saudi naval personnel. The U.S. also agreed to assist in
certain development projects, with the expansion of the Dammam port receiving first
consideration. In return the Saudi Arabian Government agreed to extend U.S. use of the
Dhahran Airfield for five years from the date of signing.\footnote{The full text of the public Agreement is in Appendix D. The economic assistance package was $25 million, covering improvements in the civil airport at Dhahran, port expansion at Dammam, a survey for the Hejaz Railway, and a mapping project. See footnote, \textit{FRUS}, 1955-1957, Vol XIII, \textit{Near East: Jordan-Yemen}, p. 495. At the time of the signing the U.S. had approximately 1,300 military personnel inside Saudi Arabia, almost all of whom were USAF personnel working out of Dhahran. The small Army contingent (80) was primarily linked to the MAAG training program for Saudi land forces with detachments in Jeddah, Riyadh, Taif and Al Kharj. A small Marine presence (10) was in-country as well. Numbers derived from \textit{United States Overseas Military Bases}, Report to the President (Nash Report), Appendix, Country Studies, November 1957, p. 145.}

A second classified note, known as the “classified supplementary note” or “secret
annex,” spelled out in detail the military and economic assistance to be provided. The
U.S. agreed to provide a grant aid program of $50 million over a five-year period. Of this
program $45 million was to be applied to providing personnel and material requirements
for training of the Saudi Arabian Army, Air Force, and Navy.\footnote{Up to $35 million of this was to come out of MAP accounts, the remainder from individual service accounts to cover the costs of U.S. personnel involved in the respective training programs.} The remaining $5 million in grant aid would be applied to construction of the new civil air terminal at Dhahran, and come from ICA accounts. In terms of reimbursable aid, the U.S. agreed to sell the
necessary arms and equipment for two Army divisions, an armored group, and equipment
for the Air Force and Navy at a total estimated five-year cost to the Saudis of $135-150
million. The U.S. also agreed to provide the Saudi Government a three-year line of credit
for $50 million toward the purchase of this equipment. In sum, as originally pushed by
the U.S. grant aid was essentially confined to training materials and services, while
reimbursable military assistance was to be used for major military equipment purchases.
But Washington did much to make Saudi purchases as painless as possible.\footnote{Summary data also taken from \textit{U.S. Policy Toward the Near East}, NSC 5820/1, Financial Appendix, 4 November 1958. According to the Financial Appendix, total reimbursable aid to Saudi Arabia for military}
Support to the Royal Guard was also covered in the classified annex. The augmented U.S. training program was to include training for the Guard. Subsequent Joint Staff records, referring to the April 2 secret annex, also state that the “U.S. note included the statement that the U.S. would provide training for the Saudi-Arabian Palace Guard.” These records further note that prior to this most recent agreement the U.S. “had six army men advising the Guard units” and that an additional eight were being added as a result of the new agreement. No mention of training the Royal Guard is contained in the public agreement.

As for the Saudi request for procurement of additional major forces beyond the two Army divisions and armored group (i.e., the full 13 regiment force), this fell outside of the agreement and was not pursued at the time. Given the cost and realistic timelines associated with the two divisions and armored group alone, any major additions would occur well into the future. And as events were soon to dictate, even the two division force would go unrealized over the next five years.

**The Saudi Arabian Naval Program**

The April 1957 agreement contained the first concrete steps toward developing a Saudi Arabian navy. The public agreement referred only to a U.S. commitment to “train Naval personnel” with details “as agreed.” In the classified annex a more substantive commitment was made.

---

56 The draft of the secret supplementary memorandum is in *Status of Discussions with the Saudi Arabians*, 18 February 1957, 611.86A/2-1857, *Records of the Department of State* (RG59), Foreign Affairs of States, Saudi Arabia. For Joint Staff see Memorandum for Admiral Austin (Director, Joint Staff), *U.S. Training of Saudi-Arabian Palace Guard*, 20 May 1957, *Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (RG 218), Chairman’s File, Admiral Radford, 1955-1957, 091 Saudi Arabia, Box No. 17.

57 The author was unable to locate any original source references as to the status of the additional regiments requested by the Saudis. A search of the secondary literature (Safran, Cordesman, Long) also turned up nothing on this.

58 Recall that the original JUSSGSA military survey of 1949 included recommendations for a small Saudi naval force. Shortly thereafter the Saudis decided to postpone developing any navy and focus on the Army and Air Force.
The Saudis initially pushed hard for the quick delivery of vessels, while the U.S. emphasized the need for training and first a study to determine Saudi naval requirements. A compromise was agreed to in the April 2 exchange of notes stating that

The United States will assist in the establishment of a Saudi Arabian Navy by the initial sale to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of two new armed Naval vessels, by training the personnel for these vessels, by an immediate survey of the possibilities of further naval expansion, and by providing advice for the establishment of a Saudi Arabian Navy training program and also for the establishment of a Naval School.  

In another instance of political decisions driving military assistance specifics, the offer of naval modernization was reportedly not coordinated with or approved in advance by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Rather the decision was reportedly made “on-the-spot at the Assistant Secretary level” during the February negotiations.

The “immediate survey” stipulated in the agreement was carried out by a small team headed up by Rear Admiral J.P. Monroe, Commander Middle East Forces, from April 4-22. The Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, considered participation of the Commander “essential” in light of “the fact that the U.S.-Saudi Arabian Agreement was negotiated at the highest level of both governments.”

Officially designated the Saudi Arabian Naval Survey Board, the survey called for a

---

59 Language contained in Report of the Survey on Plan to Establish A Saudi Arabian Navy, RADM J.P. Monroe, 10 April 1957, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1957, Geographic Files. This commitment was contained in the secret annex.
60 Memorandum for Admiral Radford, Naval Program for Saudi Arabia, undated, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), Chairman’s File, Admiral Radford, 1955-1957, 091 Saudi Arabia, Box # 17. Vice Admiral Austin, Director of the Joint Staff and author of the memorandum, noting the lack of coordination referred to the naval program as a “camel’s head in the tent operation.” His judgment appears credible in that among the various JCS positions and proposals discussed throughout the months of negotiations a Saudi naval proposal was not mentioned.
62 CNO to Members, Navy Survey Mission to Saudi Arabia, 26 March 1957, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1957, Geographic Files, Middle East.
Persian [sic] Gulf Fleet based at Dammam, a Red Sea Fleet based at Jeddah, and a Headquarters at Riyadh under the Ministry of Defense and Aviation. Each ‘Fleet’ would consist of eight armed naval vessels of varying size (25’ to 173’), with early emphasis on smaller naval craft performing a coast guard function. Some ships would be purchased by the Saudis through the reimbursable aid program, others supplied by the U.S. as support and training equipment under the grant aid portion of the Mutual Assistance Training Program. Total Manning for these two Fleets and Headquarters was estimated at 340 personnel (56 officers, 284 enlisted). The construction, training and ship delivery was to be phased over four years. A U.S. Navy Section, MAAG, was considered necessary to implement the program. Consisting of roughly twenty sailors, the Navy section was to be headed by a captain, who would also serve as CNO of the Saudi Navy until the Saudi Government could fill the position. The survey estimated that throughout much of the training period American personnel “will be required to perform many if not all operating functions” of the Saudi Navy “in the guise of providing advice and on-the-job training to Saudi Arabian personnel.”

Following additional comments by USCINCEUR and CINCNELM, a final report was approved by the CNO in early July. Later that month the outlines and estimated cost of the proposed plan were presented to Minister of Defense Fahd. The plan outlined to Fahd by Captain Richard Paret, U.S.N., was estimated to involve training a total of 1,000 men (presumably to cover all support personnel as well as actual line Naval Manning).

---

63 RADM Monroe to CNO, Report of Saudi Arabian Naval Survey Board, 10 April 1957, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1957, Geographic Files. This document contains the original survey report, including details of equipment and program implementation.

64 In his comments USCINCEUR recommended that the proposed size of the Saudi Navy be considered the maximum “for the foreseeable future in the interest of balance among the small navies of the countries of the region.” The CNO concurred. Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs, Report of the Naval Survey Mission to Saudi Arabia (FINAL), 2 July 1957, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218), 1957, Geographic Files, Middle East.
and acquiring 10 ships at a total five-year cost of $16.5 million. The estimated cost to maintain the force after that was $3 million/year.  

Now with the Eisenhower Doctrine approved and formal agreement reached with the Saudis, the way was cleared to implement the new military assistance agreement. As an initiating step, on April 20 President Eisenhower made a Presidential Determination that it was in the security interests of the United States to make available $10.2 million in Fiscal year 1957 for training of Saudi Arabian armed forces. This was the first installment of the $35 million in grant aid out of MAP funds, part of the overall $50 million grant aid package. By using this mechanism of a Presidential Determination the customary requirements a country had to enter into for receiving grant aid, and which the Saudis found so offensive, were waived. That very same day in Saudi Arabia Brigadier General Dale O. Smith, Chief of the U.S. Mission at Dhahran Airfield and Chief of the MAAG, briefed Minister of Defense and Aviation Prince Fahd and his staff on the expanded five-year plans for modernization of the Saudi armed forces. This included individual presentations on plans for the Saudi Army, Air Force and Navy as agreed to in the April 2 agreements.

Shortly after the April agreements the terms of reference for the U.S. military assistance team in Saudi Arabia were revised. The term “MAAG, Saudi Arabia” was officially rescinded and replaced by the designation U.S. Military Training Mission (USMTM). USMTM’s primary missions were defined as to “Promote closer US-

---

68 To this day USMTM remains the designation for the American military assistance team inside the Kingdom. Parenthetically, several authors cite the 1953 Mutual Assistance Agreement as creating USMTM, among them Long, The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies, p. 35, and Major Jim
Saudi Arabian politico-military relations and strengthen the special U.S. position in Saudi Arabia to the maximum extent compatible with U.S. policies for the Middle East” and to fulfill the terms of U.S.-Saudi military assistance agreements. Headquarters USMTM would be in Riyadh. In terms of chain-of-command, the Chief, USMTM was the representative of the Secretary of Defense in Saudi Arabia. Nominated by the Department of the Air Force, he was appointed by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (ASD/ISA). He operated under the direction of the Department of the Air Force, acting in its capacity as Executive Agency for military programs in Saudi Arabia for the Secretary of Defense. In addition to his responsibilities for implementing designated programs and activities, including assisting the Saudi Government to prepare specific procurement requests, the Chief of USMTM was also authorized to provide advice and assistance on military matters to the Saudi Minister of Defense and Aviation. In a clear statement of USMTM’s intended role as an instrument of influence, the new terms of reference stated that “[t]he Mission should seek to become the major source of military advice and guidance to the Saudi Minister of Defense and Aviation, and the Saudi armed forces.”

The Chief, USMTM was in turn given authority over three service sections (Army, Air Force and Navy), each headed by a chief responsible for implementing his service portion of the military assistance program. These chiefs were to coordinate all activities through the Chief, USMTM, but also had freedom to communicate directly with their respective Services on matters pertaining to service-specific programs and activities.

---


This location was due to earlier Saudi administrative changes. As part of the general Saudi Government effort to centralize ministries in Riyadh, in September 1956 the Ministry of Defense and Aviation offices were transferred from Taif to Riyadh. As a result the U.S. Army headquarters element of the MAAG, then based at Taif, was also relocated to the capital. *Combined Fortnightly Review of Events in Saudi Arabia for Periods September 15-30 and October 1-15, 1956*, 14 November 1956, 786A.00/11-1456, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).

Terms of Reference for the U.S. Military Training Mission to Saudi Arabia, contained in Robinson (Directorate of Plans, USAF HQ) to Newsom, 5 September 1957, 786A.58/9-557, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
Finally, the purposes and limits of U.S. military assistance to Saudi Arabia were summed up as follows:

The Saudi Arabian military training and equipment programs are being undertaken primarily in order to promote closer US-Saudi politico-military relations, and to enable Saudi Arabia to maintain its internal security and territorial integrity, rather than in the expectation that Saudi Arabia can contribute in a significant way to Western military strength.  

USMTM’s advisory role was soon boosted when the State Department was “reliably informed through a highly sensitive source” that King Saud was looking to reduce his dependence on Egyptian military advisors. Looking to capitalize on this, State requested that ISA explore the possibility of finding additional Arabic-speaking military or civilian personnel that could be added to USMTM to further this end. The proximate cause for the desired change in the Egyptian advisory presence came a few weeks later when an apparently Egyptian-sponsored coup attempt was exposed that included stockpiles of weapons and ammunition in Dhahran and Riyadh. Orchestration of this activity, to include the possible assassination of Saudi leaders, was reportedly linked back to the Egyptian military attaché in Saudi Arabia. Shortly afterwards and despite efforts by Nasser to claim no knowledge or involvement by the Egyptian Government, the Egyptian military mission was so sharply reduced it was effectively shut down. Far more than a U.S. opportunity to exercise even greater military influence, this episode now brought the building tensions between Saud and Nasser into the open. Tensions were further heightened by Nasser’s ongoing efforts to create an Egyptian-Syrian Union. For the Saudi leadership, the prospect of such a union under Nasser raised the specter of

---

71 Ibid. The Deputy Assistance Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs approved these new terms on 26 July 1957. The ongoing U.S. program to train Saudi nationals in airport operations and maintenance was still referred to as the Saudi Arabian Training Mission to distinguish it from the military training functions of USMTM.

72 Murphy to Sprague, 24 April 1957, 786A.5-MSP/4-2457, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).

another anti-Saudi bloc forming. Indeed, this was now supplanting the long-seated fear of the Hashemites.\footnote{Iraqi-Saudi relations had been on the mend in an effort to balance the growing influence of Nasser, and were given a major boost with Saud’s visit to Iraq in May. This was followed by a reciprocal state visit by Iraq’s King Faisal to Saudi Arabia in December 1957.}

Internally, meanwhile, King Saud continued to consolidate his power over the instruments of military security. In June he appointed his son Prince Khalid, then in his early twenties, as Chief of the National Guard.\footnote{This was an especially significant appointment in that prior to this the Mujahidin/National Guard had been commanded by a tribal shaykh. Now it was brought under the direct control of the Royal Family.} Plans were also underway for the National Guard to take over certain responsibilities from the Army, among them protecting the TAPLINE and guarding the Royal palaces. The King’s sons now headed the Ministry of Defense and Aviation (Fahd Ibn Saud), the Royal Guard (Musa’id Ibn Saud) and the National Guard (Khalid Ibn Saud).\footnote{American Embassy to Department of State, Appointment of Prince Khalid Ibn Saud as Commander of the Saudi National Guard, 3 July 1957, 786A.5517-357, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).}

Throughout this period Crown Prince Faisal was weakened not only politically but physically. He visited the U.S. for several months to receive extensive medical treatment, meeting often with U.S. government officials during his stay. Despite Saud’s consolidation of power (largely at Faisal’s expense) Washington viewed Faisal as a significant leader. In additional to being Crown Prince, he still held the two key portfolios of Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. Just prior to his visit Dulles reckoned him “an important figure in Saudi Arabia” although one that was “not as inclined to support policies of the United States as is his brother King Saud.”\footnote{Dulles to Eisenhower, Memorandum for the President, 26 June 1957, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, Subject Series, State Department Subseries, Box #2, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.}

Faisal’s views toward the U.S. were complex. He viewed America as a “Christian nation” and as such the U.S. was considered a positive force for protecting the Muslim world against atheistic Communism and other radical secular ideologies. Therefore on
both religious and practical political grounds he considered maintaining solid relations with the U.S. a necessity. Yet Faisal was deeply angered that America was the chief protector of Zionism and Israel. Aside from still strongly held feelings he harbored over the U.S. role in Israel’s creation (recall it was Faisal who recommended to Abdul Aziz that the Kingdom break off diplomatic relations with the U.S. over its support for a state of Israel), he also considered Washington’s support for Zionism a major factor in the radicalization of Arab politics. In his eyes this directly contributed to Soviet penetration of the Middle East and directly threatened the Saudi regime itself. His attitude (and later policies) toward the U.S. reflected these conflicting perspectives.  

The Building Crisis for Saud: Tensions Over Syria, Emergence of the UAR, and Palace Intrigue

By late August, developments in Syria created increasing alarm in Washington. The political conservatives there were in steep decline and Damascus was now espousing a more socialist, radical line in its foreign policy. More worrisome still were the strengthening Syrian-Soviet ties, most alarming in the military sector. The concern was so great that Eisenhower dispatched a special envoy, Loy Henderson, to speak with neighboring government leaders about the threat and possible military action by surrounding countries to remove the existing regime. For his part Nasser made clear his opposition to U.S. and conservative regional pressure on Syria and that he stood behind the government in Damascus; “Any attack on Syria…would be considered an attack on Egypt.”

---

78 For a description of Faisal’s outlook and the factors responsible for it, see David E. Long, “King Faisal’s World View,” in King Faisal and the Modernization of Saudi Arabia, Willard A. Beling, ed., (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1980), pp. 174, 179-182. As Long notes, the Islamic dimension to Faisal’s world view ran deep. His mother was from the Al al-Sheikh, the most influential religious family in Saudi Arabia and the source of much of the Al Saud’s religious legitimacy.

79 Fawaz A. Gerges, The Superpowers and the Middle East, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 84-85. The proposed military action was to be undertaken by Turkey, with Iraq in support.

80 Ibid., p. 87.
In a direct effort to enlist King Saud in the squeeze on Syria, Eisenhower wrote him expressing his view that “the Communists are taking over and effectively driving out the duly constituted authorities. There seems to be serious danger that Syria will become a Soviet Communist satellite.” He went on to note that the U.S. “has no purpose or desire to intervene” and “that it is highly preferable that Syria’s neighbors should be able to deal with this problem without the necessity for outside intervention.” He concluded with a request that “I trust that you will exert your great influence to the end that the atheistic creed of Communism will not become entrenched at a key position in the Moslem world.”

As it turned out Saud would soon exert his influence, but in ways that proved extremely damaging.

The Dhahran agreement was also now drawn into this volatile mix. In a battle of the airwaves, Egyptian broadcasts charged that Dhahran was a U.S. military base. Radio Mecca responded that such assertions “seek to disturb Arab minds everywhere.” But in a reflection of Saudi sensitivity to the charge, the broadcast included an explanation of the agreement. It reported that the April exchange of letters provided for certain facilities for the passage of American planes, which are to be refueled, with limitations on times and numbers, and all under the supervision of the Saudi command of the airport….There is no agreement aimed at creating foreign bases in Saudi Arabia, and there never will be, by God’s help. These are the real facts.

The Egyptian press would later run articles asserting that American aircraft at Dhahran carried nuclear weapons and printed what it called a secret supplement of sixteen articles to the Dhahran agreement. The Saudis immediately responded with public denials.

---

81 Eisenhower to Saud, 21 August 1957, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, Subject Series, State Department Subseries, Box #2, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.
Further complicating matters, the King was once again expressing his anger at the slow pace of arms deliveries from the U.S. Minister of Defense Fahd told his father that given the absence of modern arms he could not assume responsibility for protecting the Kingdom. While certain items had been delivered (C-123 transport aircraft, five F86-Fs and two more jet trainers as part of the accelerated Air Force training program), the M-41 and M-47 tanks remained in the U.S. Nor had anti-aircraft guns and ammunition requested on an emergency basis been delivered. Venting his anger at the American Ambassador, His Majesty complained that he had taken the trip to the U.S. to continue cooperation, had been assured everything would be delivered as part of the two nations’ mutual commitments, and had supported U.S. policies in the region. Now the “US must realize that my position is at stake at home and abroad. I have no reply for those in my government who oppose my policy of going along with US. Do Americans want my people to lose faith in me?”

Adding to the pressure was Prime Minister Faisal. On September 23 just prior to his scheduled return to Saudi Arabia he met with President Eisenhower. While recognizing the dangers of Soviet penetration of the region, Faisal took this opportunity to again stress the “constant threat” of Israel in the eyes of the Arabs, and of their legitimate right to self-defense against aggression. Eisenhower explained that the U.S. would continue to act to constrain Israel from taking military action against her Arab neighbors. As for self-defense, he added that the delivery of military supplies to Saudi Arabia was now being given high priority.

---

84 Wadsworth to Secretary of State, 25 August 1957, 786A.56/8-2457, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
85 As previously noted, Faisal was in the U.S. for extensive medical treatment, although his departure from Saudi Arabia was also interpreted as a sign of political discontent with Saud’s policies. This latter view was reinforced when Faisal repeatedly delayed leaving the U.S. and then spent several weeks in Egypt before returning in February 1958. Sarah Yizraeli in The Remaking of Saudi Arabia, The Struggle between King Sa’ud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953-1962 (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1997), pp. 57, 64-65.
86 Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Crown Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia, 23 September 1957, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Papers as President of the United States, 1953-61 (Ann Whitman File),
As tensions between the U.S., Syria, and Egypt intensified, despite Saud’s loathing of Nasser he apparently concluded that siding with the U.S. in this dispute was too risky. Whatever the longer term threats posed by the Syrian Government and Nasser’s support of Damascus, these were outweighed by the immediate political imperative to not visibly align against fellow Arab states. Saud was also well aware of his heightened exposure in the aftermath of the Dhahran agreement to charges that he was a tool of Washington. Much to Eisenhower’s frustration, Saud now became involved in mediation efforts between the Syrian and Iraqi governments. By October the various parties to the dispute claimed it all a misunderstanding and the result of outside (i.e., western) machinations. But there was no escaping the fact that Nasser’s successful support for the Syrian nationalists further strengthened his Arab credentials and, in so doing, furthered the direct competition between himself and Saud.\textsuperscript{87} Below the surface of comity yet another thorn was placed.

In October Brigadier General Albert P. Clark, Jr., USAF, succeeded General Smith as Chief, USMTM and as Commander of the Second Air Division at Dhahran, USAFE. He arrived in Saudi Arabia in November.\textsuperscript{88} In another minor but illustrative example of Saudi excitability to the perceived nature of the U.S. military presence inside the Kingdom, the Foreign Ministry objected to Clark’s designation as Commander, Second Air Division, which appeared in his biography forwarded to the Saudis. The Foreign Ministry claimed that this was inconsistent with his defined role as supervising general training and responsibilities for the civil facilities at Dhahran, facilities which the Saudi Government also permitted the U.S. military to use. The Saudis further maintained

\textsuperscript{87} Gerges, \textit{The Superpowers and the Middle East}, pp. 87-89.
that this was an unwise departure from the past. In point of fact the senior USAF officer in Saudi Arabia had always been “dual-hatted,” and the Saudis were reminded of this. Whether it was simply a misunderstanding or another attempt by the Saudis to exert control, sensitivities were revealed just the same.\footnote{Wadsworth to Dulles, 10 December 1957, 786A.5 MSP/12-1057, and Dulles to Wadsworth, 10 December 1957, 786A.5 MSP/12-1057, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). This latest Saudi response also might have been stimulated by their experience with Clark’s predecessor. General Smith was apparently rather aggressive in asserting U.S. authority at Dhahran, and in the process alienated the Saudis. As a result he was removed on short notice and replaced by Clark.}

That Dhahran itself remained an important U.S. military-political asset was captured in a major report prepared at the time for the President on the future of U.S. overseas bases:

\begin{quote}
As developments in military science [long-range ballistic missiles and intercontinental bombers] may in the future reduce the military usefulness of Dhahran to the point of its becoming less important militarily, it should be emphasized that the airfield and other military activities within the country are of great importance to the United States for political and economic reasons, particularly the latter in view of the country’s petroleum resources. The chief political function is to serve as a center of U.S. influence in the vital Persian Gulf region and the Middle East as a whole. The airfield serves as an ever-present reminder of the U.S. stake in the defense of this area. The presence of U.S. forces within the country is also a symbol to the world, and in particular to the other Arab states, of Saudi-U.S. friendship and cooperation. The airfield performs an additional service as a focal point in the event action is needed to protect the several thousand U.S. citizens in the Persian Gulf area.\footnote{United States Overseas Military Bases, Report to the President (Nash Report), Appendix, Country Studies, November 1957, p. 149.}
\end{quote}

What comes through once again is the emphasis on the non-military benefits derived from the military presence.

Now that the immediate crisis over Syria had passed, Saud quickly moved to regenerate his ties with Iraq. Iraq’s King Faisal paid a state visit to Saudi Arabia in December, resulting in several economic and cultural agreements. But closer to home, Saud could no longer avoid the consequences of years of financial mismanagement. The forcing event was ARAMCO’s decision in 1957 to no longer pay advances to the Saudi Government based on expected income from royalties. ARAMCO would resume this
practice only if the Saudis got their financial house in order. Saud’s problems were compounded when he tried to secure a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and was refused. The King was forced to bring in IMF experts who recommended among other actions substantial cuts in spending. Now out of alternatives, Saud imposed spending cuts in his January 1958 budget. Aside from affecting the individual spending habits of the Royals, the need for these measures heightened concerns and anger among the senior princes over Saud’s latest mess. The monarch’s political vulnerability was elevated as a result.\(^{91}\)

Events now began to rapidly close in on the King. In February 1958 the fears of a hostile political bloc were realized when Egypt and Syria announced the formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) with Nasser as President. Despite the still limited prospects for any Arab unity, the union did have an energizing effect in the region as a symbol of the possibilities. But with Nasser at its head, the conservative Arab monarchies had to respond. Jordan and Iraq answered with their own union that same month, proclaiming the Arab Federation. This was met with derision from Cairo and Damascus. Saud took a third path. He announced that Saudi Arabia would join neither. As Safran summarized the situation, “It was clear to Saud that his country would lose its independence if it joined the UAR, would be threatened by the UAR if it joined its rival, and would be vulnerable and isolated if it did neither. Caught in that dilemma, he turned to conspiracy.”\(^{92}\)

Within weeks of the UAR announcement, a plot against the union was ‘discovered’ to include plans for Nasser’s assassination. Strong circumstantial evidence

---

\(^{91}\) Yizraeli in *The Remaking of Saudi Arabia, The Struggle between King Sa’ud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953-1962*, pp. 64, 122. Among the IMF recommendations were reductions in princes’ private expenses and curbing government building programs. Many of the latter involved personal projects (and profits) of individual princes.

surfaced that King Saud had been personally involved in financing the coup attempt. A massive propaganda campaign was immediately launched by Egypt and Syria against both Saud and the Royal Family.

U.S. assessments of the unfolding situation concluded that it was quite serious. The most alarming was by Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles who reported to the National Security Council that King Saud’s position was “gravely endangered.” He explained to the President that this latest crisis, combined with other negative developments in the region “constituted so serious a trend that unless the trend were reversed the pro-Western regimes in Iraq, Jordan, and elsewhere in the Near East may well collapse, and we may find that the USSR will take over control of this whole oil-rich area.”

The State Department worried that Saud’s position had not only been badly weakened but “We fear desperation which may have led to attempt instigate coup as planned may lead other rash measures which would pose additional danger [to] Saud’s continued reign.”

U.S. military contingency planning also got underway for dealing with a possible coup d’etat in Saudi Arabia. A JCS Directive noted that

There is possibility of overthrow of present government of Saudi Arabia by coup d’etat with or without external armed forces. In such event, or in advance of such event as a deterrent, United States forces may be required to protect United States forces.

---

93 Egyptian and Syrian sources would later claim knowledge of the plot from December 1957. According to their version of events, one of the principal “coup plotters,” Chief of the Syrian security services Colonel Abdel Hamid Sarraj, was in fact reporting back on developments. He was instructed to let the plot unfold in order to gather incriminating evidence of Saud’s involvement, which included memoranda and checks which were later displayed at a press conference. Samore, Royal Family Politics in Saudi Arabia: 1953-1982, pp. 111-113, and Safran, Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security, pp. 85-86.

94 NSC meeting summary, 6 March 1958, in FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol XII, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, p. 715. Herter to U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Donald Heath, 10 March 1958, FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol XII, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, p. 717. Heath replaced Wadsworth as Ambassador in January 1958. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs, Mr. Rountree, was much less pessimistic. While Saud’s prestige had been lessened, in terms of effects within Saudi Arabia “there is little evidence that the impact has been great enough to threaten seriously the King’s present position.” Rountree to Dulles, 14 March 1958, FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol XII, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, p. 719.
nationals and interest, to reestablish authority of friendly government and to maintain order.  

The specified commander for the Middle East (CINCSPECOMME) was therefore instructed to “prepare as a matter of priority plans to cope with a coup d’etat in Saudi Arabia.” Securing Dhahran as a base of operations was a top priority.

Whatever the underlying truth to Saud’s level of involvement, the damage was done. Despite immediate denials by the King, the political crisis galvanized the Royal Family into action. Two days after the news was made public, Faisal resigned his position as Prime Minister in protest. This forced the hand of the other senior family members. Several princes pushed for removal of the King, while others, including Faisal, feared the risks of such drastic action. After extensive internal deliberations, the senior princes arrived at a compromise solution. On March 23, 1958 King Saud issued a Royal Decree that Crown Prince Faisal would assume greater powers in foreign and economic affairs, this being the public face put on the internal struggle and loss of power by Saud.

---

96 JCS Directive 938896 to CINCSPECOMME, 22 March 1958, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218).
97 CINCSPECOMME’s Operational Plan 215-58 served as the basis for this planning. CINCSPECOMME’s initial outline plan in response to the JCS Directive is in CINCSPECOMME to JCS, 27 March 1958, DA IN 104661, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218).
98 Among the risks, Saud was still very popular in the Nejd which might rebel at any abdication, while Saud’s sons still retained formal control over the armed forces, posing obvious potential for military confrontation. In addition were the larger political consequences of setting a precedent of removal. Samore, Royal Family Politics in Saudi Arabia: 1953-1982, pp. 116-117.
**Faisal’s Priorities and the Hiatus in Military Assistance**

The foreign policy debacle along with years of government mismanagement ushered in a period of major internal political turbulence in Saudi Arabia. For the next several years Saud and Faisal would be locked in a constant power struggle over leadership of the Kingdom and its direction. Directly affecting relations with the U.S., the impact of this struggle on military assistance were unmistakable. The next two years would see Faisal’s ascendancy, but also Saud’s unremitting efforts to block the Crown Prince and reassert His Majesty’s prerogatives. This would culminate it what has been called Saud’s “countercoup” in December 1960.

But for now Faisal moved swiftly to assert his control. Shortly after the Royal Decree he dismissed a number of the King’s advisors and several Ministers. Among the first casualties was Yusuf Yassin. The Ministry of State for Foreign Affairs was now to be headed by a Hijazi, Riad Mufleh. In the foreign policy domain Faisal quickly announced a Saudi policy of “positive neutrality” and reiterated that the Kingdom would join neither the UAR nor the Arab Federation. His emphasis was on retrenchment relative to Saud’s activism and to steer clear of regional entanglements. The result was a “cooling off” period toward both the Arab states and the U.S.

Driving much of Faisal’s policy shift was his belief that the very tense relations between Cairo and Riyadh were a direct threat to the Kingdom and had to be improved. In addition to being reckless, he concluded that Saud’s efforts to oppose Nasser’s policies were widely viewed in the region as towing the U.S. line to contain Nasser’s influence. Likewise, the Crown Prince saw the Eisenhower Doctrine as an effort to create a pro-American bloc in the region that

---

100 The term ‘countercoup” was coined by Yizraeli. For scholars of Saudi Arabia this struggle and its interplay with events outside the Kingdom largely define the period of Saudi political history from the late fifties to mid-sixties.
101 Samore, *Royal Family Politics in Saudi Arabia: 1953-1982*, pp. 120-121. The Hijaz region was Faisal’s political power base.
further divided the Arabs. Faisal understood the continuing need for U.S. support but sought to strike the balance differently than his brother. As one author summed it, “Faysal sought a compromise between his country’s strategic security needs, which required reliance on a foreign power (the US), and the security risks emanating from anti-monarchist Arab Nationalism.”

In terms of internal military developments and military assistance activities, Faisal decided to reassess the Kingdom’s defense needs. This included a break in any additional military assistance activity with the U.S. The reasons for this were several. Primary was Faisal’s domestic and foreign policy agenda that relegated military matters to a low priority. Internally the paramount concern was on getting the Kingdom’s finances in order. Applied to the armed forces, this meant cutting back its funding and ‘freezing’ any further modernization. Faisal also made it clear that any substantive attention to the military’s future would come only after financial matters were under control and a formal budget issued. Furthermore, given the recently concluded Dhahran airfield agreement, there was now no time pressure on the Crown Prince to formally address the twin issues of U.S. access and military assistance. And with Faisal’s earlier approval—or at least non-rejection—of the agreement, he also had little incentive to revisit matters now. As a result of all these factors, it would be well into 1959 before any serious reengagement on military matters took place.

When it came to changing leadership of the armed forces, Faisal moved cautiously. The Minister of Defense and Aviation Fahd Ibn Saud retained his position. Some sources reported that he had been removed and then reinstated, others that he was

103 Ibid., pp. 178-179.
104 A U.S. intelligence estimate at the time concluded that Faisal “will probably not seek early or sweeping modifications of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement’ and that “complete denial of the air base to the US appears unlikely in the near future unless Feisal becomes convinced that Aramco and the US are actively attempting to undermine his position and his policies.” Implications of Recent Governmental Changes in Saudi Arabia, Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE 30-1-58), 8 April 1958, in FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol XII, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, pp. 726-728.
not removed at all. More certain is that the Commander of the Royal Guard, Musa’id, was replaced by another of Saud’s sons, Badr, sometime between April and June 1958. The National Guard apparently remained under the command of Khalid. How much this relatively limited leadership change in the defense sector represented a tactical decision by Faisal, or the King’s enduring influence and ability to block any major shifts in this power base, cannot be discerned.\(^{105}\)

The coup-plot crisis and its aftermath affected USMTM activities almost immediately. One of the other side effects of the affair was the removal of the already gutted Egyptian military assistance mission from Saudi Arabia. On March 3, Nasser ordered the 200-man military delegation back to Egypt in anticipation of his speech two days later unveiling the plot against him.\(^{106}\) Shortly thereafter Prince Fahd requested that the Chief, USMTM, along with the Chiefs of the Service Sections meet with him in Riyadh to discuss the ability of USMTM to take over the training responsibilities formerly performed by the Egyptians.\(^{107}\)

Despite this apparent increase in demand for its services, USMTM, on military effectiveness grounds, advocated a substantial cutback in hardware purchases to the

---

\(^{105}\) Samore, *Royal Family Politics in Saudi Arabia: 1953-1982*, p. 121. Faisal had strong reservations when it came to the National Guard. These included his belief that it was a tribal throwback that ran against his fundamental vision of centralized government. Continuing this separate force represented a diffusion of power and resources, counter to the needs as he saw them for a modern bureaucracy based on centralized controls. Just the same, he had to balance these designs for modernity against the enduring role of traditional tribal power and the tribes political support which he needed. See Yizraeli, *The Remaking of Saudi Arabia, The Struggle between King Sa’ud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953-1962*, pp. 156-157. The 8 April SNIE concluded that Saud retained tight control over the Royal Guard, National Guard and regular armed forces that could be brought to bear in the event of a fundamental dispute with Faisal. *Implications of Recent Governmental Changes in Saudi Arabia, Special National Intelligence Estimate* (SNIE 30-1-58), 8 April 1958, in *FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol XII, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula*, pp. 726-728.


\(^{107}\) Heath to Secretary of State, 17 March 1958, 786A.5/3-1758, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59). As a result of additional commitments assumed in the April 1957 agreement, by January 1958 USMTM grew to 300 personnel, a threefold increase since the signing. Aside from its expanded training functions resulting from the agreement, USMTM was by the new year already involved in providing advice and assistance to Saudi armored and artillery schools previously advised by Egyptian officers. Herter to American Embassy in Saudi Arabia, Informing King Saud on Progress of U.S. Military Training Program, 24 January 1958, 786A.5-MSP/1-2458, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59).
Saudis. This was even before Faisal introduced his austerity plans. The principal suggested cutback was in the purchase of equipment USMTM considered inappropriate for desert conditions (e.g., armored cars). If adopted this could reduce Saudi expenditures from the current $50 million planned to about $30 million. These recommendations were rejected by the Saudis in what Ambassador Heath described as an example of the limitations USMTM faced in guiding Saudi military planners. As he characterized it, the Saudis needed to “demonstrate equal stature and sovereignty” and its sensitivities to accepting U.S. advice “leads frequently [to] irrational decisions.” This continuing failure to eliminate unnecessary military expenditures was one of the entrenched obstacles Faisal faced in implementing his austerity budget.\textsuperscript{108}

Yet by mid-1958 there was growing financial pressure on Saudi programs and corresponding difficulties with USMTM’s operations. In June the time was approaching for additional funding of the Saudi training program. The State Department, citing the previous use of a Presidential Determination for fiscal year 1957 funding and the continuing sensitivities of the Saudis to reporting requirements, once again requested that a Determination be made in the amount of $2.1 million. The President approved this and the funds were made available.\textsuperscript{109}

However in the field USMTM was increasingly frustrated at the lack of matching Saudi support. General Clark had been regularly reporting back on shortfalls in Saudi personnel and facilities for the training mission. He requested that these be raised directly with Riyadh through diplomatic channels. In his opinion the Saudi leadership needed to know that the expanded training goals of the April 1957 Agreement could not be met under these conditions. Headquarters, USAF, as Executive Agency for military

\textsuperscript{108} Heath to Secretary of State, 22 March 1958, 786A.56/3-2258, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).

\textsuperscript{109} Memorandum for the President, 27 June 1958, 786A.5-MSP/6-2758, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). For Presidential approval see Memorandum for the Secretary, 28 June 1958, 786A.5-MSP/6-2858, containing Eisenhower’s approval of Presidential Determination No. 58-16.
programs in Saudi Arabia, responded to Clark’s appeal. The Headquarters essentially argued that the support shortfalls would soon become less of a burden given the anticipated direction of Saudi military programs. It noted that both State and Defense believed that Faisal’s austerity program would likely revise downward the previous force objectives of the Saudis. Still, it was important that the Saudis themselves arrive at this conclusion and that the U.S. not be blamed. Any formal diplomatic exchange of notes on the subject as suggested by Clark could be used by Riyadh as a basis for renegotiating the April 1957 Agreement, especially if initiated by the U.S. Therefore the guidance to him was that the “initiative for any downward adjustment in SAG force objectives and training goals should come from Saudis themselves. US can, however, assist in leading Saudis to such a conclusion and can furnish detailed suggestions on revised programs if solicited.”

The principal mechanism for helping the Saudis arrive at the desired conclusion was to be the USMTM Annual Progress Report. Submitted to the Saudis as an annual review of USMTM activities, Clark was instructed that now its primary purpose should be to present for record in palatable terms actual progress training in contrast long-range goals and to provide further evidence to SAG of need to reduce force goals….you may suggest a downward adjustment of previously agreed upon goals as one alternative but you should not rpt not highlight or recommend such a course.

Clearly reflected was the sensitivity to any charge that the U.S. was reneging on its commitments to the Saudis. It also revealed another nuance to the dance; the need for a form of circumlocution that avoided directly raising a problem that both likely recognized and wanted to resolve. More mundane if practical, the guidance further meant that USMTM’s strained training conditions would get no immediate relief.

---

110 HQ USAF to CHUSMTM Dhahran Saudi Arabia, 18 June 1958, 786A.5-MSP/6-1858, located in Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
While the status of the Saudi training program was reconsidered, all the Arab monarchies were shaken in July by a traumatic political event. On July 14 a military coup in Iraq toppled the monarch and the King and Crown Prince were executed. The new Iraqi regime proclaimed itself a People’s Republic. For the Al Saud this anti-monarchist political ideology now appeared close to its doorstep. Revealing near-panic, immediately following the overthrow King Saud sent word to the American Embassy pressing for the Baghdad Pact powers to intervene in Iraq to reverse the coup. He urged that American and British troops be sent to Jordan to protect the monarchy there, admonishing that if the U.S. and U.K. took no action they would be finished as powers in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia would not stand alone against the UAR and its co-conspirators. As to Faisal’s position on these matters, the reply came that “This is our neck and Faisal will cooperate.”

Nasser and the UAR immediately supported the new regime, and in mid-July the Iraqi Government withdrew from the Arab Federation and signed a defense pact with the Soviet Union and a defense treaty with the UAR. In the midst of these actions the U.S. deployed several thousand troops to Lebanon in response to President Chamoun’s appeal and out of fears of a pro-Nasser coup there following on the heels of the Iraqi revolution. Similar action was taken by the British in Jordan to prevent a potential coup against King Hussein. Both interventions were widely condemned by Arab leaders throughout the region.

113 As reported in an intelligence review presented to the President and Congressional leaders by Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles on 14 July 1958. A copy of Dulles’ briefing notes containing these points is attached to Dulles to Goodpaster, Staff Secretary of the White House, 18 July 1958, National Security Archives, Persian Gulf files, July 1958.

114 Although the Iraqi Government would not formally withdraw from the Baghdad Pact until March 1959, the revolution effectively ended any involvement. The Baghdad Pact was renamed the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) on March 5, 1959, now comprised of Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan.

Faisal, with his new charge of increasing responsibility in foreign affairs, had to shoulder much of the Saudi response to these events. He in fact came down against the American and British military actions, making this concrete by denying Saudi airspace to U.S. planes transporting fuel from Bahrain to Amman. Following a three-day meeting with Nasser in Cairo in mid-August, Faisal emerged proclaiming misunderstandings had been resolved between the two countries and “Thank God our relations are so good now that if there were a cloud in the sky it has passed by.” In clear reference to the U.S. and British actions, the two parties condemned “the presence of any foreign forces on the territory of any Arab state.” Faisal’s strategy was apparently to make certain concessions and efforts to appease Nasser in return for an end to the campaign being waged against the Kingdom. As part of this it was also alleged that Faisal promised Nasser he would not renew the Dhahran base rights agreement with the U.S.

All near-term tactical responses, Faisal now had to confront three hard facts and the tough strategic choices they posed: the spreading tide of Nasserism, the failure of the U.S. or Britain to protect a friendly monarchy, and further evidence that armed forces were not only unreliable in protecting a regime but a “spearhead of revolution.” Faisal’s strategic response was to move to the defensive. For external security Saudi Arabia would rely heavily on political accommodation of Nasser, including a reduced political-military association with the U.S. Internally, and consistent with its distancing from the U.S. in security matters, the Kingdom would scale back on the modernization of the armed forces, relying on other instruments for maintaining internal security. Key among these would be financial and other government reforms that would hopefully ease


\[118\] Reporting to the NSC on the August meeting, Director of Central Intelligence Dulles assessed Faisal’s performance in Cairo as follows: “Faisal was a wily character, and in these negotiations with Nasser had gone only as far as he thought necessary in order to save the Saudi dynasty. Faisal had made no written commitments that we know about.” NSC minutes, 21 August 1958, in *FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol XII, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula*, p. 734.
discontent. Cutting back on the military forces for security reasons also comported well with Faisal’s financial priorities. But there was no getting around the fact that this overall approach derived from a convergence of weaknesses, not desirable choices.

The King was meanwhile pursuing his own agenda on internal security as best he could. In August 1958 he again expressed his desire for U.S. delivery of arms to the Mujahidin (National Guard). The American Embassy was also informed that His Majesty “fully intended to proceed with equipping and training Mujahidin as recognized element [of the] Saudi armed forces complex and anticipates necessity training in use [of] these arms will be provided by USMTM.” The King had not informed Faisal of this purchase, and was planning to pay for these particular arms out of his own personal account.

**Caught in the Middle: USMTM’s Growing Military Difficulties and Mounting Political Role**

In late 1958, as part of the ongoing concerns over lack of Saudi support in the field for USMTM activities, U.S. Embassy Second Secretary W.A. Stoltzfus visited USMTM sites at Taif, Al Kharj and Riyadh. Both Ambassador Heath and USMTM Chief General Clark endorsed the fact-finding trip. Stoltzfus reported back on the poor working and living conditions of USMTM personnel and their widespread view that the Saudis could never provide the support necessary to the mission. Quite aside from quality of life issues, the USMTM personnel described the inordinate amount of time spent on housekeeping versus performing the training mission, and as a consequence,

---

119 These points are summarized in Safran, *Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, pp. 89-90. U.S. estimates of threats to the Al Saud regime from opposition groups were lowered now that the immediate crisis involving Saud had passed and Faisal was in basic control. One SNIE emphasized the organizational weakness of the opposition, concluding that while for the Saudi dynasty “the outlook is for a further accumulation of opposition from within and revolutionary stimulus from without the country…none of the opposition elements is effectively organized…we believe that opposition to the dynasty is amorphous, and that it lacks leadership.” The *Outlook in Saudi Arabia and the Consequences of Possible US Courses of Action*, Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE 36.6-58), 9 September 1958, cited in *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Vol XII, *Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula*, pp. 734-735.

their concerns over a failure to meet the commitment to build up effective military forces. This in turn would result in criticism by the Saudis. Stoltzfus believed that the administrative support problems, serious though they were, raised more fundamental issues of what the Saudis intended to accomplish with its armed forces:

For example, do the Saudis really want effective military forces in the country and if so, do they really want us to do the job? There is little evidence so far in any but isolated instances of any real Saudi interest in allowing the mission to perform its duties of training Saudi military personnel or advising in the fields of logistics, personnel, ordinance, etc.

As for the political role served by USMTM,

If our political position in Saudi Arabia depends in part on the success or prestige of the military mission, should we not go all out to ensure its success? If we do not consider that the possible failure of the mission has a political affect, and we do not want an effective military organization here, should we not face the fact and reduce our mission to a small smart-looking token force? I do not believe we can have it both ways….we should attempt to get some high level decisions on these and related points from both the U.S. Government and SAG.

That these types of fundamental questions were still being asked, and did not have clear answers, speaks volumes as to the core nature of the military assistance process as it had evolved. Contrary to Stoltzfus’ observation, having it not only both ways, but several other ways as well was really at the heart of the process. The inescapable and untidy reality was that military assistance served many purposes with many different masters, all of which were highly susceptible to shifting political conditions.

Making clean distinctions was also risky, limiting incentives for doing so. This was especially true when dealing with the primary provider of military assistance funds, the U.S. Congress. At a December NSC meeting the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, 

---

121 Memorandum to the Ambassador from W.A. Stoltzfus, Jr., enclosure to Saudi Support of the United States Military Training Mission, 3 November 1958, 786A.58/11-358, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). Despite these aired concerns and continuing difficulties in the field, USMTM continued to grow and at the end of 1958 was staffed at 363 military personnel (157 Army, 109 Air Force, and 16 Navy). Composite Report of The President’s Committee to Study the United States Military Assistance Program (Draper Committee), Volume II, Annex H, Selected Statistics, Table IX, 17 August 1959, p. 348.

122 This is not to disparage the questions raised by Stoltzfus and many others. They were valid in addressing very concrete policy issues and certainly should have been asked. But they addressed only one set of issues facing U.S. and Saudi decision makers on military assistance.
General Nathan Twining, argued that it was the view of the Chiefs that whenever U.S. military assistance was being provided for essentially political reasons, it should be clearly identified as such both at the NSC and in discussions of the military assistance program with Congress. The President responded that it was very difficult to make this distinction as “military assistance was merely a tool of U.S. political or national security policy.” Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Dillon, who was also Coordinator of the Mutual Security Program, added that when dealing with Congress the State Department thought it was in fact preferable to play down the distinction. Eisenhower was sympathetic to this view being “well aware of the fact that many members of Congress regarded U.S. assistance to foreign nations, given for political or economic reasons, to be simply ‘a give-away.’” Vice President Nixon agreed, noting that “Congress was as generous in providing funds for military assistance as it was niggardly in providing funds for assistance for political purposes.” The President concluded that when they went to the Hill for military assistance appropriations, all types should simply be described as national security assistance.  

With the coming of the new year the Kingdom released its first budget under the new Council of Ministers on January 13, 1959. Notable was the major reduction in the budget allocations to the Ministry of Defense and the Royal Guards. Faisal’s motivations for this likely involved several calculations. Dominant was probably the need for greater austerity in the budget as a whole, of which military expenditures were still around 20 percent even after the reductions (the total budget for the Saudi fiscal year corresponding to 1958-1959 was SR 1410 million). Second was a conscious security policy decision

---

123 Discussion at the 388th Meeting of the NSC, Wednesday, 3 December 1958, Ann Whitman File, NSC Series, Summaries of Discussions, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

124 In 1957 the U.S. estimated that the defense budget of Saudi Arabia was approximately $159 million per year, or about 33 percent of the entire Saudi national budget. Status of Military Assistance Programs as of 30 June 1957, DoD Report to the NSC, NSC 5720, Part 2, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 22 September 1957, p. 43, White House Office, NSC Series, Status of Projects Subseries, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.
to reduce the emphasis on military expansion and modernization, with reliance on other instruments, primary political, for pursuing the Kingdom’s security. Third, Faisal’s desire to place some distance between Riyadh and Washington in the security sphere logically would result in a reduction in the planned military modernization programs, the vast majority of which involved the U.S. Finally, there was likely some element of reducing the power of the King and his sons still in command of the armed forces, an internal political power calculation. Regardless of motives, the impact on the future of U.S.-Saudi military assistance proved substantial. With Faisal’s new emphasis and the cutbacks, the Royal Cabinet concluded that the two division goal of the “1380 Plan” was unrealizable and that a one division force with support elements was now under consideration.

Assistant Secretary of Defense Irwin visited Saudi Arabia in late January 1959. At Dhahran he was briefed by General Clark who continued to stress the field difficulties USMTM was having and their consequences on progress. This was due to “defaults on the part of the Saudi Government” and a general lack of support on housing, facilities, and transportation, especially at Al Kharj. Captain Paret, Chief of the Navy Section of USMTM, added that the recently released Saudi budget contained no funding for the Saudi navy. Despite previous plans, virtually no progress to date had in fact been made

125 Safran argues that the key factor was Faisal’s defense concept of meeting the threat of Nasser and Arab nationalism “through a policy of neutralism, appeasement, and suppression of the American connection to the point of freezing the buildup of the regular armed forces.” Subordinate to this was the military’s “double handicap” of suspected disloyalty to the regime and a base of support for Saud, both of which were added incentives to freeze military development. He argues financial constraints were not a factor, nor was supplier constraint, maintaining that “the United States had agreed in April 1957 to provide Saudi Arabia with more equipment than the latter subsequently ordered.” Safran, Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security, pp. 104-105. While this last observation is technically correct, its intended implication is not. The record does show that the U.S. was consistently looking for ways to convince the Saudis to scale back their plans and arms purchases.

toward developing a Saudi navy. Under the circumstances, General Clark himself now supported the idea of postponing a Saudi naval program. Assistant Secretary Irwin made clear his view that political considerations were the determining factor, not particular military problems: “Therefore, no matter what our military problems with the Saudis are they should be accepted up to the limit of our national interest.” Irwin also remarked that the Defense Department worried that the Saudis could come back and accuse the U.S. of not living up to its commitments. Ambassador Heath added that since assuming his new authority the year before, Prince Faisal had been concentrating on internal economic matters and had not yet turned to defense issues. The Crown Prince had recently commented to Heath that while a larger armed force might be desirable, it was not now a priority given other pressing development demands. This helped to explain why the training program was being neglected. Heath also shared the Assistant Secretary’s concerns over Saudi perceptions of U.S. commitment. But given the Saudi decision to not allocate funds to naval development, he thought the one politically acceptable area would be to gradually remove U.S. Navy personnel from the mission.

In a further effort to convey Washington’s adherence to its end of the bargain, on March 7, 1959 President Eisenhower made a third Presidential Determination that up to

---

127 Recall that Captain Paret originally briefed Minister of Defense and Aviation Fahd on the proposed U.S. plan for a Saudi navy in July 1957. As of January 1959 two training vessels had been acquired. The Navy School staff at Dammam was comprised of only one officer and seven men, with a student body of five officer candidates and 17 enlisted students. An additional 80 students were training in Egypt. The U.S. MAP activity consisted of training the 22 students. United States European Command, Report to the President’s Committee to Study the U.S. MAP, North Africa and the Middle East, 26 January 1959.

128 Report of meeting from Ambassador Heath to Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Rountree), 9 February 1959, FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol XII, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, p. 742-743.

129 Heath to Rountree, 9 February 1959, FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol XII, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, p. 743. Heath also took the opportunity in his letter to Rountree to convey the importance he attached to the diplomatic skills required of the Chief, USMTM. “The personality and ability of the Chief of the Military Training Mission are of comparable importance, in our relations with the Saudi Arabia to that of the personality and ability of the Ambassador.” Given this, Heath asked Rountree to consider the Department’s role in helping to select General Clark’s successor, fearing the tendency “for the Air Force to appoint a West Pointer [sic] of requisite seniority and availability rather than to make an effort to select someone capable of exerting a measure of influence on the senior echelons of the Saudi Officer Corps.” See above pp. 744-745.
$12.7 million be provided to the Saudis for training and associated equipment out of fiscal year 1959 MAP funds. As in the two prior cases, this determination waived the normal reporting requirements for grant aid recipients under the Mutual Security Act of 1954.\textsuperscript{130}

Likewise U.S. political authorities continued to work to accommodate Saudi sovereignty sensitivities in military assistance matters. In the latest example, a proposed change in U.S. military jurisdiction over USMTM having nothing to do with the training mission per se triggered a heated debate over political repercussions. In an effort to unify and streamline military command relations in the late 1950s, the Administration decided to discontinue the use of military departments as Executive Agents for unified and specified commands.\textsuperscript{131} A side-effect of this decision was that USMTM, traditionally under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Air Force acting as Executive Agent, would now fall under the U.S. Commander-in-Chief, European Command (USCINCEUR). The State Department immediately registered concerns over this change and requested the Defense Department to reconsider this particular case. It cited the extreme sensitivity of the Saudis to any indication of a link between U.S. military activities in the Kingdom and the Baghdad Pact or NATO countries. To drive the point home, State noted that the Saudis refused to recognize the designation of the Second Air Division at Dhahran, under the command of U.S. Air Forces, Europe. Now USMTM itself was being placed directly under a U.S. military command, a sure source of future friction. The existing arrangement avoided these difficulties.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{130} Memorandum for the Secretary of State from President Eisenhower, 7 March 1959, 786A.5 MSP/3-759, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). As a benchmark, the Administration was planning to spend a total of $447.9 million in military assistance in FY 1959 for nations in the greater Near East region, including Greece and Turkey. These latter two accounted for 63 percent of the total. See testimony of William Rountree in \textit{Mutual Security Act of 1958}, U.S. Congress, Senate, Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations. 85th Congress, 2nd session, March-April 1958, p. 289.


USMTM’s field conditions meanwhile continued to deteriorate. The lack of administrative support previously identified by General Clark worsened throughout the year. It was now estimated that the Chief of the Army Section of USMTM was spending almost half of his time trying to resolve basic administrative matters at the expense of his training responsibilities. This was attributed to different factors. The most benign and straightforward explanation was that this reflected the general lack of Saudi capabilities and attention to such matters as housing, office conditions, local transportation and the like, with USMTM being no worse off — and likely in much better shape — than what was provided to the Saudis themselves. The continuing cutbacks to the defense budget and general inattention of the senior Saudi leadership to military matters simply added to the difficulties. A more politically-charged interpretation of this “inattention” held that the senior Saudi leadership, concerned over the loyalty of the Army (heightened by the recent military coup in Iraq), did not want to see an effective force developed. Therefore USMTM’s difficulties were the result of a deliberate policy by the Saudis.

Regarding this second view, a source identified as “fairly close to the Royal Family” explained to USMTM personnel that this was at the root of their problems, including the unwillingness of senior Saudi leaders to meet with General Clark or Ambassador Heath on matters related to the USMTM program. Setting aside the credibility of the source, the train of thinking described is worth capturing and ran as follows. Neither Faisal nor Saud wanted to increase the actual fighting capability of the Army for fear of its loyalty. The price for this lack of capability was not deemed high by the Saudi leaders because any external military threat to the Saudi regime would be met by the U.S. USMTM itself “was a necessary instrument to justify keeping an American air base in Saudi Arabia,” the *quid pro quo* the Royal Family could hold up to its anti-Western Arab neighbors to reduce their criticism for allowing the Americans continued access to Dhahran. As such, its presence and activities were a politically important cover to maintain, as long as they did not meet the stated objective of building up Saudi
fighting capability. By this logic the hobbled Saudi support for USMTM, along with its unwillingness to address USMTM’s concerns over effective operations in the field, made perfectly good sense.\footnote{Heath to Clark, 21 May 1959, enclosure to Heath to State Department, 23 May 1959, 786A.5/5-2359, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG 59). Ambassador Heath remarked to Clark that he hoped the informant’s information was wrong “but I am afraid he may, in the main, be right.”}

At a final meeting with Prince Faisal prior to his departure from Saudi Arabia, General Clark presented his closing views on issues facing USMTM and the Saudi military, including the long-pending support difficulties. Faisal responded that during most of General Clark’s tenure he (Faisal) had regrettably been preoccupied with a series of crises, most notably dealing with Saudi Arabia’s financial situation. These had to take priority in order to establish a sound future course for the Kingdom. As for General Clark’s observations on ways to improve development of the Saudi armed forces, the Crown Prince noted that the Saudi Government had high hopes for developing a modern Army, Air Force and Navy. A realistic appraisal, however, led him to conclude that the Kingdom was currently in no position to meet these high goals. Required was a military program more in line with actual Saudi potential. And in a clear signal of his intent to further defer the subject, he remarked as to how he did not consider it possible to discuss Clark’s concrete recommendations at the time but hoped progress could be made the following year. Ambassador Heath, who attended the meeting, later summarized that while no decisions were taken by Faisal his statements represented the “first realistic high level official statement of Saudi desires for modern armed force.” If Faisal was able to maintain his present course in ordering Saudi affairs, Heath concluded that “painfully slow but steady progress may be possible toward USMTM goals of reorganizing Saudi military services into effective compact armed force.”\footnote{Heath to Secretary of State, 4 July 1959, 786A.5/7-459, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG59). In addition to the support issues, General Clark was especially frustrated by basic planning deficiencies. As he later related, “I tried very hard to get them to sit down and do a little planning. What are your threats? How were you going to meet the threat?….How are you going to move the army to the threatened areas? How much artillery will you need? How many days supply of ammo? All these things were completely strange concepts for them, and we never were able to get to first base.” Clark was even more critical of the}
Brigadier General James C. McGehee, the new Chief of USMTM, as one of his first orders of business conducted a field tour. He concluded that the Saudis did not want the mission. Ambassador Heath strongly disagreed, citing the expressed satisfaction with the mission by King Saud, its admittedly less enthusiastic support by Crown Prince Faisal, as well as the cooperation of General Tassen (Commander-in-Chief of the Saudi Armed Forces).  

In strictly military terms, USMTM was now overseeing at best a very modest modernization of the Saudi armed forces. In 1959 the Saudi Arabian order of battle was estimated to consist of ground forces of 31,000, divided equally between the Regular Army and the Tribal Militia/Mujahadin. Regular Army forces consisted of approximately six infantry regiments, plus the Royal Guard Regiment, along with a handful of other battalions and two light tank companies. The Royal Guard Regiment remained based in Riyadh, with the infantry regiments deployed around Tabuk, the Taif-Mecca-Medina area, and Al-Kharj as shown in Map 6.1. The Saudis also had a small number of infantry troops deployed in Jordan stemming from the 1956 Suez war and the internal threat to the Jordanian monarchy in 1957. Major equipment items included around 300 artillery pieces of various quality and age, 54 tanks (U.S. M-41 and M-47s), and about 150 armored and scout cars. The Ministry of Defense was also in the midst of once again rethinking its plans for the Army. Following the Saudi decision not to pursue the goals set forth in the “1380 Plan,” MODA turned to USMTM for advice on a

---

Saudi air force. This all led him to conclude “it was a little difficult to see how they would ever get to the point where they had a presentable military force in the world. We had a lot of questions in our mind.” *U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview*, Lt Gen Albert P. Clark, 20-21 June 1979, Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Office of Air Force History, pp. 200-201.  


modified Army modernization plan. A reorganization plan developed by USMTM recommended a force of 30,000 men to be organized into 3 brigades of three battle groups each plus support elements, along the lines of current U.S. battle groups. Initially, the Army would be equipped with weapons already on hand in the country to minimize additional purchases. With these existing inventories it was estimated the Saudis could field and support 4 battle groups. On December 3, 1959, the Saudi Arabian Army staff announced its decision to accept the proposed reorganization which it designated Plan Green.  

The Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) still remained part of the Army and consisted of approximately 560 personnel (69 pilots, 363 non-airmen and 129 cadets) of the 1st Composite Group based out of Jeddah, with about 60 Saudi-owned military aircraft in the Kingdom, plus about another 30-odd military aircraft assigned to the U.S. training mission to support the RSAF training program, the title for which was still retained by the U.S. RSAF tactical units consisted of the 1st Fighter-Bomber Squadron, the 1st Light Bomber Squadron, and the 1st Transport Squadron, all stationed at Jeddah. As to capabilities, the RSAF was rated as “still an inferior fighting force poorly equipped, trained and organized, with practically no capabilities for tactical support of the ground forces.” No air defense capability existed, with only 2 early warning radars located at Dhahran and an inadequate communications system. An airfield construction program called for the development of five jet airbases for fighter and bomber use at Jeddah,

---


138 Recall that this mission of tactical support was the primary one recommended for the Saudi air force by the original 1949 U.S. Military Survey.
Medina, Riyadh, Taif and Al Kharj. As for the Saudi Navy, it was estimated to have 150 personnel, but no ships.\textsuperscript{139} All-in-all, an underwhelming output.

**Resistance to Faisal and His Reforms**

Not unlike the resentment Saud created among other princes in appointing his sons to so many key positions, Faisal now created his own set of resentments by controlling various elements of the Saudi Government. In addition to being Prime Minister, by mid-1959 he held the portfolios for Foreign Affairs, Finance, Commerce and Interior.\textsuperscript{140} His austerity measures also created rancor, both from those who saw their personal funds curtailed and from the reformers who thought critical investments were being ignored. Included in this latter group were younger princes now turned political activists and heavily influenced by Nasser and Arab nationalism. Their agenda was not to overturn the monarchy, but transform it in ways that better served the needs of the nation and, in so doing, insured survival of the Royal Family. This group, which came to be known as the ‘liberal’ or ‘free’ princes, counted among its graybeards Princes Talal and Nawwaf, both brothers of the King. Talal and Nawwaf had particular stature having served under Abdul Aziz (Talal as Minister of Communications, Nawwaf as Commander of the Royal Guard). This group of Royals became increasingly active in pushing their agenda in the late 1950s. Collectively they became a third force in Saudi politics and as


\textsuperscript{140} According to Samore, Faisal also picked up the Defense portfolio following the resignation of Fahd ibn Saud as Minister of Defense in April 1959. Samore states that Faisal held this until Saud set up a new government in December 1960, when the King appointed his other son, Muhammad ibn Saud, to the position. Yizraeli, citing U.S. State Department sources, states that Saud effectively resisted Faisal’s efforts to replace Fahd and that Fahd held the post of Defense Minister until Muhammad ibn Saud’s appointment. The U.S. military country study for Saudi Arabia published in mid-1959 continued to list Fahd as the Minister of Defense. Samore, Royal Family Politics in Saudi Arabia: 1953-1982, 1983, p. 129, 141; Yizraeli, The Remaking of Saudi Arabia, The Struggle between King Sa’ud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953-1962, p. 110; CINCNELM Country Study, Saudi Arabia, Fleet Intelligence Center, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean, 1959, Chapter XI, Biographies.
such influential in the Saud-Faisal competition. King Saud, searching for ways to reassert his authority, was the first to embrace the reformist agenda of the liberal princes. Despite the fact that Saud himself eased senior members like Talal and Nwwaf out during the early years of his rule, their anger was far greater toward the ‘reformer’ Faisal who now excluded them. This anger and resentment made Saud’s coalition-building against his brother easier.  

Throughout 1959 and into the new year Washington continued to make clear its support of Faisal and his economic reforms. Well aware of the ongoing and now escalating power struggle between Saud and Faisal, the U.S. Government sought to avoid conveying any sense to the King that it would welcome a reassertion of his previous authority. As Herter instructed Ambassador Heath, “It should be made clear to all, including King, that USG has great respect for Faisal and is firmly convinced financial reforms he has instituted are in best interests of Saudi Arabia.” While recognizing the need for a “balanced public image” of impartiality between the two and Washington’s desire to “maintain friendly relations with all major protagonists,” Herter was clear on the State Department’s position. A move by Saud against Faisal risked jeopardizing economic reforms and could even trigger organized political opposition. Nothing should be done to encourage him. To place distance and avoid engaging the King on policy matters, substantive meetings with him were diplomatically deferred. Sensitivities were

---

141 Samore, *Royal Family Politics in Saudi Arabia: 1953-1982*, pp. 129-132. Contributing to Saud’s efforts to rebuild his image along these lines, from August 31 to September 3 1959 he visited Cairo and met with Nasser in their first meeting since 1958. Saud emerged from the meetings claiming “full cooperation” between the UAR and Saudi Arabia, including maintaining the Suez Canal blockade against Israel. Mostyn, *Major Political Events in Iran, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, 1945-1990*, p. 69.

142 The progress already made by Faisal was considered quite significant by U.S. analysts. But also recognized was the potential for both traditionalists and reformers to become disenchanted with the imposed austerity measures. See *Faysal’s Financial Reforms, March 1958–January 1960*, Intelligence Report No. 8215, 28 January 1960, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59).

143 U.S. intelligence estimates at the time identified various efforts by Saud to build a coalition to challenge Faisal, concluding it was very likely such a challenge would take place. See for example *The Outlook for Saudi Arabia*, National Intelligence Estimate (NIE 36.6-60), 19 April 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Vol XII, *Near East Region: Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula*, pp. 759-761.
such that the State Department feared any such meetings could send a wrong signal to both the King and to Faisal, the latter perhaps seeing it as an effort to circumvent his authority, even casting the Ambassador in a conspiratorial role.\(^\text{144}\)

By early 1960 U.S. authorities also began the now ritual worry over the future of Dhahran and the next anticipated rounds of negotiations on its renewal.\(^\text{145}\) Into its third year, the five-year extension of U.S. use of Dhahran Airfield meant that many of the perennial issues soon would need re-addressing. The military was once again asked to evaluate the importance of Dhahran as a means to determining the price the U.S. was willing to pay to retain future access. Responding to the original request from Deputy Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Raymond Hare, the Joint Chiefs concluded that Dhahran was no longer required as a primary installation in support of SAC operations, but was still quite valuable—though not irreplaceable—in meeting the need for a continuing Middle East base to support logistical requirements in the region. On this basis the JCS would later recommend renewal.\(^\text{146}\)

With renegotiation considerations increasingly in mind, State’s Office of Near Eastern Affairs also was concerned over the extent to which the U.S. had met its 1957 military and economic assistance commitments. The military training and equipment funds were running behind schedule, much of this having to do with Saudi administrative problems. But this was still a source of worry for future negotiations. As one NEA


\(^\text{145}\) Ambassador Heath was already linking recently concluded military construction agreements with the Saudis to Dhahran renewal. The Saudi Defense Minister recently reached agreement with the Chief, USMTM for the construction of RSAF training facilities at Jeddah, Taif and Riyadh. Heath emphasized the urgent need to get MAP funds allocated for this construction to signal to the Saudis the importance the U.S. attaches to its commitments. This meeting of contractual obligations would also “be a significant factor when we discuss with Saudi Arabia renewal of our rights at the Dhahran Airfield in 1962. Failure to have fulfilled our contractual obligation will most certainly have an adverse effect upon these talks.” Recorded in Hart to Bell, \textit{Allocation of $9.258 Million from MAP Funds for Construction of Air Force Training Facilities in Saudi Arabia}, 7 January 1960, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG 59).

officer put it, “In general, we have operated on the theory that the more nearly we have completed our 1957 commitment by 1962, the lower the price for renewal will be at that time.” However much wishful thinking, the clear political emphasis was on meeting the letter of the agreement; this took precedence over any actual military progress on the ground. Indeed to the extent meeting these commitments impeded military progress, the latter was expendable. The exigencies of the next round of renewal negotiations were what carried weight.

This was reflected in another fairly pessimistic assessment of the status of Saudi forces and military modernization. As part of his responsibilities as Chief, USMTM, General McGehee was tasked with preparing a Country Plan for Saudi Arabia for CINCEUR to cover projected military assistance for the period FY 1962—FY 1966. As part of that Country Plan, McGehee assessed current and projected Saudi military capabilities and the role of U.S. military assistance in the process. It is therefore another useful snapshot of where the Kingdom stood militarily in 1960.148

In terms of land forces, the U.S.-advised Royal Guard Regiment continued to be rated as the most competent military force, receiving the best resources both in terms of personnel and equipment. The White Army or National Guard, estimated to consist of about 16,000 men (and an inactive reserve of 34,000) organized into battalion-sized units, was now largely motorized but still equipped with mostly small arms. In a confrontation with the Regular Army, USMTM concluded “that in a hit and run desert type warfare, the White Army could outlast the Regular Army and eventually cut it to pieces. In addition there is the good possibility that a number of the Regular troops would desert to the home provinces and control of the local Amirs and eventually show up in the White Army.” The Regular Army was estimated to have a total strength of 13,000 men and to be the

---

148 Although the Country Plan is undated, it is clear from references in the text that it was prepared in the April-May 1960 time frame.
least capable force. Its major combat units consisted of the 8th, 10th and 11th Infantry Regiments. Despite initially high expectations for progress resulting from the 1957 Agreement, “budgetary limitations, personnel shortages in all units, an illiteracy rate of 92%, apathy on the part of the majority of Saudi Arabian Army Officers, the failure of those in responsible positions to properly delegate authority, awkward supply procedures and little interest in training, the development of an effective force, as envisioned by the authors of the “1380 Plan” has failed to materialize.” As a result, any Army contribution to Saudi Arabia’s defense “would be limited to harassing tactics within the border of the country.” The Royal Saudi Air Force suffered from serious maintenance problems and a limited cadre of qualified support personnel. It “has no combat capability other than a minimum amount of airlift.” The Royal Saudi Navy had neither a budget nor any representation at MODA and as such, “is non-existent.”

As to the future, against this somewhat pessimistic backdrop McGehee held out for reasonable progress. In the case of the Army’s revised Plan Green, there was “no indication that the Saudi Arabian Army budget will be increased to provide the additional manpower required for a 30,000 man force.” Attaining such a force over the next five years was therefore considered remote. However, even with smaller increases in funding along with Saudi leadership to implement the plan, McGehee considered it “reasonable to expect that a small, compact, fairly well trained and equipped force could result” by the mid-1960s.

---

149 McGehee noted that figures were derived from the best sources available, but at best were educated guesses. The Saudi Arabian Army refused to provide such information to the USMTM.


151 Ibid., p. 8. Just the same, later in the Country Plan McGehee catalogues the Saudi Government’s unwillingness to allocate necessary resources, to include not paying troops for up to three months, no funding for critical parts and supplies, and no monies for completing the last stages of military construction projects that would improve the efficiency of military operations.
In the case of the RSAF, again with sufficient dedication and resources McGehee considered it possible to produce a functioning Saudi logistics system in five years, making the RSAF self-sufficient. According to him pilots were not a problem, as USMTM had already trained ninety-two pilots to minimum proficiency and that at the present training rate full pilot training requirements would be met by July 1961. The issue again was a Saudi willingness to follow through on the plans worked out with the USMTM.\footnote{152} As to USMTM’s current and future function in relation to the military training program, he noted that “[t]he basic reason for the USMTM to Saudi Arabia is political…secondary factors of training and improving the military forces of the country are in reality sidelines.”\footnote{153} Furthermore, the military assistance projects, while not politically important in and of themselves, served an important function in denying others access, i.e., “excluding other nationals who might fill the void if we were not present. The political significance of such an event is obvious.”\footnote{154}

Finally, as far as the impact of likely shortfalls in meeting future force objectives, McGehee pointedly noted the marginal consequences given the limited military objectives in the first place and the overriding political importance served simply by USMTM’s presence:

Overall, the failures anticipated in the planning period [FY 1962—FY 1966] can be accepted without altering United States policies or objectives. These failures on the part of the host government will not radically affect its present or future mode of operation. The threat of internal revolt or external aggression will still exist, and the country’s ability to meet these threats will not be greatly changed by failure to achieve the planned objectives. The position of the U.S. Military Training Mission is expected to remain the same and because [sic] of its presence in the country, the U.S. political-military objectives will probably continue to be accomplished.\footnote{155}

\footnote{152} Ibid. A breakout of training statistics (pilot and support) and accomplishments to date is contained in the document, pp. 23-24.\footnote{153} Ibid., p. 36.\footnote{154} Ibid., p. 38.\footnote{155} Ibid., pp. 42-43.
While these longer-term challenges were of concern, McGehee and USMTM were soon facing a more acute and dangerous situation. From the available (and heavily sanitized) record both U.S. civilian and military personnel in Saudi Arabia were picking up rumors of coup planning by Saudi military officers in July. In the case of American military personnel, Saudi officers appear to have raised the subject with some of their USMTM counterparts, perhaps testing the waters. Reporting this back, U.S. personnel were instructed to avoid taking any initiative in seeking further information, as this might be perceived by Saudi intelligence as associating the U.S. with the plot. If approached on the subject, they were instructed to “discreetly seek discourage any coup action” stressing the dangers of such revolutionary approaches for Saudi Arabia’s future and the alternative benefits of evolutionary change. In terms of informing the senior Saudi leadership, Ambassador Heath was instructed as follows:

In whatever manner you deem most appropriate you authorized advise Faisal (or King) orally and in strictest confidence that rumors of proposed military coup against Saudi regime have come to your attention and, while you have no details any such alleged plotting and are frankly unable to evaluate reliability such rumors, you feel it is your duty as sincere friend King, Faisal and SAG, to alert Faisal (or King) to those rumors in case they have not already been noted since SAG clearly better able assess their significance.  

Piecing the story together from an admittedly fragmentary record, it appears that a specific Saudi individual or group of individuals were in correspondence with USMTM personnel. This is inferred from the following passages. Responding to the State Department’s guidance on pushing evolutionary change, Heath remarked that “To suggest to [text not declassified] that he use petition to obtain his ends, seemed to Heath an invitation [text not declassified] ‘to stick his head in the noose.’” As to the USMTM connection, after formally warning Faisal and Saud about the potential plot Ambassador Heath “recommended that the USMTM officers who had dealt with [text not declassified]

---

should be reassigned discreetly. [text not declassified] Heath thought they had become too closely involved [text not declassified].157 Following the warning to both Saud and Faisal, the State Department advocated that USMTM personnel “disengage from any further initiatives re the [Colonel] Hazim plot.” It also recommended that, based on Ambassador Heath’s recommendation, certain members of the Second Air Division and USMTM be reassigned due to their indiscretion in sharing the coup plot information and in approaching Colonel Hazim directly.158

This illustrates how USMTM, by its close and regular contacts with the Saudi military and officer corps, risked getting drawn into Saudi coup activities emanating from the military. It also provides a glimpse into perhaps the most difficult problem USMTM could face as it sought to maintain an effective military training program requiring the support of an already suspicious central government.159

In late November, Heath had a meeting with Faisal in which Dhahran was raised as a principal topic. “I want to tell you something which I have told absolutely no one else” Faisal confided to Heath, and that he would not mention again. Many Arabs, he explained, continued to see Dhahran as a U.S. military airbase. “With all eyes on us, with all the fingers pointing at the airfield” Faisal continued,

I find that its presence hampers cooperation between us. I want to cooperate, but I can only do so when this obstacle is removed. Of course, I know that the agreement between us regarding the airfield and USMTM has yet a year and half or two years to go. What I envision is to turn over the management of the airfield

157 Heath to State Department, 25 July 1960, 786A.00/7-2560, and Heath to State Department, 1 and 2 August, 786A.00/8-160 and 786A.00/8-260, recorded in footnotes in FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol XII, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, pp. 763, 765. Available correspondence also shows that the Chief and Acting Chief USMTM were in close contact with the State Department and the Ambassador throughout this period.


159 This particular episode remains shrouded in secrecy and the full story will have to await further declassification. Interestingly, none of the standard works on Saudi Arabia covering this period (Holden and Johns, Lacey, Safran, Yizraeli, Abir) make reference to any coup plot at this time.
to some civil company, such as TWA, in a way similar to the arrangement we have regarding the Saudi Arabian Airlines.\footnoteref{heath160}

The Crown Prince explained that this applied only to the American military presence associated with Dhahran, and not USMTM; “The presence of one or more training missions in our country is less of an eye-catcher or finger-pointer than the existence of what has come to be considered a foreign base.” Telegraphing his intent to terminate the agreement, Faisal concluded that “My purpose in telling you this is so that your minds will be prepared for what we intend to do.” In reporting this back to the State Department, Heath added his observation that Faisal’s position on Dhahran was not likely shared by the King. Heath believed Saud did not wish to cancel the agreement “since he probably regards the presence of American troops there, even though, technically, they do not bear arms, as a deterrent against any revolution against the Throne.”\footnoteref{heath161}

Regardless, this was soon to be the concern of a new Administration. A few weeks earlier John F. Kennedy defeated Richard Nixon for the Presidency. Unclear at the time, the Kennedy Administration would bring significantly different perspectives to the White House on Middle East affairs with sweeping implications for Saudi Arabia.

While this American political transition was underway, the rivalry between Faisal and Saud came to a head in December. As the Kingdom’s next year’s budget was being finalized, a confrontation erupted between the two over the details, including Saud’s demand for increased funding of the Royal purse. The King refused to sign the budget. Faisal then submitted a note to the monarch expressing his inability to move forward under the circumstances. Saud, seeing his opening, conveniently interpreted this as a “resignation” which he accepted on December 21. He himself then assumed the title of Prime Minister. A Royal Decree made it formal, announcing the King’s acceptance of

\footnotetext[160]{Heath to Department of State, 30 November 1960, FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol XII, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, p. 768.}

\footnotetext[161]{Heath to Department of State, 30 November 1960, FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol XII, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, p. 769. The Dhahran Agreement would in fact undergo several more contortions covered in the next chapter.}
Faisal’s resignation and that all other members of the Council were considered resigned as well. This cleared the way for Saud to form a new government, which he did on December 22, 1960.\(^{162}\) To square accounts with the support received from the ‘liberal princes,’ the King immediately ordered that a national council be convened to draw up a constitution, one of Talal’s earlier proposals.\(^{163}\) Talal was also given the key post of Minister of Finance. Fahd was replaced as Minister of Defense and Aviation by Muhammad Ibn Saud, third son of the King and regarded as Saud’s most talented offspring. Saud’s ‘counter-coup’ had succeeded.

To the extent Saud weighed possible U.S. reactions to his gambit, his timing was good. With the recent election of Kennedy, the Republican Administration was in its final days and unlikely to get involved in Saud’s “counter-coup.” As for Faisal, though he remained Crown Prince, he would keep his distance from any official government responsibilities (he was offered the position of Deputy Premier by Saud and turned it down), making it clear to the rest of the Royal Family that he would return only if Saud’s government resigned and Faisal’s previous authority restored.\(^{164}\) Far from resolving matters, Saud’s power grab simply set the stage for the Family’s next internal crisis. And threatening external events would soon once again intrude to raise the stakes still further. Through it all the new administration would seek to reexamine the U.S. security and military assistance posture toward the Kingdom, and in so doing experience the limits of trying to change the dance.

**Observations**

Three principal factors were at work driving U.S.-Saudi security relations and military assistance during this period. First, the growing concern of the Eisenhower

---

\(^{162}\) Aside from shifting political fortunes, for much of this period Faisal was quite physically ill. This likely contributed to Saud’s success in moving against him.


Administration over Soviet ideological penetration of the Middle East and what was perceived as its fellow traveler, Arab nationalism. Fears arising from the French and British debacle over Suez in 1956 further propelled the Administration toward greater direct involvement in the region’s security. This included efforts to enlist the support of Saudi Arabia and King Saud in the larger design of the Eisenhower Doctrine. Second, Saudi decision making was heavily shaped by reciprocal fears on the part of the Al Saud over how best to respond to Nasser and the swelling popularity of Arab nationalism. The Saudi leadership understood that the monarchy was under threat. But how to respond to insure the long-term viability of the Kingdom was much more controversial. This included differences over how close a relationship to maintain with the U.S., especially in military matters. Third, and closely related, was the struggle between Saud and Faisal over personal power and ruling authority, and over more fundamental issues of the future direction of Saudi Arabia. Issues of control over the various armed forces in the Kingdom, their future role, and the degree of military modernization provided by the U.S. were inextricably tied to this struggle. The interaction of these three factors largely determined the pattern of U.S. military assistance to the Saudis throughout this period.

A lesser U.S. objective, but one of growing importance, was holding onto Dhahran as a means to prevent a possible opening for the Egyptians. Although the Saudis were increasing wary of Nasser’s ambitions, Egyptian personnel were a natural Arab choice to man and operate Dhahran in place of the Americans. Fraught with military and political risks for the U.S., maintaining the U.S. military presence at Dhahran was a means to prevent this possibility.

While the military assistance process was shaped to serve higher U.S. policy objectives, in military terms it continued to be used as a direct *quid pro quo* for continued U.S. military access to Dhahran. The Saudis were quite explicit about this. While Washington resisted the characterization in its dealings with the Saudis, it was a well-recognized fact within the administration.
With regard to its negotiating strategy and the price the U.S. was willing to pay as a *quid pro quo* for continued presence at Dhahran, for the most part Washington continued to adhere to the position of providing the Saudis military *training* at U.S. expense but not armaments. This was a consistent pattern and very much at variance with the Saudi position. Several factors were at work. First might be called the strategic posture of limited liability. Given all the other demands on U.S. security resources the U.S. clearly wanted to limited the extent of its commitment to Saudi Arabian security. Providing significant grant aid on armaments represented a level of commitment beyond what the Administration was willing to accept. The Saudis themselves contributed to this, however, by their unwillingness to accept the terms of grant aid as required by U.S. law. Second was the issue of cost. It was simply far less expensive to provide training support at a level commensurate with Saudi needs than to provide arms and other equipment. Many in DoD were unwilling to bear the cost of substantial armaments being supplied on a grant basis, with Congressional authorization representing yet another hurdle. This was reinforced by the perception that the Saudis were using Dhahran to squeeze the U.S. on grant aid, a facility that while militarily important was not deemed vital and came with plenty of restrictions.

Aside from cost per se, there was the issue of priorities. Grant military aid was capped on an annual basis, both within the Defense Department budgeting and by Congressional appropriations. The demand for such aid far exceeded the supply, and when compared against other candidates the Saudis simply were not a priority. Linked to this was the added concern over setting precedents—if the Saudis were provided grant aid, why not other countries in the region not currently recipients? There was also the enduring desire to not fuel an arms race in the region, and generally to minimize the flow of weapons. While providing the weapons on a reimbursable basis was somewhat inconsistent with this objective, it still served to limit the flow simply by forcing the Saudis to come up with the cash for purchases, a frequently difficult task for them. From
a military effectiveness standpoint, there was the added sound argument that what the
Saudis really needed up front was effective organization and training, not more modern
equipment. Absent this, much of the modern equipment would go to waste. Finally was
the concern that like many other underdeveloped countries, Saudi Arabia might attempt
to create a military larger than it could support financially, making it a burden to the
economy, a threat to important domestic development activities, and itself a source of
political instability.

Against this larger backdrop of constraints on U.S. military assistance, however,
was the enduring desire by the administration further to strengthen political ties with
Saud and Faisal. In this regard there were strenuous efforts to arrive at a mutually
acceptable accommodation on military assistance. As far as the military assistance trade-
off between concrete military progress on Saudi modernization and political exigencies,
the latter clearly continued to dominate. U.S. military assistance was heavily skewed
toward accommodating the political needs of the Saudi leadership to the extent
practicable. At times this meant adjusting to the personal political requirements of the
King, to include those arising from his internal struggle with Faisal. At other times this
meant clearly strengthening Faisal at Saud’s expense (admittedly delicately). In either
case the internal Saudi political dimension was a central feature shaping the military
assistance process and what could and could not be accomplished.

More significantly, the struggle played out against the backdrop of traditional
Saudi concerns over instability inside the Kingdom and threats to the monarchy to which
the U.S. had to be sensitive to in its military assistance negotiations and activities. These
factors were becoming even more influential with the persona of Nasser and the forces of
Arab nationalism and were ever present in Saudi decisions on the armed forces and in
U.S.-Saudi security relations. And while the U.S. clearly set conditions limiting the
extent of that accommodation and largely held to them, the Saudis remained effective
negotiators in using the ever-present fear over political instability to push their agenda.
The results of all this were to frustrate any attempt at systematic military planning. Concrete and realistically attainable military modernization goals were always subordinated, and at times sacrificed outright, to the higher political objective of strengthening ties with the Saudi leadership. Plans therefore emerged that had little prospect of real implementation. Alternatively, the best laid military plans could quickly be undone by shifts in the political winds. As the primary case in point, largely due to internal dynastic power struggles, further heated by the dangerous regional political environment, the military assistance program so heavily worked on by Riyadh and Washington and culminating in the April 1957 agreement was by early 1959 completely undone as a viable plan.

Further turbulence lay ahead. While Saud managed to reestablish his authority by late 1960, external events would soon conspire to erode his weakening grip and trigger another leadership crisis for the Kingdom, this time entailing direct military threats to the country and to the rule of the Al Saud. A new U.S. administration with a more critical view of Saudi governance added to the burden. Saud’s star-crossed monarchy ultimately would not survive the test. In the process U.S.-Saudi security relations would face their most strained period to date, requiring an even more elaborate choreography on military matters to sustain the relationship.
CHAPTER 7

U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE IN THE CRUCIBLE: CONFLICT IN THE YEMEN

The US has no intention of being drawn into hostilities between Saudi Arabia and the UAR.
— Secretary of State Dean Rusk on the Yemen conflict

With all my power I will fight against the UAR in the Yemen, if the situation requires, whether we win or lose
— Crown Prince Faisal

Strategic Setting: Cold War With A Difference

The Kennedy Administration arrived with a strong sense of the Cold War and the expansionist tendencies of the Soviet Union and China, punctuated by Moscow’s advocacy of wars of national liberation. Kennedy made clear in his inaugural address that when it came to fighting the Cold War, the U.S. would “pay any price, bear any burden” in its battle against communism and repression. Among other things this meant a strong emphasis on providing military support to many Third World countries where the proxy wars were being fought. Any remaining doubts of a long-term struggle were swept aside early by the Berlin crisis and the deteriorating situation in Southeast Asia, the latter perceived as a joint Sino-Soviet effort to undermine western influence and stimulate revolution.

As with the Eisenhower Administration, the Middle East was viewed as another theater for this ideological competition. But precisely because of this Kennedy was searching for ways to harness the forces of Arab nationalism rather than have them fall—
or be driven—into the hands of the opposing communist camp. For this reason the
president sought to encourage positive relations with the forces of Arab nationalism, and
specifically Nasser and his United Arab Republic (UAR). Indeed Kennedy came in with
an appreciation of the distinction between Arab nationalism and the forces of
communism, taking up where the Eisenhower Administration in essence left off.¹ This
policy perspective, combined with a negative view of traditional monarchies as
reactionary and in need of reform, would have major implications for U.S.-Saudi
relations.

One other consequence of the new administration was that its Secretary of
Defense, Robert McNamara, argued that in the future intercontinental ballistic missiles
(ICBMs) and submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) represented the most cost-
effective means for delivering nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union. By this logic
there was less need for overseas bases to support SAC operations. Therefore at a time of
growing political frictions with Saudi Arabia one of the major military justifications for
retaining access to Dhahran was eroding.²

On the Saudi side, the internal struggle between Saud and Faisal continued
throughout this period, affecting virtually every aspect of domestic and foreign policy,
including defense policies and military assistance with the U.S. A series of direct

¹ It is generally recognized that by the end of the Eisenhower Administration this distinction had also taken
hold and with it a willingness to try to co-opt Arab nationalism rather than combat it. This is well reflected
in the administration’s revised U.S. Policy Toward the Near East, NSC 6011, approved by Eisenhower on
July 19, 1960. Among its major policy guidance was “Seek[ing] to demonstrate to the peoples and
governments of the area that U.S. objectives are generally compatible with goals of Arab nationalism,
whereas the objectives of international Communism are incompatible with the aims of true nationalism.”
As for relations with Nasser and the UAR, the U.S. must “Be alert to any possibilities which may occur for
broader understanding or consultation between the United States and the UAR” which “might serve to limit
UAR contacts with the Soviet bloc and Soviet influence.” NSC 6011, White House Office, NSC Series,
Status of Projects Subseries, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.
authors argue that this strategic shift by the U.S. cleared the way for reaching agreement with the Saudis on
Dhahran’s non-renewal. No doubt a contributing factor, the reality was more complex. Clearly U.S.
military access to Dhahran offered many benefits that had nothing to due with the U.S. nuclear posture.
These would be largely lost once routine access to Dhahran ended. The Saudis of course also had their
own political reasons for pushing non-renewal, as signaled earlier by Faisal.
confrontations between the two would ultimately seal Saud’s fate, but not before an additional four years of internecine struggle and the disruptions it produced.

Unquestionably, the seminal foreign policy event in the Gulf was the overthrow of the ruling Imamate in Yemen, its replacement by a revolutionary regime patterned on and supported by Nasser, and the civil war that ensued. This development brought to a head the growing polarization between Cairo and Riyadh. Nasser’s policies to dominate the affairs of the region now reached directly to the Arabian Peninsula itself, leading the Al Saud to conclude that an Egyptian victory in Yemen posed a fundamental threat to its rule. In facing this crisis Riyadh had to come to grips with an American administration much more willing to embrace Arab nationalism with all that implied for support of the conservative monarchies. This would be made all too clear to the Al Saud in the early days of the Yemen conflict. The Kennedy Administration initially viewed the coup and subsequent insurgency largely as an internal affair, brushing off Saudi entreaties that the U.S. demand Nasser cut off its support to the revolutionaries. The fact that the administration was already working to build closer ties with Nasser, and simultaneously critical of the Royal Family’s pace of modernization, all sent a very strong signal indeed.

The Yemen conflict would also significantly affect Faisal’s attitudes toward the need for a serious Saudi defense capability, and by extension, the need for greater reliance on the U.S. for military assistance. But in the short run it put into sharp relief the twin vulnerabilities the regime faced with regard to its armed forces. The military remained weak largely due to conscious internal decisions, both out of fears over its general loyalty to the Al Saud and from more personal manipulation resulting from the Saud-Faisal power struggle. But now the prospect of actually having to use the anemic force in combat against Egyptian forces raised the specter of a military defeat. Such a

---

defeat could in turn be the catalyst for a revolt by the military, especially in the context of a conflict involving Nasser and his continuing propaganda campaign against the regime. The Saudi response to these twin vulnerabilities was itself twofold. First, it chose to wage a proxy war by supporting the opposition royalist insurgents against the new regime, thereby avoiding any direct use of Saudi troops. Second, despite policy differences, it turned to the U.S. for political and military support to defend Saudi Arabia and to get Egyptian forces out of the Yemen.

**Early Days And Differences Under Kennedy**

The early days of the Kennedy Administration soon indicated troubles ahead for the Saudi leadership. The new residents of the White House regarded Arab nationalism and socialism as progressive forces to be promoted, assets in the ideological struggle against the Soviet Union in the region. Far from being communist-inspired evils to be contained “the Kennedy administration, was on the contrary engaged in an experiment of supporting Nasser’s Arab socialism as an antidote to Communism.”

Nasser represented an important potential ally and ways should be explored to engage him. The greater threat to stability in the region was the conservative regimes that clung to the old political order and resisted political and economic reforms and modernization.

At the very time this view was being embraced in Washington the Saudi position was shifting decidedly against Nasser. With the exception of a few princes, the senior Al Saud was now solidifying its perspective that the Egyptian leader was “increasingly militant and revolutionary” while also becoming more attractive to young Saudis. Therefore “whatever lingering admiration for Nasser there had been among the Saudi leadership had turned to abiding antipathy and apprehension.”

---

seeking out Nasser for a possible rapprochement the Saudi leadership was concluding he was an intractable foe.

**End of the Road on Dhahran Renewal**

Despite its growing hostility toward Nasser, the Royal Family could not discount his influence. The U.S. military presence at Dhahran had been a neuralgic point for some time and the growing nationalist rhetoric out of Cairo added to the pressure to move to a new arrangement. While the Egypt-based radio “Voice of the Arabs” continued the harangue over the U.S. use of the airfield, the two governments moved toward closure on non-renewal. Negotiations between the Saudis and the U.S. Departments of State and Defense were initiated in early 1961 with the intent of producing a joint U.S.-Saudi statement on non-renewal, to be released in mid-March 1961. The clear idea behind the joint statement was to announce this development as one endorsed by both parties, reflecting the best mutual interests of the two countries, and to frame non-renewal as the result of continued close cooperation and not as a contentious issue.

As final discussions were being held on the joint statement King Saud, apparently reacting to domestic pressure and heightened concerns over Nasser’s propaganda attacks, could not resist the temptation to score political points by making a unilateral announcement. On March 16, Radio Mecca broadcast that the King was ordering that Ambassador Heath be informed that the Dhahran Airfield Agreement would not be renewed. In fact Finance Minister Talal telephoned Heath late in the day, explaining Saud’s action as a response to an anticipated attack on the King in the Lebanese press by Saudi opposition princes. They were reportedly going to say that Saud dismissed Faisal

---

8 At the time there were an estimated 1,332 American airman stationed at Dhahran and 10 transport aircraft to support the Military Air Transport Service (MAPS) activities there. Memorandum From the Department of State Executive Secretary (Battle) to the President’s Special Assistant (Dungan), 21 March 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1962, Vol XVII, Near East*, p. 53.
as Prime Minister in December because of Faisal’s desire to terminate the Dhahran Airfield Agreement.⁹

The U.S. Government immediately responded with the State Department issuing its own background press release. The statement made brief initial reference to discussions with the Saudis “proceeding for some time...looking toward the non-renewal of the Dhahran airfield agreement of 1957.” The remainder of the text discussed the history of Dhahran and the efforts by the U.S. to assist the Saudis in building an international civil aviation facility there, help in developing Saudi military aviation, and that the USAF “has also enjoyed certain use of the facilities” in the course of these activities. To convey that the termination of the agreement implied nothing untoward, the press release concluded that “The United States Government expects that its close and friendly cooperation with Saudi Arabia in various fields will continue.”¹⁰

Privately, the State Department surmised that “King Saud’s precipitate action reflects the shaky internal position of his recently formed Government,” a view bolstered by the statements of the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S., Sheikh Abdullah al-Khayyal. Two days after the announcement he called on the Under Secretary of State to explain that the King’s action was stimulated by his need to deflect criticism by his opponents, both internal and external, and hoped that the U.S. would understand. The Ambassador also conveyed the King’s wishes that the announcement would in no way affect the

---


¹⁰ Memorandum From the Department of State Executive Secretary (Battle) to the President’s Special Assistant (Dungan), 21 March 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1962*, Vol XVII, *Near East*, pp. 52-53. The original full texts of the Saudi and U.S. announcements are in Appendix E.
cooperation and strong relations between the two countries, indeed that they might now be further strengthened.\textsuperscript{11}

Secretary of State Dean Rusk felt that despite near-term pressures on King Saud to place distance from the U.S. on Dhahran, many Saudi leaders understood the importance of maintaining U.S. assistance in the facility’s operations, appreciating their inability to keep it functioning otherwise. Therefore, “Our hope is that in the context of some type of private civilian operation of Dhahran Airfield which the Saudi Arabian Government may find technically desirable and politically acceptable, continued United States Military Air Transport Service and minimal mission support-type activities at Dhahran might informally be worked out.”\textsuperscript{12}

The new U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Parker T. Hart, reported that soon after his arrival in the Kingdom he found serious reservations among senior Saudi leaders over the King’s decision to terminate the Dhahran agreement.\textsuperscript{13} Aside from raising the prospect of a reduced U.S. commitment to the Kingdom’s security, practical concerns were voiced over the Saudi inability to run Dhahran, either financially or technically, the latter despite the extended training program run by the USAF. The option of contracting

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 52.
\textsuperscript{12} Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy, 14 April 1961, \textit{FRUS}, 1961-1962, Vol XVII, \textit{Near East}, pp. 82-83. According to a State Department representative, David D. Newsom, the communications facilities at Dhahran were the most valued military asset there. Based on his conversations with U.S. military officials in the area (to include Admiral Jackson, Commander, Middle East Force, and General McGehee), the Commander MIDEASTFOR depended on these for all of its shore-to-flagship communications and the facilities were the principal Air Force communications link between Wheelus and Clark Field. MATS flights, on the other hand, (then running at 1700/month, half of which were estimated to support U.S. operations at Dhahran and the USMTM) were expected by General McGehee to drop substantially with the Second Division close out and the increasing use of jets. He also thought this service could be contracted out. As for Dhahran’s use as a SAC recovery field, doubt was expressed by officers over whether it would ever be used in this role in the event of war. Based on this military evaluation and the growing Congressional pressure that any follow-on agreement insure non-discrimination by the Saudis, Newsom concluded that “while we will most certainly wish to have some exploratory discussions with the Saudis on the future of this installation, we should plan a smooth and graceful withdrawal.” Newsom to Eilts, 24 April 1961, \textit{FRUS}, 1961-1963, Volumes XVII, XVIII, XX, XXI, \textit{Near East, Africa}, Microfiche Supplement, Document # 217. Newsom, First Secretary of the American Embassy in London at the time, had been Officer in Charge of Arabian Peninsula Affairs at the State Department from 1955 to 1959, the position then being held by Hermann Eilts.
\textsuperscript{13} Hart replaced Donald Heath as Ambassador in April 1961.
these services out to Egyptians, Iraqis, Palestinians or Syrians raised obvious political risks. But reversing the decision was certainly riskier still. The Saudis therefore began soliciting U.S. contractors for this function.\textsuperscript{14} Also underway were efforts to find a middle ground both sides could live with. In a throwback to earlier days, Hart reported a Saudi proposal that the U.S. military stay on but that personnel not be in uniform. This proposal went nowhere. Another possibility raised was to expand USMTM’s role and personnel to assume some of the functions performed by the Second Air Division personnel at the airfield.\textsuperscript{15}

**Uncertain Future of USMTM**

With the formal close-out at Dhahran, the future of USMTM was now called into question as well. While the military assistance agreements, to include USMTM’s services, were under separate agreement from Dhahran renewal the two were always inextricably linked. And to the extent that U.S. military assistance was viewed as a *quid pro quo* for access, now with non-renewal the first issue was whether USMTM should continue at all. If so, the larger political-military purposes and conditions governing it had to be reconsidered, along with the entire military assistance process. While these mattes were being reviewed in Washington, USMTM continued on in its training capacity and obligations as stipulated in the original 1957 agreement. The fact that it operated under separate agreement (and therefore still remained valid) made it easier for both parties to allow this low-key continuance in the face of the highly visible ending to the Dhahran access agreement.


The State Department position held that USMTM was an asset for the U.S. and should be retained in some form if at all possible. State argued that keeping USMTM in Saudi Arabia would

1. Constitute a tangible manifestation of United States willingness to be responsive to Saudi Arabia’s expressed desire to continue its close and friendly relations with the US;

2. Afford us unequaled opportunity to continue to observe developments in the Saudi Arabian military, which is one of the principal potential power loci in Saudi Arabia, and enable us to exert some constructive influence on the political and military thinking of the emerging Saudi officer corps;

3. Preclude the Saudis from having to turn to UAR (or other) military advisers...

4. Afford a useful peg which might increase Saudi receptivity to allowing the United States to retain some sort of MATS and mission-support arrangements at Dhahran after April, 1962, even if on an informal basis.

For his part Ambassador Hart supported the importance of USMTM as an important link to future Saudi political as well as military leadership. He made this point explicitly in a meeting with President Kennedy, stating that he considered such contacts of “great potential value as the regime in Saudi Arabia must surely change and new leadership is most likely to come from this element.”

From the Saudi side the only indications of a desire to continue USMTM were broad references to that effect made to General McGehee during his farewell visits. But this was viewed as enough of an opening to raise “the possibility of some kind of a package deal whereby perhaps USMTM might operate the airfield as a supporting function to its training mission.” But the Defense Department was equally concerned—

as was State—that USMTM remain primarily an advisory group and not a maintenance organization for the Saudis.\footnote{Review of Saudi FY 1962-1967 Military Assistance Plan, 18 September 1961, Office of Near Eastern Affairs, Records of the Director, 1958-1963. Records of the Department of State (RG 59). Given the poor state of Saudi maintenance, this was a serious risk.}

**Dust-Up Over Kuwait**

While it was sorting out these matters the new administration faced its first major foreign policy event in the Gulf with the June 1961 challenge to Kuwait’s sovereignty by the regime in Baghdad. The ensuing military operation fell largely to the British, but it did serve to focus attention on the region and to the Arabian Peninsula’s continuing dependency on the west for military protection. It also demonstrated that the U.K. was very much still a political-military power on the Peninsula with enduring influence, a point not lost on the Saudis who would later seek to re-establish military assistance relations with London. As such, the confrontation merits a brief review.

London’s commitment to defend Kuwait traced back to an agreement signed in 1899 with the ruling Al Sabah dynasty. Protecting Kuwait had long been a principal British defense objective on the Arabian Peninsula, part of the larger strategy to maintain lines-of-communication for Empire. By the 1960s the requirement was self-evident in more narrow energy and economic terms. The single largest British investment in the region was British Petroleum’s (BP) 50 percent share in Kuwait Oil. The British Government in turn had a controlling interest in BP. Kuwaiti oil alone was also now providing about 50 percent of the U.K.’s oil requirements.\footnote{Phillip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), The Royal Institute of International Affairs, pp. 153-156. As Darby notes, quite aside from these hard economic facts, there also was a very real and deep sense of British obligation to its ex-colonies and the continuing sway of the strategic notion of Britain as a world power.} Given these stakes, British plans for rapid military intervention to defend Kuwait were fairly well developed.

Contained in the MOD’s plan code-named *Vantage*, these were designed either to counter

---

20 Phillip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), The Royal Institute of International Affairs, pp. 153-156. As Darby notes, quite aside from these hard economic facts, there also was a very real and deep sense of British obligation to its ex-colonies and the continuing sway of the strategic notion of Britain as a world power.
an Iraqi conventional offensive (Plan A) or to stabilize an internal situation in Kuwait (Plan B).  

For the Al Sabah the long-term security arrangement provided a mechanism for protecting the Shaykhdom in the midst of her much larger neighbors. By 1961 the protection was still required, but the political means had to be altered in the face of the growing regional emphasis on sovereignty and independence. Therefore on June 19, 1961 an Exchange of Notes was signed between the two governments terminating the 1899 agreement. It was replaced by a statement of enduring close friendship and the continuing readiness of Her Majesty’s Government to come to the aid of the Kuwaiti Government should it request such assistance, either in response to external or internal aggression.

Less than a week later, on June 25, Iraq’s Prime Minister General Abdul Karim Qasim used the venue of a press conference to claim Kuwait as Iraqi territory along with Baghdad’s willingness to “liberate” the inhabitants and bring them back under Iraqi sovereignty. Shortly thereafter came reports of Iraqi troop movements, although the intelligence picture was muddled by the fact that Iraq’s National Day (July 14) was approaching and the movements might merely be preparations for a military parade. Behind the scenes the British began initial military preparations in the event they had to deploy into Kuwait, even though the National Day timing slowed London’s response and with it the plan’s built-in assumption of four-days warning. This was followed by a public announcement by the British Foreign Office on July 1 that in fulfilling the United Kingdom’s obligations to the Kuwaitis, and at the request of the Ruler of Kuwait, a

---


22 Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 165-166.

23 Ibid., p. 168.
British force had deployed into Kuwait and was at the ready. 24 By July 9 British forces had reached 6,000 troops and were sustained at this strength until Iraq’s National Day passed. With the crisis subsiding, on August 12 the Kuwaiti Government and the Arab League signed a Saudi-sponsored agreement that Arab League troops would replace British forces, providing an “Arab solution” to the problem and palatable cover for a British withdrawal. London withdrew its troops by late September. 25

A direct conflict with the Iraqis was averted. But it was also a concrete reminder that outside intervention was required to defend Kuwait—and certainly Saudi Arabia as well. While the episode never reached the point where the Kingdom was directly threatened, it was clear that Saudi forces alone would have offered little defensive capability against a concerted Iraqi attack.

It was also during the Kuwait tensions that President Kennedy first took a personal interest in arms sales to the Saudis. At a meeting with the Saudi Arabian Ambassador in early July the Ambassador asked about delivery of requested U.S. arms in support of the ‘1380 Plan.’ 26 The President immediately queried U.S. officials as to the status of the deliveries. As it turned out agreement for the deliveries was still pending. At issue was determining that the Saudi requests were consistent with the Tables of

---

24 Throughout this early period the British had not requested any U.S. military assistance, although they made it known that such requests might be forthcoming. The recommendation of USCINCNELM was that the U.S. should not make any military deployment until requested by the British. CINCLANT did however redirect a naval force of two destroyers, three amphibious vessels, and 463 Marines toward Bahrain in the event they were required. Message From the National Security Council Executive Secretary (Smith) to the President’s Military Aide (Clifton), 30 June 1961, and attached footnote, FRUS, 1961-1962, Vol XVII, Near East, pp. 175-176, and footnote on CINCLANT, p. 177.

25 Peterson, Defending Arabia, pp. 90-91. For a detailed description of the British buildup and the difficulties encountered, especially unanticipated overflight restrictions, see Lee, Flight from the Middle East, pp 173-182. The Arab League force of some 2,300 soldiers was subsequently removed from Kuwait in late 1962.

26 The primary topic of the meeting was King Saud’s letter to President Kennedy which was presented by the Ambassador. This was a response to the President’s earlier letter to Arab leaders explaining the new administration’s policies in the Middle East, including toward Israel. The King’s reply was extremely critical of U.S. support for Israel and was characterized by Secretary Rusk as “undiplomatic to the point of being insulting.” Rusk attributed this largely to the King’s increasing insecurity, also consistent with his earlier preemptive announcement on Dhahran. For Rusk’s reaction see Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy, 13 July 1961, FRUS, 1961-1962, Vol XVII, Near East, p. 191.
Organization and Equipment agreed to in the 1380 Plan, as well as establishing the availability of those items within U.S. service stocks. At the time the Defense Department estimated that it could take “from six weeks to six months” to make these determinations and to submit Letters of Offer to the Saudi Arabian Embassy. Actual equipment deliveries would take a minimum of eight months. When informed of this the President wrote directly to the Secretary of Defense demanding to know why this process took so long and could not be accelerated.\(^\text{27}\)

**Strains and Leadership Shuffles Within the Royal Family**

Throughout the Kuwait affair the Saudi government was that of Saud’s as constituted in December 1960. Internal cracks formed early, however, already revealed in the King’s precipitous announcement on Dhahran. Faisal continued to absent himself from Saud’s government and as such was not an immediate source of friction. But tension between Saud and Talal which began shortly after Talal’s inclusion in Saud’s government as Minister of Finance came to a head in August. Just as the Kuwait situation was dampening, Talal gave an interview with a Lebanese newspaper in Beirut in which he violated a fundamental principal of the Royal Family; he discussed family differences outside the inner circle of the Al Saud, notably the disagreements between Saud and Faisal. He also made reference to the expiring agreement with the U.S. on Dhahran, regarded as an inappropriate foray into sensitive foreign affairs. Furthermore he spoke openly about his reforms and the need for them. Perhaps most inciting of all, Talal remarked that King Saud had “so far been behaving himself.” Saud took this as his

\(^{27}\) Memorandum From the Department of State Executive Secretary (Battle) to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), 10 July 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1962, Vol XVII, Near East*, pp. 182-183, and Editorial Note, *FRUS, 1961-1962, Vol XVII, Near East*, p. 230. President Kennedy’s original request is contained in *National Security Action Memorandum No. 73*, dated August 20, 1961. As noted in the previous chapter, the ‘1380 Plan’ had already been rejected by the Saudis in terms of the original two-division land force, but various individual arms requests imbedded in the Plan were still being pursued by the Saudis. It was also another example of plans merging into one another. At the time the Saudis already had another modernization ‘plan’ underway, the *National Defense Plan Number 1*. 
opening to sack Talal and his supporters, including Talal’s brothers, demanding their resignations in September 1961.²⁸

Additional problems came with Saud’s deteriorating health. By November the King was in acute distress and in need of immediate medical attention abroad.²⁹ This created both a need and opportunity for reconciliation within the family in order to bring Faisal back into the fold as a strong leader, a role many senior family members felt was now essential. Just before his departure for medical treatment in the U.S. Saud issued a Royal Decree making Faisal the King’s Deputy and acting Prime Minister.³⁰ Effectively this meant that from mid-November 1961 to early March 1962 when Saud returned, Faisal functioned as acting monarch.³¹ But just as in prior instances this was an unstable compromise, giving Faisal renewed authority but keeping him quite subordinate to the King. It did not yet propel Faisal into a dominant position where he could fulfill the desire of many Saudi leaders for a strong central ruling figure. A more serious crisis would be required for that.

**Next Steps on Dhahran, USMTM and Military Assistance**

By September CINCEUR had initiated a “phase-down” of operations of the Second Air Division at Dhahran. One outstanding issue was what items to leave behind for the Saudis adequate for continued operation of the field as stipulated in the original

---


²⁹ U.S. estimates of Saud’s health were so pessimistic at the time that the State Department drafted statements of condolences from the White House in the event of Saud’s death. *Contingency Proposals for Use in the Event of the Death of King Saud*, 20 November 1961, Office of Near Eastern Affairs, Records of the Director, 1958-1963, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59).


³¹ Bligh, *From Prince to King*, p. 75. Saud was operated on in the U.S. for cataracts and stomach ailments. Holden and Johns, *The House of Saud*, p. 218.
agreement on Dhahran. How these items would be paid for was another aspect that had to be worked out. These matters were resolved by identifying such equipment as surplus and financing the transfer to the Saudis via existing MAP funds. The Defense Department also agreed that if the political decision to do so was made, the eleven USAF F-86s then currently part of the training program could be turned over to the Saudis within existing MAP program funds rather than being sold to the Saudis as originally negotiated.  

Also as part of its close-out at Dhahran the U.S. was exploring regional alternatives to the airfield, to include discussions with the British on locating a MATS turn-around site on Bahrain. But by the Fall of 1961 the Saudis made it clear that they now wanted to retain USMTM, reinvigorated the prospects of working out an arrangement to keep some informal use of Dhahran for MATS activity.  

An added boost came in response to President Kennedy’s earlier inquiry on the apparently slow approval process for determining the availability of U.S. weaponry for sale to the Saudis. Twenty Letters of Offer covering most of the Saudi requests were presented to the Saudi Embassy on September 18. Army equipment of various sorts was included totaling $13.4 million, and the U.S. offered to sell the eleven F-86 aircraft along with airfield equipment, totaling another $3.5 million. Among the requested items not offered to the Saudis were F-100 jet fighters. In addition to falling outside of

32 Memorandum, Status Report on Developments Connected with Dhahran Airfield, 21 September 1961, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). In the midst of these positive efforts on the transition Hart relates one interesting glitch that arose. It was related to the original agreement language that the U.S. would leave behind for Saudi use “fixed” facilities and equipment. U.S. personnel apparently took a rather rigid interpretation of the term, using hacksaws to cut off the legs of various machines bolted to building floors and shipping the equipment out, leading to an embarrassing situation. Hart, Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership, pp. 92-95.  
35 Memorandum for Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Arms and Equipment Offered Saudi Arabia Under Recent Letters of Offer, 9 October 1961, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.
the ‘1380 Plan,’ State and Defense argued that it made more sense for the Saudis to consider the F-86, which was already being used by the Saudis as part of the ongoing USAF training program and therefore also compatible with existing maintenance and operational facilities.\textsuperscript{36}

Efforts to clarify the future of USMTM, and place it on a sounder long-term footing, were taken up directly with the King in early 1962 while he was still convalescing in the U.S. In response to an invitation from the President, Saud attended a White House lunch on February 13.\textsuperscript{37} Prior to the meeting several senior advisors pressed the President to raise the topic of Saudi Arabia’s continuing discrimination against granting visas and transit rights to American Jews (to include U.S. Congressmen) as well other ‘irritants’ directly bearing on USMTM. The latter included customs difficulties and not allowing U.S. personnel to conduct religious services openly. While not the level of issues traditionally reserved for head-of-state discussions, repeated efforts with high-level Saudi officials to get relief on these matters came to nothing. Therefore Kennedy’s senior advisors urged “that our only hope for remedy is for you [President Kennedy] to raise them with the King.”\textsuperscript{38}

In the course of the White House discussions Saud reiterated the Kingdom’s need for a strong military, requesting that the U.S. continue the military training mission, but that it be reduced to 80 individuals. President Kennedy stated his interest in extending USMTM, but that a minimum of 200 personnel were necessary to perform the function,

\textsuperscript{36} As previously noted in \textit{Status Report on Saudi Arabian Government’s Arms Purchase Request}, Memorandum for Mr. McGeorge Bundy, 18 August 1961, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), \textit{JFK Library}. There was also the issue of available trained pilots for future combat aircraft. According to Hart, “In 1961 there were, at best, a half-dozen combat-trained pilots, with a few more in basic training.” Hart, \textit{Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership}, p. 77.

\textsuperscript{37} The President extended the invitation while paying the King a brief courtesy visit on January 27 at Palm Beach where Saud was recovering from his eye surgery.

\textsuperscript{38} Memorandum for Mr. McGeorge Bundy from Executive Secretary Battle, \textit{List of Proposed Topics for President to Raise With King Saud at February 13 Meeting}, 7 February 1962, and Memorandum For The President from Robert Komer, \textit{Working Visit with King Saud}, 12 February 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), \textit{JFK Library}.
especially now that the support previously provided by the Second Air Division at Dhahran would no longer be available. Saud emphasized his need to keep costs down by reducing the number of personnel. When informed that except for housing and transportation the U.S. paid the cost of the mission, Saud simply said that he then had no objections to its size. The King also brought up the issue of credit for the recent proposed Saudi arms purchases of about $16 million. The President agreed to explore the issue and asked that the Saudis provide information as to what type of credit arrangements they envisioned. President Kennedy did also raise the issue of discrimination against American Jews. The King maintained that the prohibition was against Zionists, not those of Jewish faith, but that he would look into the matter upon his return.

Saud returned to Saudi Arabia on March 7, 1962, proclaiming himself fit and ready to resume his responsibilities as ruler. A so-called “reconciliation government” was formed with Faisal that same month. In terms of key defense and security postings Saud’s sons still controlled Defense (Muhammad ibn Saud), the National Guard (Saad ibn Saud), and the Royal Guard (Mansur ibn Saud). But Saud was also forced to issue a Royal Decree making Faisal Vice President of the new Council of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs, bestowing on him substantial powers, an action imposed by the senior princes in recognition both of Saud’s poor health and growing inability to rule effectively.

---

39 A summary of U.S. military assistance to the Saudis prepared for McGeorge Bundy at the time listed U.S. military grant aid from FY 50-61 at $20.1 million, with an additional $9.6 million scheduled for delivery by the end of FY 62. The bulk of the grant aid so far spent was on aircraft ($8.3 m.), training ($5.1 m.) and construction ($2.8 m.). Military credit sales came to an additional $44.8 million. Memorandum for McGeorge Bundy, 19 February 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Staff Memoranda, Robert Komer, JFK Library.


41 Details in untitled briefing book prepared for Crown Prince Faisal October 1962 visit, 10 September 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library, and Samore, Royal Family Politics in Saudi Arabia: 1953-1982, pp. 161, 164. Despite the King’s ability to keep his sons in key military and security postings, their days were numbered. Hart reported that Defense Minister Prince Muhammad was already a marked man by Faisal due to his reputation “for continuing venality connection rake-offs on aviation and defense contracts.” Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 15 March 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.
Within a week of the King’s return Ambassador Hart met with him to discuss the future of USMTM in light of the Dhahran agreement cancellation and “to test his willingness to permit US residual use of Dhahran.” The subject was also deemed timely in that during the previous month a new agreement governing the conditions and status of the U.S. training mission had been drafted by the Chief, USMTM and his staff. The King again asked about the number of men the U.S. anticipated keeping in the mission. Hart reiterated the 200 number the King previously discussed with the President, to which Saud repeated that he had no objection. Hart also raised the U.S. desire to retain a small group at Dhahran within the overall USMTM team to continue MATS flights landings and turnarounds. American use of Dhahran would accordingly fall under the umbrella of ongoing USMTM activities. This the King also agreed to.

Meanwhile negotiations proceeded over jurisdictional details (legal status of USMTM personnel and their exemption from Saudi civil and criminal prosecution) and the still contentious issues of discrimination against Jews and the right to conduct Christian religious services. The State Department wanted closure on these matters given its strong desire to retain a military presence in the Kingdom as spelled out in a mid-March Policy Directive. In endorsing the continuation of USMTM it cited the essentially political requirements

To preserve an important center of United States influence.

---

43 Hart to Secretary of State, 28 February 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), *JFK Library*. USMTM was still operating under the guidelines of the June 27, 1953, Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement.
44 Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 12 March 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), *JFK Library*, and Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership*, pp. 90-91. As part of the official U.S. departure from Dhahran, however, the US Navy’s communication facility was shut down and relocated to Bahrain.
45 On the jurisdictional issue, the 1953 USMTM Agreement restricted the geographic areas in which USMTM personnel fell totally under U.S. jurisdiction to those “specified for training operations.” In any future agreement the U.S. intent was to establish that all of Saudi Arabia be considered a “training area” and extend coverage to U.S. military personnel accordingly. On this objective see Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 25 April 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), *JFK Library*. 
To preclude the Saudi Arabian Government from turning to advisory groups unfriendly to the West.
To maintain a Saudi military force capable of preserving internal security.
To give tangible USG response to Saudi Arabia’s desire to maintain cordial relations with this country.  

Also ongoing was an internal debate between the State and Defense Departments over the appropriate rank of the next Chief, USMTM, now that Brigadier General McGehee was about to depart. Defense was of the view that the position should be downgraded to the rank of Colonel reflecting the reduced U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia and the uncertain future of both Dhahran and USMTM. The State Department argued that the position should remain that of a General Officer to reflect the political importance of the position and the senior rank of the Saudi personnel the Chief dealt with. The Defense Department would not reverse its position and the next Chief, USMTM, was to be designated a Colonel.  

In the meantime the end of formal U.S. access to Dhahran came on April 2, 1962. Consistent with the original deadline in the 1957 agreement in the event of non-renewal, the U.S. officially turned over operation of the Dhahran Airfield to the Saudi Arabian Government on that date. This marked the end of the Second Air Division at Dhahran. The transfer was handled by a low-key ceremony, in part due to concerns that the past U.S. presence reflected in the transfer not provide Nasser with another propaganda opportunity. Airfield services had already been subcontracted to an American company. Following the expiration of the Dhahran Agreement, and consistent with the King’s earlier assurances, the Saudi Arabian Government continued to informally permit

48 Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 29 March 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), *JFK Library*.
49 Memorandum From the Department of State Executive Secretary (Battle) to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), 11 April 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1962, Vol XVII, *Near East*, pp. 585-586.
a small USAF contingent at the airfield to service MATS aircraft. U.S. military aircraft were still granted overflight and landing rights at Dhahran.\textsuperscript{50}

As a sweetener to the King, Saud’s February request for credit for arms purchases was granted in August in the amount of $13.5 million. This was to cover all of the Army items contained in the previous U.S. Letters of Offer to the Saudis. Extending credit for jet aircraft was denied on the basis of a recent U.S. agreement to continue its RSAF training mission for another two years. As a result the F-86s used for this training and still under U.S. ownership would remain available to the Saudis for another two years.\textsuperscript{51}

This also conveniently delayed the delicate problems of Saudi incapacity to maintain jet aircraft and the opposition such a sale or transfer would arouse vis-a-vis Israel.

Ambassador Hart worried that the U.S. decision to retain custody of the F-86s and not offer to sell them to the Saudis might be interpreted in Riyadh as an effort to keep the Saudis from controlling their own fighter aircraft. Hart therefore requested that he be authorized to approach the Saudis with an offer of F-5A aircraft. The Chief, USMTM had advised him that the F-5 was appropriate to both Saudi needs and capabilities and a better match than American F-100s or non-U.S. aircraft. In the case of non-American aircraft, Hart feared that the training and logistics difficulties introduced would likely result in “future static displays like Vampire jets grounded unusable at Jidda for last two years.”\textsuperscript{52}

Certainly also on Hart’s mind was that such a sale would be a major blow to U.S. efforts to use its arms for influence. And in recognition of the suspect role Defense Minister Muhammad could play in any decision, the Ambassador recommended that if such an offer was approved the U.S. should “leak” the existence of the offer to various

\textsuperscript{50} As recorded in \textit{U.S. Military and Economic Assistance to Saudi Arabia}, September 1965, NEA/NE, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Office of the Executive Director, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG 59).

\textsuperscript{51} Credit terms were for three years with no interest. Telegram from Rusk to Hart, 14 August 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), \textit{JFK Library}.

\textsuperscript{52} From Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 29 August 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), \textit{JFK Library}.
officers in MODA. This would preclude the Defense Minister from making a unilateral decision to purchase fighters elsewhere (i.e., France) that might personally benefit him financially.\(^{53}\)

In late September Ambassador Hart received approval to instruct the Chief of the U.S. Air Training Mission in Jeddah to inform Major Zohair, the Commanding Officer of the Saudi Air Force, that the U.S. was prepared to sell Saudi Arabia F-5As and F-5Bs. Colonel Willard Wilson, USAF, and the new Chief, USMTM, would make a similar approach to the Minister of Defense then in Paris.\(^ {54}\)

But unfolding political developments now began to shift the ground under the Saudis. In August former government officials Talal, Badr, Fawwaz and Saud ibn Fahd all arrived in Cairo in protest against the regime.\(^ {55}\) This followed Talal’s announcement to the Beirut press that he differed with the King’s governance and was seeking the establishment of a “democratic, constitutional, monarchical regime” and not the “one-man rule” that existed. Feted by Nasser, the group defection representing a major propaganda coup for the Egyptian President in his war against the monarchy.\(^ {56}\) But damaging as these Royal defections were, they were mere prelude to what the Al Saud was about to face—a Nasser-supported conflict along its border that directly threatened the regime’s survival.

**Outbreak of the War in the Yemen**

The triggering event for what would become a five-year civil war in the Yemen was the overthrow in late September 1962 of the conservative ruler, Imam Muhammad

\(^{53}\) From Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 10 September 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.

\(^{54}\) From Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 22 September 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.

\(^{55}\) Under King Saud’s 1960-1961 government Talal had been Minister of Finance, Badr Minister of Communications and Fawwaz Governor of Riyadh.

al-Badr, by a military coup. The leader of the coup, Colonel Abdallah al-Sallal, immediately announced creation of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). In a clear indication of advanced Egyptian knowledge and support for the coup, within a few days of the overthrow Egyptian troops landed in Yemen and began operations against the remaining resistance.\(^{57}\) One key flaw in the coup’s execution, however, was the escape of the Imam. Despite official YAR claims of his death during the overthrow, al-Badr soon surfaced in Saudi Arabia to establish a Royalist government in exile and lead the insurgency against the new North Yemen Government, known as the Republicans. The Saudis would bankroll the Royalist insurgency in an effort to bring down the al-Sallal regime and drive out Egyptian troops.

In the early days of what would later be described as Nasser’s Vietnam, the Republicans with major Egyptian support were able to control the southwestern quadrant of the Yemen (Sanaa--Taiz--Hodeida) but little more (see Maps 7.1 and 7.2).\(^{58}\) In a clear sign of Nasser’s willingness to escalate the conflict beyond the borders of Yemen to secure the Republican government, from October 8-12 Egyptian jet aircraft repeatedly flew over Jeddah. According to Ambassador Hart, the Saudis viewed these provocations as a “deliberate attempt [to] humiliate them.”\(^{59}\) In the meantime additional events were contributing to this sense of Saudi humiliation. Shortly after the Al Saud’s decision to fund the Royalists, a Saudi transport aircraft scheduled to deliver them supplies instead diverted to Cairo. The three Saudi pilots had defected. They were followed the next day

---


\(^{58}\) A long-term stalemate would soon ensue in which both Cairo and Riyadh would experience the travails of trying to co-opt the local tribes to their side. Like the shifting sands, the sheiks would change allegiance repeatedly—and oftentimes profitably—as bribes were one of the primary tools of influence. The result was a frustrating foray into transitory alliances and inevitable let down. Nasser’s own frustration was captured in his reported quote that the Yemenis were “republicans in the morning and royalists in the evening.” On shifting allegiances see Edgar O’Ballance, *The War in the Yemen* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1971), p. 90. Although now somewhat dated, O’Ballance’s political-military history of the war remains a good one, particularly strong on the military aspects of the insurgency and the activities of both Republican and Royalist forces. Nasser’s quote is cited in Trevor Mostyn, *Major Political Events in Iran, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, 1945-1990* (New York: Facts on File, 1991), p. 83.

\(^{59}\) Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 14 October 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), *JFK Library*.
Map 7.1. The Middle East showing situation of the Yemen

Map 7.2. The Yemen

by two more RSAF pilots, leading to the King’s ordering that the entire RSAF be grounded and its officer corps purged of disloyal supporters of Nasser. All of this added to the sense of impotence and mounting political risk to the Al Saud.

The unfolding situation posed multiple, and unacceptable, threats for the Saudi leadership. A radical regime was now immediately across its border raising the prospect of a long-term source of political agitation, fueled by the resources of Nasser. This in turn could stimulate internal Saudi dissonance and instability against the Al Saud. As a Saudi history of the conflict notes,

From the Saudi point of view, Yemen was at the time and continues to be of immense importance to the internal security of Saudi Arabia. Thus, the stability and security of Yemen has been seen by the kingdom to be as essential as its own....An Egyptian puppet government in Sanaa in the eyes of Saudi Arabia undoubtedly would threaten the internal security of the kingdom and create conditions of unrest among the Saudi people, particularly in the kingdom’s Southern Province.

The presence of Egyptian troops on the Peninsula also raised the prospect of a more direct military move against Saudi territory. One pretext would be the old claims of North Yemen that Jizan and Najran were rightfully part of their country, not Saudi Arabia.

Compounding the dangers of the situation was the likely prospect that the Saudi military would prove incapable of defending against Egyptian troops, and could well suffer a major military defeat at their hands. The Saudis found themselves unable to mount any effective defense against even very limited Egyptian forays into Saudi airspace. Saudi military performance in protecting the Kingdom’s borders from

---

60 Holden and Johns, *The House of Saud*, p. 227. In a somewhat conflicting piece of evidence on Saudi leadership attitudes toward the RSAF, Safran notes that budgetary data from the Kingdom shows that in 1963-64 the air force appeared for the first time as its own line item under the Ministry of Defense budget. He argues that this represented the Saudi recognition of the need for an air force capable of protecting Saudi air space due to its early experiences in the Yemen civil war, and as such, one separated from the Army. Safran, *Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, pp. 108-109.

incursions on the ground was likely to be equally dismal, despite the reported general mobilization of the Army, the dispatch of anti-aircraft guns to the area, and the deployment of “three squadrons of Saudi jets.” Starkly revealed in all this was the paucity of serious Saudi military capabilities for internal security and self-defense despite two decades of military assistance in one form or another from the U.S. (and to a lesser degree the U.K.).

Much of this poor performance was due to years of a lackluster approach to defense modernization on the part of the Saudis, aided and abetted by mismanagement and ineptitude. A goodly amount was, of course, also the product of weakness by design, due to the perceived political risks posed by an effective military. Regardless, the Al Saud were now reaping the consequences. The poor performance of the Saudi forces carried its own set of grave political risks. A clear inability to defend the Kingdom’s borders, let alone suffer a major military defeat, could itself unleash a threat to the leadership’s survival.

In the near term improving the effectiveness of Saudi forces, however desirable, was simply impossible. The dragon’s teeth were too deeply sown. And as the recent pilot defections demonstrated, the risks of military dissent and disloyalty to the ruling family were still real enough. However the threat now posed was so serious that for the first time the Saudi leadership apparently was willing to assume the internal risks of developing an effective military force. But Faisal clearly would be working from a

---

62 Ibid., p. 54. According to Badeeb, these measures were taken in the very early days of the conflict. How the Saudis could put together three squadrons-worth of jet fighters for combat operations is a mystery. At the time the Saudis had only the 11 U.S.-owned F-86s, plus a handful of British Vampires, most of which were grounded due to maintenance problems. Furthermore, U.S. trainers estimated that there were less than half-a-dozen Saudi pilots who were combat qualified at the time.


64 This last point is made by David Long, who considers the Yemen conflict a turning point in Saudi military modernization. Perhaps true in relative terms, the progress after that would remain quite modest, with many of the self-imposed political restrictions still in effect. Similar statements of major change were made after the other political-military ‘shocks’ of 1979 (the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the revolution in Iran) and 1990 (Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait). Concrete evidence remains elusive.
position of military weakness in this crisis, and as he soon discovered, under considerable political disadvantage when it came to the U.S. administration.

**Washington’s Response to Early Military Developments**

Back in Washington the administration had far graver worries than the future of Yemen or even of Saudi Arabia. Events just off the Florida coast were unfolding that soon would lead to the Cuban Missile Crisis. But while a low priority at the time, in its own way the Yemen conflict would become a long-term policy dilemma for the White House and a severe test of U.S.-Saudi relations.

The administration’s early response to the Yemen conflict epitomized its larger philosophy of emphasizing internal reform as a key element in countering threatening insurgencies. But the recipient of this pressure was Saudi Arabia, not Yemen. The administration told the Saudis early and often that the greatest threat to the Royal Family was not the Egyptian-sponsored insurgency on its borders, but the lack of internal reform in the Kingdom itself. A sincerely held view among several senior policy makers, it also comported well with the other more pronounced policy objective of the administration—building bridges to Nasser. Coming to Riyadh’s assistance against the Egyptians was fundamentally at odds with this larger policy. Driving the point home was the administration’s signing of a long-term economic assistance agreement with Egypt within a week of Nasser’s intervention in Yemen, an unambiguous signal to the Saudis.⁶⁵

Still, despite misgivings about the particulars of the Saudi regime and the need to improve relations with Nasser, the Kennedy Administration had no desire to see the regime toppled, instability introduced into the Gulf, nor as part of this, to see Britain’s

---

position in Aden eroded. On this last point the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt John Badeau was instructed to inform Vice President Anwar Sadat that U.S. national interests were served by tranquility in the Gulf which meant support for Britain as protectorate in Aden. There should be no assault on that position emanating from the Yemen situation.  

As chance would have it, the Crown Prince was already scheduled to be in Washington and to have a courtesy call with President Kennedy. Now with the outbreak of the Yemen conflict, the meetings took on much more importance. In what would be his only face-to-face meeting, Crown Prince Faisal met with President Kennedy on October 5, 1962. Faisal was clear in his efforts to elicit the U.S. position on support for Saudi Arabia, specifically as it applied to the building crisis in Yemen. Faisal was concerned that U.S. economic aid to Nasser was being diverted to support subversive activities in the region. As to Nasser’s designs on Saudi Arabia, he listed numerous ways in which the Egyptian leader was interfering in Saudi Arabia’s internal affairs and sought to destroy the authority of the Saudi Arabian government.  

For his part President Kennedy reiterated the long-standing U.S. interest in the independence and territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia, and of U.S. willingness to take measures to counter threats to these. In response to a query by Faisal, Kennedy stated that the U.S. pledge of general support applied to both external and internal threats. As to specific actions, in addition to stepped up naval visits the President offered to provide pilot training and counterinsurgency instruction to the Saudis. He also repeated the

---

66 Telegram From the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the Department of State, 1 October 1962, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963, p. 150. In point of fact the outbreak of the North Yemen civil war along with the presence of Egyptian troops energized an uprising against the British in the Radfan area, north of Aden and near the North Yemen border. Aden itself later came under guerrilla attack as well, and the overall deteriorating situation would lead to Britain’s withdrawal from the Protectorate in November 1967. Peterson, Defending Arabia, pp. 95-98. A detailed and fascinating account of British operations in the Radfan in 1963-64 is in Lee, Flight from the Middle East, pp. 202-219.


68 On the counterinsurgency point, the official Memorandum of Conversation of 5 October refers only to a “civic action” program focused on road building, with no reference to counterinsurgency training. But Hart notes that Green Berets were later sent to Dhahran in the Spring of 1963 to train Saudis in counterinsurgency. And as official records show, efforts were undertaken along these lines.
recent U.S. offer to sell the Saudis the F-5A supersonic fighter “at the earliest opportunity.”

The ‘balanced’ approach of the administration was not reassuring to the Saudis. Given the profound sense of threat they felt from the insurgency, and the long history of viewing the U.S. essentially as a friend of the monarchy, this was a serious blow. The policy dilemma facing the U.S. in this instance was well understood in Washington as spelled out by Robert Komer, senior NSC adviser to the President on Yemen:

if we come down on UK/Jordan/Saudi side there goes our new relationship with Nasser; if we come down on other side, we open Pandora’s box. If we do nothing, we offend all our friends. I need hardly add that a compromise would be most worthwhile from US standpoint if it protected our investment in Nasser and at the same time preserved the essential interests of our friends.

Initial Discussions Over Deploying U.S. Fighter Aircraft to the Kingdom

Though not explicitly discussed in the meeting with Faisal, another military option under consideration by the administration involved the possible deployment of a squadron of tactical aircraft to Saudi Arabia. What came to be designated “Operation Hard Surface” has generally been described as the deployment of U.S. fighter aircraft to the Kingdom in response to Egyptian bombing of Saudi territory, both to deter further Egyptian air attacks and to secure Saudi political support for a disengagement of troops in Yemen. Upon closer examination the saga is more complicated and rife with

---


69 Memorandum of Conversation, *President’s Talk with Crown Prince Faysal, 5 October 1962, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963*, p. 166. As previously noted, the U.S. was already involved in discussions with the Saudis on a replacement for the F-86s, which while still useful aircraft, were becoming obsolescent and increasingly difficult to support. The recommended replacement was the F-5, considered both versatile and relatively simple in terms of operation and maintenance. These were key attributes given the Saudis’ chronic problems in there areas. Talbot to McGhee, *Proposed Sale of F-5A Jet aircraft to Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, 7 September 1962*, Office of Near Eastern Affairs, Records of the Director, 1958-1963, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59).


387
illustrations of the limits of cooperation and the many strains between Washington and Riyadh during this period.

The specific origin of the idea for Hard Surface remains unclear. The possibility of deploying fighter aircraft to the Kingdom as a sign of U.S. support and a morale booster for the Saudis was discussed in an October 17 meeting between the State Department Officer in Charge of Arabian Peninsula Affairs (Talcott Seelye) and a member of OSD (Charles Quinn). This resulted in a memo being generated that same day by OSD/International Security Affairs proposing such an idea to the Joint Chiefs for their consideration.\textsuperscript{72} According to Robert Komer’s personal memoirs, after the initial Egyptian overflights in early October and complaints by the Saudis, he approached the State Department to recommend that the U.S. send a “deterrent squadron of U.S. military aircraft” to Saudi Arabia. Komer believed that even a small presence of American aircraft in the skies would deter Egyptian pilots. Following State Department concurrence in this proposal, he met with the President to discuss it. The President was not enthusiastic. While he did agree it would send a message to Nasser, Kennedy wanted to neither run the risk of American pilots getting shot down nor of a wider conflict with Nasser over Yemen. The President’s position to Komer was that a squadron be prepared for the mission, but that he was not going to deploy it until the fighting between the parties in Yemen (and the support provided by their proxies) stopped.\textsuperscript{73}

With this guidance in hand Komer spoke with the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Curtis E. LeMay, requesting that he prepare the squadron. In what was to be the first in a long series of differences between the senior policy and military leadership over the idea, LeMay and Komer clashed early over the size and purpose of the force. Komer

\textsuperscript{72} Seelye to Strong, Telephone Conversation with Mr. Charles Quinn, 18 October 1962, Office of Near Eastern Affairs, Records of the Director, 1958-1963, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).

\textsuperscript{73} The following section draws heavily from Robert W. Komer, Blowtorch, private manuscript, 1996, Chapter I, “Komer’s War.” The author is grateful to Mr. Douglas Komer for permitting me access to his manuscript.
explained the deterrent function and that the President did not want any actual fighting. LeMay retorted that he had never deployed forces abroad that were unprepared to fight and would not start doing so now. Komer observed that this was the Commander in Chief’s order. LeMay remained adamant that in following that order he would insist on sending a well-prepared fighting force. Komer therefore requested that General LeMay put together his requirements and send it to him. Komer recalled that when the list came back: “I was stunned.” LeMay wanted some twenty fighter aircraft, substantial anti-aircraft artillery, ground control radars, and a hefty inventory of bombs and ammunition.\footnote{Ibid., Chapter I, “Komer’s War.”}

Komer protested that this was much larger than envisioned, that the intention was to send a small deterrent force to wave off the Egyptians. “After a great deal of bitching and complaining by LeMay and his staff, we got the thing down to what I thought was reasonable.” Komer then tried it out again on the President, who accepted the planned force package, but stuck to his position that it not be deployed until things calmed down.\footnote{Ibid.} As it would turn out, nine months would have to pass before there was sufficient ‘calming down’ to deploy the squadron.

**Fighting From Weakness: Faisal’s Response**

The gravity with which the conflict was viewed from Riyadh precipitated yet another shift in Saudi leadership. With the very survival of the House of Saud on the line, it also came at a time when the Saudi’s principal military backer, the U.S., was more ambivalent about the ‘reactionary’ rule of the Royal Family—most notably Saud—than it was about Nasser’s ideology and moves in Sanaa. The stakes were very high. The senior Al Saud moved quickly, authorizing Faisal to form a new cabinet and to exercise full executive powers, to include in matters of defense. King Saud was in no position—or
physical condition—to resist this clear transfer of power. Faisal was still in the U.S. when he was named Prime Minister (a position previously held by Saud) in addition to his existing portfolio as Foreign Minister. Faisal returned to Saudi Arabia on October 25 and formally set up his new government on October 31.

Faisal again found himself thrust into a crisis with extremely limited tools. Politically, his long-held strategic approach of maintaining friendly relations with Nasser and of avoiding any direct confrontations with Cairo and ‘nationalist’ Arab forces was now no longer sustainable. “For Faysal, this [the conflict in Yemen] marked the end of the neutralist policy as he understood it, as well as the suspension of Saudi endeavors to bridge the gap between the West and Arab Nationalism.”

Militarily, Faisal’s well-founded fears over Saudi weaknesses meant that any direct military engagement with Egyptian troops had to be avoided. Instead a war of attrition would have to waged by proxy, through Saudi support to the Royalist forces. Given Saudi political and military vulnerability, he was also forced to turn to the U.S. and U.K. for assistance and, in so doing, run the obvious political risks of aligning with

---

76 Yizraeli, *The Remaking of Saudi Arabia, The Struggle between King Sa’ud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953-1962*, pp. 94-95. According to Holden and Johns, Saud asked Faisal to form a new government on October 17, 1962. See *The House of Saud*, p. 227. Saud and Faisal were to have several more confrontations over governing authority, but as Yizraeli notes this assumption of new power by Faisal in October 1962 effectively “marked the end of Sa’ud’s rule and the beginning of Faysal’s.” A CIA estimate at the time concluded that Saud was already a spent force. See Memorandum from Sherman Kent (CIA) to the Director (CIA), *Short-Term Outlook in Saudi Arabia*, 19 October 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volumes XVII, XVIII, XX, XXI, *Near East, Africa*, Microfiche Supplement, Document #234.

77 Royal Order No. 21 issued by King Saud, dated October 31, 1962, confirmed the new government as proposed by Faisal and listed all of the new Ministry appointments. A copy is located in Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.


79 In his handling of the Yemen crisis, the CIA estimated that Faisal would be unwilling to commit Saudi forces to the conflict. Noting that Saud was already compelled to ground the Saudi air force out of distrust, concerns over the effectiveness of Saudi military performance and the resulting political backlash from a poor showing were likely to keep Faisal from committing Saudi troops. As for the House of Saud’s ability to prevail politically, the estimate was that opposition inside the Kingdom was still not organized. But “Despite the regime’s fair chance of surviving for a time, we believe that profound change is inevitable in Saudi Arabia and we doubt that the royal family will prove able to prevent such change from being revolutionary.” Memorandum from Sherman Kent (CIA) to the Director (CIA), *Short-Term Outlook in Saudi Arabia*, 19 October 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volumes XVII, XVIII, XX, XXI, *Near East, Africa*, Microfiche Supplement, Document #234.
western powers against a “popular” Arab movement. Faisals’s calculation was even riskier in the face of Washington’s emphasis on reform in the Kingdom and clearly cool attitude toward taking on Nasser. But he understood that as part of his strategy the Saudis needed to expand the political scope of the conflict in order to bring in western support to offset Nasser’s strength.80

Faisal also had a keen sense of how to make the most of a weak hand. He began on the internal front. Unlike his previous government in 1958 when he fostered resentment by concentrating power under himself, now he went about filling posts—and replacing Saud’s sons—with senior half-brothers in an effort to build a powerful coalition.81 He had learned the hard lessons of political patronage. Faisal also benefited from the growing recognition by many of the senior princes that they were in a fight for survival against Nasser. However inflated, the princes could not easily dismiss the inflammatory rhetoric coming from Nasser’s principal propaganda machine, radio Cairo’s “Voice of the Arabs.” It now attacked Faisal’s government as stridently as it had Saud’s, with calls for the Saudi people to overthrow “the present rotten regime.”82 Like it or not, they were part of the “regime” slated for elimination.

Externally, Faisal moved quickly to convince his critical benefactors in Washington that he shared their desires for changes in Saudi governance. Immediately after constituting his new government he announced his “Ten Point Program” of reforms,

80 Safran, *Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, pp. 95-96, and Gerges, “The Kennedy Administration and the Egyptian-Saudi Conflict in Yemen: Co-opting Arab Nationalism,” pp. 292-311. Gerges’ thesis is that the Kennedy Administration’s overriding objective was to maintain and improve relations with Nasser and the power of Arab nationalism he represented; “Befriending Nasser was much higher on the US foreign policy agenda than allaying the fears and concerns of its Arab conservative allies.”

81 One of his more inspired moves in this regard was to appoint Khalid ibn Abdul Aziz as Deputy Prime Minister, a position previously held only by Faisal himself. Khalid’s political base was, like Saud’s, among the Nejdi tribes. By appointing Khalid to this position with its perquisites for distributing monies to tribal leaders, Faisal now was able to undercut Saud’s monopoly of support to the Nejdi tribes. Samore, *Royal Family Politics in Saudi Arabia: 1953-1982*, pp. 169, 174-176.

82 Ibid., pp. 171-172.
discussed earlier with President Kennedy. Whatever desires Faisal himself had in making these reforms, this was also an important tactical maneuver to help garner Washington’s support in the crisis.

As all of these efforts were getting underway, however, Faisal’s immediate problems worsened. Apparently in response to a royalist guerrilla attack, the Egyptians launched both a ground and air offensive against the resistance in the north on November 2. This included bombing by air of Saudi border towns and the naval shelling of Saudi coastal villages that Cairo claimed were insurgent supply and staging areas. The conflict was now brought directly onto Saudi territory. The Saudi reaction was swift on the diplomatic front, with Riyadh severing diplomatic relations with the UAR on November 6.

The Saudi military response was far more measured. According to Hart, by mid-November the Saudis had committed about 2,000 troops to defensive positions along the border, but the weaknesses—both military and political—of Saudi forces were obvious. Of a total Saudi Army estimated at 15,000 troops, only about one-third were considered combat-capable by U.S. observers. The National Guard was largely limited to light arms, while the Royal Guard, the most capable fighting force, was of questionable political loyalty to Faisal. As for the Royal Saudi Air Force, quite aside from the few pilots considered combat capable, the early defections of RSAF pilots to Cairo eroded the utility of the force. Indicative of this was that despite stepped-up U.S. training of Saudi pilots at the time, gunnery training was prohibited by the Al Saud for fear the improved skills might be at their expense. All in all, the attacks by Cairo heightened both the visibility of Saudi military deficiencies and the political pressure to respond.

**Measured Reassurances From Washington**

Shortly after Faisal’s return to Saudi Arabia President Kennedy sent him a general letter of support. Kennedy expressed that

Saudi Arabia can depend upon the friendship and the cooperation of the United States in dealing with the many tasks which lie before it in the days ahead. The United States has a deep and abiding interest in the stability and progress of Saudi Arabia. Under your firm and wise leadership I am confident Saudi Arabia will move ahead successfully on the path of modernization and reform which you so clearly desire. In pursuing this course you may be assured of full United States support for the maintenance of Saudi Arabia’s integrity.  

The President went on to note as to how he understood Faisal was in need of “the requisite tranquility” to undertake his reforms and that the U.S. would help in finding ways to reduce current tensions. Although signed by the President on October 25, it was unfortunately conveyed to Faisal just as the UAR was bombing and shelling Saudi soil.

With the letter somewhat overtaken by events, the Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister Sayyid Omar Saqqaf called on Ambassador Hart the day after the bombings to express Faisals’s extreme concern and desire to know where the U.S. stood and what actions it was considering in response. The pressure was growing for some type of U.S. reaction beyond the reassuring words of President Kennedy. Looking first and foremost to Washington to bring Nasser to heel through political pressure, Riyadh was also now expressing urgency on possible military support as well.

On November 4, newly appointed Saudi Minister of Defense Prince Sultan ibn Abd al-Aziz called in USMTM Chief Colonel Wilson to attend a series of meetings on

---


87 One of Faisals’s early appointments under his new government was to make Prince Sultan Minister of Defense, replacing Muhammad ibn Saud. A half brother to Faisal, he was one of the “Sudairi Seven” sons of King Abdul Aziz to a Sudairi princess. Holden and Johns, *The House of Saud*, p. 227. Following the
military developments and possible Saudi responses. Wilson was informed that Saudi Arabia would soon request U.S. assistance in developing an air defense system. This would include a request that the Kingdom be allowed to purchase the necessary arms on credit, that the eleven U.S. F-86 aircraft currently located at Dhahran be turned over to the Saudi Government (sale or lease), and that U.S. operational maintenance and support for those aircraft be provided. The Minister of Defense also asked for U.S. assistance in reorganizing Saudi defenses. This last request was the beginning of what would become another long-term defense reorganization activity involving the U.S.

On November 7 Colonel Wilson was again called in by Prince Sultan and presented with an appeal from Faisal to President Kennedy for a U.S. show-of-force in response to the latest Egyptian attacks. Faisal did not call for direct U.S. participation in defending Saudi Arabia, but rather a show of American air and naval forces as a clear signal of U.S. support for Riyadh and to serve notice to the UAR.

Ambassador Hart was directed by the State Department to seek an immediate audience with Crown Prince Faisal and convey the seriousness of U.S. concern. Hart was instructed to inform the Crown Prince that Washington had expressed its “grave concern” to Cairo over these actions. In addition, the U.S. Government was prepared to underscore its commitment to Saudi security through a show of military force. It was further

---

88 Telegram 117 from Dhahran, 5 November 1962, cited in Editorial Note, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963, p. 200. At the NSC Komer was in favor of transferring the F-86s as part of a “minimum essential response we can make to buck up Saudi regime” but only “on clear understanding these will be used only for defense, not attacks on Yemen.” Both he and the Defense Department also favored selling the aircraft rather than leasing them “since we don’t want to be tied to any incidents.” Note to McGeorge Bundy from Robert Komer, 9 November 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Staff Memoranda, Robert Komer, JFK Library.

89 Hart noted in his oral history that the Saudis also raised the possibility of using American pilots in civilian cloths to fly aircraft, an idea that never was seriously considered. Parker T. Hart, Third Oral History Interview, 10 June 1970, pp. 51-52, conducted by Dennis J. O’Brien for the John F. Kennedy Library, located at JFK Library.

prepared to loan the Saudi Government the eleven F-86s along with “limited operational assistance” as long as the aircraft were used for self-defense and the operational assistance was “confined well inside [the] Saudi border.” The U.S. was also willing to allow the Saudi Arabian Government use of a limited quantity of rockets with the F-86s, again under the condition they would be used defensively and only within Saudi Arabian territory (although Hart was advised that on the rockets Washington “wish insofar possible drag our feet on this”). On the diplomatic front, the White House agreed to defer its planned November 15 recognition of the Yemen Arab Republic Government until conditions improved.  

Ambassador Hart was moreover instructed to tell Faisal of the administration’s willingness to materially contribute to his reform efforts, including support for civic actions and technical assistance. But an important caveat to all this support was also attached. Whereas vital U.S. interests called for maintaining the Kingdom’s integrity and defending it against outside aggression “We wish Faysal fully understand our commitment to Royal Family as such contingent upon progress and reform in Saudi Arabia and does not connote preservation Saudi Royal Family at all costs.”

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were now weighing in as well with their perspective on military support to the Saudis. The JCS began by noting its terms of reference: “It is difficult to divorce the problem within Saudi Arabia from the external problem, particularly as it arises out of the Yemen affair.” The Joint Chiefs were “Proceeding from the basic assumption that the US interest is to maintain the existing Saudi Arabian Government.” Therefore they recommended military measures designed to both strengthen Saudi internal security and deter external aggression. On the internal security front they recommended that the Chief, USMTM, be instructed “to consult closely with

---

92 Ibid., pp. 203-204.
the leaders of the armed forces of Saudi Arabia, to inform them of US support for the Saudi Arabian Government, to impress them with their responsibilities to the Government, and to emphasize the necessity of assuring the loyalty of all personnel.” They also urged that the U.S. “Assign appropriate personnel to the USMTM to evaluate the subversive insurgency situation and to recommend a program to assist the Saudi Arabian Government in counterinsurgency.” As a deterrent against external aggression and to help reassure the Saudis, the Joint Chiefs called for continued visits by MIDEASTFOR to Saudi ports, use of Dhahran airfield by USAF forces in an upcoming CENTO air defense exercise, and an offer to conduct joint exercises with Saudi Arabian forces. The Chiefs also suggested assisting the Saudis to deploy a portion of the F-86 aircraft then located at Dhahran to Jeddah, and to maintain those aircraft while Saudi pilots flew air defense operations. This latter operation, they added, should only be undertaken if “the Chief, USMTM, should report a reasonable degree of assurance that defections will not occur.”

In laying out these options, the Joint Chiefs recognized the risks of not providing military support to the Saudis. But they advocated tying any such support to concrete military and political objectives:

US military interests in Saudi Arabia would be adversely affected if the Saudi Arabian Government were to adopt a hostile attitude due to lack of US support in the Yemen crisis. In particular, the loss of already limited US use of Dhahran Air Base and the forced withdrawal of the USMTM would deprive the United States of important assets in the Middle East....

As a quid pro quo for US support, the United States should extract an acceptable USMTM agreement, an agreement to continue US use of Dhahran Air Base, and at least a promise on the part of the present Saudi Arabian Government to inaugurate reforms.

---

93 Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara, 9 November 1962, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963, pp. 205-207. The JCS of course had some basis for its concern over defections given earlier RSAF flights to Cairo.
94 Ibid., p. 207.
At the political level it was equally clear that the U.S. was still seeking to keep the Yemen conflict from poisoning relations with Nasser, despite the intensifying military operations by the UAR. In this regard both the State Department’s Near Eastern Affairs office and Secretary of State Rusk himself saw value in moving ahead with the U.S. decision to recognize the new government in Yemen, sooner rather than later. The sensing was that a failure to do so would lead to further escalation of the conflict, posing greater risks to the stability of Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and expand opportunities for the new Yemen regime to turn to the Soviet Union for assistance. They cited Nasser’s assurances that he would not use Yemen as a platform to attack Saudi Arabia if the Saudis stopped undermining the Sallal government through its continued support to the Royalists. While so far merely a pledge, the strong belief within State was that the UAR was so strongly committed to the survival of the Sallal regime it would take whatever measures were necessary to preserve it, to include further expanding the conflict to Saudi Arabia if necessary to cut off supplies to the insurgents. That prognosis, along with repeated U.S. assurances to Faisal of Washington’s support, led Rusk to conclude that “the time is now propitious for the United States to recognize the Yemen Arab Republic.”

Additional Strains: Faisal’s Rejection of Kennedy’s Diplomatic Initiative

A next diplomatic step came when President Kennedy wrote identical letters to Nasser, Faisal, King Hussein of Jordan, and Sallal with a proposal for ending the conflict. In effect it called for Saudi Arabia and Jordan to end all support to the Royalists, with a reciprocal pledge by the UAR to undertake a phased withdrawal of its troops from

---

Footnote:

95 Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy, 12 November 1962, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963, p. 200; and Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to Secretary of State Rusk, 13 November 1962, pp. 220-221.
Yemen. Once agreement was reached on these points, the U.S would extend recognition to the Yemen Arab Republic.96

Faisal’s reaction to Kennedy’s proposal was swift and severe. Slamming the letter down in front of Ambassador Hart in their November 19 meeting, he considered it completely one-sided and unacceptable. “Nasir’s point of view has been adopted and is imposed on us” he raged. “How could USG propose so one-sided a program? In effect liquidate [the] Royalists?” As to the prospect of U.S. recognition of the YAR, while the Saudis had no power to prevent this, Faisal was emphatic that Saudi Arabia would continue to recognize and support al-Badr and would under no circumstances reverse this position.97

In contrast, the UAR and the Sallal regime claimed that they accepted the disengagement proposal as outlined in Kennedy’s letter. With these statements in hand the State Department issued a press release on December 19, 1962, declaring that they represented a basis for ending the conflict and announcing U.S. recognition of the YAR.98 Ambassador Hart cabled that Faisal’s position was unchanged, and he did not feel bound by the proposal.99

As the Saudis dug in, efforts at diplomacy further unraveled with renewed UAR air attacks on Saudi territory at Nejran. Cairo maintained that these bombings were against Saudi-supported Royalist troop concentrations equipped with heavy weapons near

97 As reported back by Ambassador Hart in his meeting with Prime Minister Faisal in Telegram From the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to the Department of State, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963, pp. 229-232, and recalled in Hart, Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership, p. 149. In his oral history Hart recorded that Faisal told him “This is an outrage” and he “was absolutely furious; I’ve never seen the man so angry in my life.” Parker T. Hart, First Oral History Interview, 15 April 1969, pp. 16-17, conducted by Dennis J. O’Brien for the John F. Kennedy Library, located at JFK Library.
the Nijran area. Word later came from the U.S. Embassy in Cairo that these latest Egyptian bombings were motivated by Nasser’s expectation that once the UAR and YAR agreed to the terms outlined by the U.S., the Saudis would cease economic and military support to Royalist forces, which they had not done. The bombings were designed to bring pressure on both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia to end Riyadh’s support to the insurgents.

**Growing Saudi Pressure for U.S. Military Assistance**

Prince Sultan immediately called in Colonel Wilson with a direct message from the Crown Prince to President Kennedy. Faisal needed to know exactly what the U.S. was willing to do to defend Saudi sovereignty. The most recent attacks were designed to create internal unrest in the Kingdom by undermining confidence in the government and its military. Would the U.S. take active actions to defend the Kingdom, or continue to rely on passive and ineffectual diplomacy? Sultan then passed on a formal request from the Crown Prince to the President consisting of three items. First, a U.S. declaration assuring Saudi Arabia of its complete support for the sovereignty of the Kingdom’s territory and of U.S. willingness to directly assist the Saudi military with U.S. forces. Second, that the U.S. send at once fighter aircraft to the Kingdom to defend it against external aggression. Third, that the U.S. immediately supply the Saudi military with the items of equipment necessary to defend the Kingdom contained in the $13.5 million credit package, including radar and anti-aircraft guns. Prince Sultan then added his own request that USMIL personnel visit the sites under attack and advise the Saudis on anti-aircraft gun emplacement and alert procedures.

---

102 USMILTNMSN (Wilson) to Secretary of State, 31 December 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), *JFK Library*. USMIL had already been involved in some direct military activities in response to the UAR attacks, and in the process encountered
The initial U.S. response was a reprimand to the UAR leadership. Realizing that Faisal was looking for something stronger and more concrete, the White House then turned to Faisal’s list. On his first request, Washington conveyed its willingness to permit publication of the President’s original October 25 letter to the Crown Prince and would publicly reaffirm its support for the integrity of Saudi Arabia as spelled out in the letter. As for the deployment of U.S. aircraft, the U.S. was prepared to announce military exercises with the Saudi military beginning in early 1963. On armaments requests, it would “carry forward shipment of 30 caliber ammo” and agree to “process rest of arms order as expeditiously as possible.” Arguably a mild and not terribly reassuring response to the Saudis, it reflected the continuing emphasis of the administration on ending the Yemen conflict using the existing political formula on disengagement. That the White House was not going to be baited by the Saudis was made clear by Secretary Rusk; “The US has no intention of being drawn into hostilities between Saudi Arabia and the UAR” he argued, nor “can US serve as ‘shield’ protecting Saudi Arabia while SAG stokes fires of war by supplying weapons and ammunition to the Royalists.” Washington remained unwilling to risk a military confrontation with Nasser that might scuttle efforts to engage him politically, and certainly was not willing to back Riyadh in its proxy war.

**A Clarion Call for Military Reform**

In addition to near-term Saudi efforts to directly draw in the U.S. military and to get more American hardware, the Saudi leadership once again turned to USMTM for

---

some of the problems and sensitivities involved. Colonel Wilson was given classified instructions to place the firing systems aboard the F-86 in operating conditions, presumably to have some capability to defend against UAR air attacks. Only U.S. technicians were capable of reactivating the guns, which were not operational due to Saudi concerns over where the guns might be directed. A USMTM officer in the field was confronted by a Saudi RSAF officer who upon seeing the activity, his suspicions aroused, ordered the work halted and the F-86s guarded to prevent any further activity. Only by high-level intervention was the matter cleared up and the guns put into operation. Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 27 December 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library. 


advice in addressing its larger organizational military problems. This latest appeal stemmed from Sultan’s early November request to Colonel Wilson to assist him in reorganizing the Saudi armed forces and the Kingdom’s defense structure. An initial response was a report by Colonel Wilson entitled *SAF (Saudi Arabian Forces) Reforms*. As its name implied, this report was not another survey of Saudi defense requirements but instead focused on some of the deep-seated institutional problems endemic to the Saudi armed forces.

Presented to Prince Sultan in late 1962, Wilson identified several areas as stifling serious military progress. For starters the lack of any decentralized decision making meant that even “the most simple and insignificant problems are now referred to Ministry of Defense and Aviation for decision.” This included decisions to share basic information with U.S. military advisors, forcing the advisors to act on incomplete or incorrect data, or else wait lengthy periods for higher release authority. The training mission’s activities were slowed as a result. More insidious, the inability to delegate authority had the damaging effect on commanders and troops of inducing “futility, paralysis and impotency in subordinate units and personnel.” Saudi commanders themselves also were criticized for demonstrating an indifference to their subordinates, showing little interest in progress within their military units and frequently were absent. The lack of any serious financial accounting mechanisms invited both mismanagement and graft on the part of officers. The amount of time spent by MODA personnel in performing their duties was also flagged as deficient: “Present working hours of many top echelon personnel (11:00 AM to 2:00 PM) just cannot get the job done.”

The report went on to cite the diffusion of resources and duplication of effort among the Regular Army, White Army (National Guard), and Royal Guard as another

---

major problem. Wilson’s report recommended that the White Army and Royal Guard
“be placed under the direction of the Army Chief of Staff” and funded through MODA
channels. As for military planning, MODA was faulted for failing to develop even short-
range operational plans and guidance to the fielded forces. In the case of force
modernization there was a “Failure to use workable long range plans for orderly growth
of the three Armed Forces.” Where plans did exist “none have been implemented in
sufficient measure to indicate genuine acceptance of even the basic concepts of the plans
involved.” Training deficiencies were identified as especially severe. Wilson reported to
Sultan that “To our knowledge, a field maneuver or field training exercise of battle group
size has not been conducted by the Saudi Army. As a matter fact, very little field training
of any kind has been observed over the past several years.” In the critical area of
logistics, the Saudi armed forces “prefer to leave the resolution of such problems to the
USMTM.”

Wilson’s critique also touched on the sensitive issue of the role of the armed
forces with respect to the rule of the Royal Family. “There is a persistent and widespread
rumor that the Saudi Government does not want effective Regular Armed Forces,” a
rumor which “will surely have a detrimental affect on the Armed Forces of Saudi
Arabia.” The report recommended a “counter-propaganda campaign” to neutralize this
perception, especially within the armed forces. Though frequently couched in
diplomatic terms (e.g., that the problems identified were not peculiar to the Saudi armed
forces, that the U.S. itself had to confront such issues in the past), the message was
undiably strong—there were serious and deep-rooted problems in the Saudi defense
sector.

106 SAF Reform, Annexes.
107 SAF Reforms, Annex A. Presumably the word “rumor” was employed as a diplomatic device.
Continuing Caution on U.S. Military Options over Yemen

In early January 1963 Faisal did agree to publication of Kennedy’s October 5 letter, as well as agreeing to hold joint military exercises with the U.S. He also reiterated the urgency of receiving U.S. arms shipments as soon as possible. These actions opened the way for expanding U.S. military activity as part of the overall diplomatic effort on Yemen. But any use of American force was heavily conditioned by Kennedy’s existing policy goal of disengagement. Any efforts to assist the Saudis militarily were to be a means to this end. ‘Proceed with extreme caution’ remained the order of the day.

Shortly after the new year the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented Secretary of Defense McNamara with a range of specific U.S. military actions for possible use in the Yemen conflict. As before, the Joint Chiefs maintained that any resolution was likely to be based on political and diplomatic solutions, not military ones. Nevertheless if military force was chosen a series of options were available. The lowest level response was a ‘show-of-force’ involving tactical aircraft and designed to deter the UAR and Yemeni forces from aggression against Saudi territory. The initial recommended element for this was a 300-man “Composite Air Strike Unit consisting of about eight tactical fighters and two to four reconnaissance aircraft with necessary refueling and support elements.” This was essentially the option that Komer and Lemay had discussed back in October-November. The estimate was that this force could be in Saudi Arabia in thirty six hours. A supplemental military demonstration could involve a destroyer attached to MIDEASTFOR making a port call in Jeddah. A more robust show of force alternative was deploying a Sixth Fleet carrier task force from the Mediterranean. If these force demonstrations did not prove effective in deterring attacks against Saudi Arabia, a number of escalating direct use options existed, including blockade, air defense

operations, interdiction of hostile shipping, and strikes against targets in the UAR and YAR.\textsuperscript{109}

At that same time Colonel Wilson continued discussions with the MODA staff and Prince Sultan on the basic Saudi defense posture. As an indicator of the state of Saudi defense affairs, in the course of these meetings Wilson asked “if war plans or defense plans existed which considered such factors as vital interests of country, nature of threats and budgetary limitation. None existed.” The planning cupboard was bare. Demonstrating the political-military advisory role that the USMTM Chief could play under such circumstances, Wilson in a private meeting with Prince Sultan emphasized that the SAG should work to reduce the tensions in the Yemen and resolve the conflict peacefully. The Saudi military had few options to counter the threat and needed time to build effective combat units and an overall defense plan for the Kingdom. Wilson then minced no words in explaining to Sultan why the Saudis found themselves in this predicament:

SAG had wasted millions of riyals in past years on armaments purchased without benefit of or not in consonance with professionally well developed sensible and coordinated defense plan. It [is] because of this fact SAG now finds itself with a military establishment of sub-marginal capability the first time a threat appears manifest. This waste has drained SAG treasury of vast sums which if spent wisely in professional manner would have produced mil forces in which King and CP could be proud.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{109} Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara, 2 January 1963, \textit{FRUS}, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, \textit{Near East 1962-1963}, pp. 295-298. The JCS were already having second thoughts about sending the tactical aircraft unit as a deterrent, but the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, McGeorge Bundy, prevailed in arguing that the risks of doing so were low and that a failure to do so could lead to a greater need for actual U.S. use of force later. He added that “I gather the Chiefs also wonder whether this flea-bitten part of the world is one where we should get involved. I’m afraid we are involved here long since—even though it may have been a mistake in the first place. But remember oil.’’ Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor), 11 January 1963, \textit{FRUS}, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, \textit{Near East 1962-1963}, pp. 303-304.

Coming on top of the previous \textit{SAF Reforms} report, the news was bleak indeed. Sultan’s response was to ask USMTM to immediately prepare a master defense plan for the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{111}

Faisal was informed in mid-January 1963 that the U.S. was prepared to consider sending tactical fighters to Saudi Arabia, but with very specific conditions attached. Faisal had to give his word that all military shipments to the Royalists would stop. Hart was himself told confidentially that even if the U.S. fighters were deployed they would not be employed against UAR or YAR forces unless directly engaged, and then for self-defense only.\textsuperscript{112} From the Saudi perspective this cautious approach continued to signal Washington’s very limited military commitment to Riyadh in its conflict with Cairo. Also not lost was the administration’s continuing refrain that the best answer to Nasser was for the Saudis to push their own internal reforms, an even more disturbing pattern. This all helped spur the Saudis into looking for additional benefactors.

\textbf{Re-enter the British: Rapprochement and Renewal of Saudi-U.K. Military Assistance Ties}

The Yemen conflict, along with the disappointing level of U.S. support to Saudi Arabia, stimulated additional efforts by Riyadh to seek out other external sources of support against its enemies. Turning once again to London exemplified Faisal’s craft at playing a weak hand well. In late January 1963 he re-established diplomatic relations with Britain despite ongoing differences over Buraimi. In contrast to the Kennedy Administration, London’s unwillingness to recognize the new regime in the YAR (in the face of U.S. efforts to persuade London to do so) and the shared sense of mutual threat

\textsuperscript{111} Over the next year, working with the Saudi Ministry of Defense USMTM would put together another reorganization plan known as \textit{Armed Forces Defense Plan No. 1}.

\textsuperscript{112} See footnote reference to Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor), 11 January 1963, \textit{FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963}, p. 305.
the YAR posed to Saudi and British interests helped move the two together. As Badeeb states, “Saudi-British views of the Yemeni dilemma were much closer than Saudi-American views.” Of primary concern to Britain’s Foreign Office was the risk a Republican government posed of eroding confidence among the Aden protectorate (now renamed the Protectorate of Southern Arabia). A weakened British military presence in Aden in turn threatened London’s ability to protect the Gulf shaykhdoms and England’s oil interests. From Riyadh’s perspective, enlisting Britain’s political and military support in the Yemen conflict provided obvious advantages. And beyond the direct benefits, the renewed relationship could be used as in the past to leverage additional U.S. political and military assistance.

It was not long before the effects on military assistance were felt. Just as relations were beginning to warm with the British, Defense Minister Sultan informed Ambassador Hart that he was ready to purchase twelve U.S. F-5 aircraft (ten F-5As and two F-5Bs). While the purchase would do nothing in the short run to alleviate the Kingdom’s current air defense problems, Hart cabled to State with a real sense of urgency over the request. The U.S. needed to respond as quickly as possible to convey Washington’s support for Saudi Arabia and strengthen America’s “role as leading influence in Saudi military affairs.” Hart was already aware of the growing interest on the part of the Saudis in supplementing their U.S. military assistance with that from the British and felt the U.S. needed to protect its position. A few days later he was authorized by Rusk to make the

113 Holden and Johns, The House of Saud, pp. 228-229. Britain’s 1961 intervention in Kuwait had an initial salutary effect as well. The intervention helped to protect Saudi territorial interests, while Britain’s rapid departure after the crisis and replacement by an Arab League force negotiated by the Saudis served Riyadh’s political agenda.
115 On January 16, 1963 an agreement was reached merging the British colony of Aden with the 11-state Federation of South Arabia, and the Aden Protectorate was renamed the Protectorate of Southern Arabia. Mostyn, Major Political Events in Iran, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, 1945-1990, p. 83.
116 Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 12 January 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.
offer, but also informed that the F-5s were unlikely to be available for delivery before September 1964.

No sooner had London and Riyadh restored diplomatic relations when the British approached the U.S. in February about the prospect of British military advisers being sent to help train the Saudi White Army. The U.S. military mission was strongly opposed to the idea, maintaining that in the absence of overriding political considerations “USMTM considers proposal for British military mission with White Army would compromise USMTM position in Saudi Arabia.” Of major concern was that the two missions would be working “at cross purposes as long as regular Army and National Guard are used in balance of forces role by SAG.” USMTM was actively working with MODA at the time to explore the prospects for some integration of the Army and National Guard to better utilize limited defense resources. This included the possibility of having MODA assume operational control over both forces (as previously recommended in Colonel Wilson’s SAF Reforms report). Introducing a British mission to train the White Army would work against these efforts at integration. Over the years USMTM made repeated offers to provide advisers to work with the National Guard. All had been rebuffed. Now with this latest Saudi interest in outside training of the Guard, USMTM suggested offering the Crown Prince U.S. special force teams to train the White Army. This could be done as part of the efforts already underway involving the U.S. counterinsurgency mobile training team program (CI MTT).

Further Escalation and New Diplomatic Efforts: The Bunker Mission

Egyptian military activity against Saudi Arabia stepped up significantly in mid-February and with it renewed pressure for a more direct U.S. response. Egyptian aircraft

---

made there deepest penetrations to date by bombing Royalist supply depots near Nijran, Khamis Mushayt, and Jizan and also conducted an airdrop of weapons along the Saudi coast, presumably for Saudi insurgents inside the Kingdom. The drop consisted of 119 “bundles” of weapons which U.S. military personnel estimated could support a 1,000-man force. Constituting a serious escalation and evidence of direct UAR designs against the Kingdom itself, Faisal was both outraged and increasingly left wondering about U.S. support. How long, he repeatedly would ask, can the U.S. expect him to “keep his arms folded?” He had military assistance options beyond the U.S. (e.g., use of mercenaries and now the British) but had not exercised them to work with the U.S. He now felt time was running out as the Saudi people increasingly questioned why there was no Saudi military response to these provocations.

In light of these developments Ambassador Hart sought a review of U.S. policy, to include re-opening the issue of deploying a squadron of aircraft to Saudi Arabia. Hart called not only for the deployment but also fairly strong rules of engagement allowing the U.S. aircraft to shoot down UAR planes “behaving in a hostile manner in Saudi airspace.” Washington’s concern remained, however, that it not provide any U.S. military cover for continued Saudi supplying of the Royalists that would undermine the larger objective of disengagement. Robert Komer laid out his perspective on the situation to the President on February 21:

Painful and uncertain as it is, I see no alternative to our present effort to damp down the Yemen affair, by working on Faysal as well as warning off Nasser. We must make any commitments to Faysal dependent on his willingness to play ball. Instead of fiddling around in Yemen Faysal needs to shore himself up domestically as the chief means of protecting himself against Nasser virus. In the

---

118 Hart, Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership, pp. 156-159. According to Hart, the top Saudi leadership was to assemble a few days later in Jeddah, and the air-dropped weapons were believed to be part of a plan to take down the leadership. A State Department telegram signed by Secretary of State Rusk noted that UAR responsibility for the drop was “now confirmed beyond doubt and reliability reported further drops contemplated with arms intended for pro-UAR elements in Saudi Army.” Department of State Telegram, 25 March 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Yemen), JFK Library.

long run we won’t save our oil just by giving Faysal a blank check on us. Nor will we necessarily lose it if we let Faysal get bloodied a bit.\textsuperscript{120}

But Komer and other senior officials recognized that getting Faisal “to play ball” on disengagement also meant offering additional U.S. military incentives to bring him around. Aside from the possible deployment of U.S. aircraft, the idea of offering the Saudis a modern air defense system of their own to defend the Red Sea coast was taking hold. The Saudis would be expected to finance the program, but the U.S. would provide it and man it until American training advisors could bring Saudi personnel up to the necessary level of expertise. The near-term effect would be to provide a psychological boost to the Saudi leadership, the longer-term benefit to provide the Saudis with an air defense capability in the western portion of the Kingdom. The \textit{quid pro quo} would be Faisal’s agreement to halt any further assistance to the Royalists as part of an overall agreement also involving the phased withdrawal of UAR troops.\textsuperscript{121}

This enhanced military package (deploying a squadron of fighters and the air defense system) was raised with President Kennedy in late February as part of a larger discussion of ongoing negotiations to end the Yemen conflict. Regarding the deployment of aircraft, the State Department proposal was to “offer the politico-military reassurance of a ‘plate glass fighter squadron’ in the Jidda area if Faysal would agree to suspend aid to the Royalists.” Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Paul Nitze raised the concern that this could lead to a major confrontation. If the UAR continued to bomb Saudi territory, the most effective military option was to eliminate the problem at its source by striking at UAR airfields. The President made clear this was not an option. But both Nitze and General Earle Wheeler (Chief of Staff, U.S. Army)

pointed out that simply defending the large airspace of Saudi Arabia alone was extremely
difficult and would require a radar network. Nitze also re-emphasized the enduring
Defense Department position that any U.S. military involvement had to be contingent on
Faisal’s agreement to suspend support for the Royalists.

The President finally agreed to offer deployment of the fighter squadron to Faisal
as part of an overall package on disengagement, but again carefully circumscribed. If
Faisal accepted the complete package, the fighter deployment would be explained to
Nasser as a means to get Faisal to suspend support to the Royalists, making it less
provocative to the Egyptian leader. Kennedy also directed that the deployment not look
like a permanent condition, that a fixed timetable of two months be set, and that Faisal be
informed it would be withdrawn if support to the Royalists were resumed. Also included
as part of the military incentive was an offer to provide (though not finance) a Saudi air
defense capability. These military elements would be part of an eight-point
disengagement proposal that included stationing neutral observers to verify both Saudi
suspension of aid and the phased withdrawal of UAR troops. The proposal was to be
carried to Faisal by the President’s Special Emissary on the Yemen crisis, Ellsworth
Bunker.  

Now with the prospects of a U.S. deployment increasing, in a March 6
Memorandum the Joint Chiefs again raised the difficulties and risks associated with use
of U.S. force on the Arabian Peninsula and the importance of first exhausting all political
and diplomatic alternatives. In a sign of further reservations over using U.S. forces in a
combat role, in the event military force was still required the Joint Chiefs recommended
that the capabilities of the United Kingdom be considered as well. Citing the substantial
British assets already in the region (4600 Army troops at Aden, 1100 troops in Bahrain,

and 3300 troops in Cyprus, plus various aircraft and naval vessels in the area), the JCS concluded that “UK forces in the Middle East can conduct effective military operations anywhere in the Arabian Peninsula.” The JCS therefore “consider that concert with the United Kingdom in the Arabian Peninsula is essential.” This was reflected in the proposed military courses of action in the event Faisal accepted the agreement. In order of severity these consisted of:

1. The dispatch of a military advance team to coordinate a U.S. deployment; the sending of this team itself might be sufficient to deter further Egyptian aggression;
2. Deploy “a token Air Defense Squadron” of 3 fighter-bombers, 2-4 reconnaissance aircraft, and 1 mobile radar unit along with air refueling and other support elements, all deployed from the U.S.;
3. Implement Phase I of CINCNELM OPLAN 200-6, which called for a naval show of force in the Red Sea and Mediterranean;

As noted by the President himself, the Joint Chiefs appeared very reluctant to get involved in the Middle East and were strongly inclined to involve the British in any military operations against the UAR.124 Here then was one of the dichotomies between the desire on the part of many U.S. policy makers and USMTM to retain the U.S. lock on military ties with the Kingdom, and the desire of the Joint Chiefs to encourage British military involvement in protecting the peninsula. In theory the two were not inconsistent, but practical political realities at least put them in tension, especially given the now strengthening security ties between London and Riyadh.

Military Assistance as an Instrument of Disengagement Diplomacy

With the President’s approval of the disengagement package the U.S. was clearly taking the diplomatic initiative with attached military commitments. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker first met with Faisal March 6-8 where he presented the proposal to the Crown Prince. Faisal expressed interest in the possibilities, emphasizing the importance of getting UAR troops and equipment out of Yemen as a Saudi condition for ending the conflict. Faisal was also very interested in the proposed U.S. military support to his government and what this implied. He noted that his country had already suffered several bombing attacks and despite its pledges of support the U.S. had done nothing. Bunker referenced the strong statements Kennedy made to Nasser regarding Saudi Arabia, adding unequivocally that the U.S. would provide “Military support to the SAG to deter attacks and, if necessary, to shoot down intruding, hostile aircraft” as part of the overall disengagement package. Also made was the offer of a long-term air defense system. Faisal was appreciative, but reiterated his concerns over the lack of U.S. response to date and the problems this created for him and King Saud. Popular indignation was rising over Saudi military inaction and Faisal was feeling the heat:

Today...I received a telegram from His Majesty the King, it was the fifth such telegram, asking me what I was doing and why I was not doing anything. He asked pointedly what has the USG done about all this!”

---

This statement on shooting down UAR aircraft was made in the first meeting between Faisal and Bunker on 6 March. It would later create problems due to the administration’s desire to keep the rules of engagement very restrictive, with shoot downs only considered as a last resort. In contrast the Saudis would treat it more as a promise of aggressive action in the event of any further UAR intrusions. The record of Ambassador Bunker’s March 6 meeting is in Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Crown Prince Faysal, 6 March 1963, attachment to Memorandum for Mr. McGeorge Bundy, The White House, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).

Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Crown Prince Faysal, 6 March 1963. Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963. Records of the Department of State (RG 59). Of course the lack of Saudi military response had much to do with continuing fears over the reliability of the forces. Hart notes that the very day the Egyptians unleashed another attack in March 1963, bombing the Saudi town of Abha in the south and hitting a hospital killing two dozen patients, “the Saudi air force was doing barrel rolls and maneuvers for exhibition purposes in Dhahran,” which he attended. “They didn’t trust their pilots...They never put them in combat.” Parker T. Hart, Third Oral History Interview, 10 June 1970, p. 56.
Faisal again wanted to know how long the U.S. expected him to go on like this. As for the air defense program, he asked that the details of this be passed to MODA by Colonel Wilson.  

Separate from the Bunker proposal, Ambassador Hart had requested some initial recommendations on a potential counter-insurgency program for the Saudi military. A small special forces team was already in the Kingdom, but basically as a public relations exercise with Saudi forces. Hart was interested in something more substantial and longer term. The obvious concern was that spill-over from events in Northern Yemen and Nasser’s larger assault on the Saudi regime could trigger an insurgency within the Kingdom. A report was prepared for the Ambassador by a member of the Special Operations forces. It recommend a long-range in country training program for Saudi officers, as well as having select officers attend an extended counter-insurgency course conducted by the U.S. Army School in Europe. It also proposed sending a U.S. survey team to the Kingdom to identify problems and training requirements. Based on this survey, Counterinsurgency Mobile Training Teams (CI MTTs) could be dispatched to conduct the necessary training of Saudi forces.

As of mid-March 1963 it still remained unclear whether the U.S. would actually send the tactical aviation squadron to Saudi Arabia. Ambivalence over the mission was still very high. When, the President asked, would U.S. aircraft actually have to be deployed in support of the disengagement proposal? The President’s security advisor

128 See Memorandum to Hart from Lt Col William Hinton, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 8 March 1963, with attached document “Counter-Insurgency Training Brief,” Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). By June USMTM would be working up proposed plans for the CI MTT’s. These were to consist of a range of activities, from academic course instruction in counterinsurgency to MODA staff, to “grass roots” counterinsurgency training to selected officers and enlisted personnel, to civic action, communications and psychological operations teams. Also proposed was CI training in U.S. schools for selected officers. The teams for each proposed area were relatively small, usually between 4-10 men. Colonel Wilson (CHUSMTM) to Ambassador Hart, Counterinsurgency Mobile Training Teams, 11 July 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
McGeorge Bundy responded that hopefully not at all, that it was the prospect of such support that could bring Faisal to suspend support to the Royalists, allowing for a military disengagement. 129

In his continuing efforts to get Faisal onboard, President Kennedy again wrote to the Crown Prince expressing the critical importance of Saudi Arabia agreeing to suspend support to the Royalists. He asked Faisal to reconsider conditions he placed on the President’s eight-point plan, conditions which had little chance of being accepted. Kennedy also emphasized the recent political shifts in the Arab world (a Nasserite-Ba’th coup in Iraq in February followed by a pro-Nasserite army coup in Syria in early March) and their implications for continued Saudi involvement in Yemen:

Events in Iraq and Syria obviously have established a new atmosphere in the Arab world which can only give new confidence to your opponents and bring new pressures on your Government. The Egyptian offensive in Yemen seems to us on the eve of success. Our intelligence confirms your remarks that revolutionary ideas are abroad in your country. This situation can be corrected if action is taken now. The longer the current impasse goes on, the less chance there is that corrective action will be effective.

The President closed by urging Faisal to accept the American proposal without conditions. He reiterated the U.S. enduring support for Saudi Arabia, listing military demonstrations undertaken to date by American forces as the latest evidence of this. But he felt compelled to add that continuing Saudi support to the Royalists “makes it extremely difficult for me to take further such actions,” a clear reference to the fighter squadron. 130

Bunker later reported that Faisal took umbrage at Kennedy’s suggestions of revolutionary forces inside the Kingdom, characterizing U.S. understanding of internal Saudi developments as “faulty at best.” Many of the sources for such reports were

130 Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Saudi Arabia, 14 March 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963, pp. 427-428. This message from the President was conveyed to Faisal orally by Ambassador Bunker at their March 17 meeting.
American, he shot back, and these apparently were being used to intimidate him into desired actions. Bunker sought to reassure Faisal that the President had no such intention.  

A third set of meetings was undertaken with Faisal in early April. The Crown Prince agreed to President Kennedy’s disengagement proposal but now with amendments. At that time Bunker asked if Faisal still wished to have the American squadron sent once the disengagement was in force. Interestingly, Faisal’s response was non-committal, saying he did “in principle” but would leave details for discussion by the military. Faisal appeared more interested in U.S. help on a proposed television station and in a road construction survey than in the squadron.  

Perhaps not wanting to look too eager, or in order to keep his options open while the disengagement process played out, Faisal did not seize the opening. Bunker was of the view that despite Faisal’s “elliptical response to dispatching [the] squadron” he believed Faisal wanted it “soonest.”

**Troubled Deployment: The Military and Political Complications Surrounding Operation ‘Hard Surface’**

The deployment of the fighter aircraft now looked imminent. Reflecting the delicate balancing act Washington was attempting, the final touches had to be made on how best to characterize the operation. It was presented to the Saudi leadership as a strong signal of U.S. support to their security and “to demonstrate to the Saudi and

---


132 Hart noted that Faisal had important political reasons for wanting the television station. The religious authorities continued to prevent many of the normal pastimes enjoyed in other Arab states. As a result, the “growing educated classes in business offices, military and government bureaucracy have little in way of after hours diversion except listening to hammer blows of Radio Cairo against their government and rulers.” Faisal needed to provide them an alternative. Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 13 March 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), *JFK Library*.

Egyptian governments and peoples continued US interest in and support for Saudi Arabia and to provide a deterrent to Egyptian operations in Saudi airspace.” It was packaged very differently to Nasser. The U.S. Ambassador to the UAR was told to describe it as a training activity in support of long-term U.S. interest in improving Saudi self-defense capabilities, and that its deployment had specifically been delayed so as not to give the impression it was linked to the Yemen crisis. The idea was to avoid a confrontational atmosphere with Cairo whereby the deployment was presented as a direct response to UAR bombing attacks and a riposte to Nasser. While Nasser may well have understood the more direct implications of the proposed U.S. action, the Saudis likely found little solace in Washington’s continuing need to draw these distinctions.

An advanced survey team for the squadron did, in fact, arrive in Jeddah on April 18. In addition to dealing with problems of getting visas for an estimated 850 personnel associated with the deployment, the location of the squadron soon became an issue. Faisal wanted it based at Jeddah as a clear signal of U.S. intent to protect the western portion of the country against Egyptian air strikes. But both Saudi and U.S. military planners concluded that Jeddah would not work due to the now approaching Hajj season and the vast number of pilgrims that would arrive through Jeddah. Furthermore, a principal initial mission of Hard Surface was to train Saudi pilots. The F-86 aircraft used for Saudi training were based at Dhahran, as were support facilities. Moving all of this to Jeddah would be both time consuming and further congest the airfield there. They therefore chose Dhahran as the deployment location.

Despite the operational arguments and the approval of Minister of Defense Sultan, this plan was rejected by Faisal who insisted the deployment be in the western sector. After a month of subsequent negotiations on this, Faisal finally agreed on May 22 to a compromise whereby the main operating base would be at Dhahran with a secondary

---

basing of aircraft at Jeddah. 135 The U.S. would take compensatory actions to insure a significant presence and show of force existed at Jeddah to meet Faisal’s concerns, especially at the beginning of the operation. 136 Also as part of the compromise the Commander, Air Forces, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean (AFELM), would make his headquarters at Jeddah even though the bulk of the force—roughly 80 percent—would be based at Dhahran (now to be AFELM rear headquarters). The Saudis made clear that they were more concerned with the positioning of the headquarters and the impression it would send than they were with the actual distribution of U.S. forces. 137

As the final details of the mission were being worked out, in another twist on political sensitivities in how to characterize the operation Faisal requested that any reference to the unit’s mission as providing an “air defense capability” be deleted and that the sole stated purpose be that of training. This would lessen the exposure of the Saudi Government to criticism that it had to rely on the U.S. for its self-defense. As further insurance Faisal wanted no formal written record of the agreed terms of the deployment which if discovered could be used against the monarchy. 138

CINCNELM meanwhile raised a different set of concerns, namely that before the U.S. squadron was even deployed unrealistic expectations were taking hold among the Saudis. “We here have the definite impression that the Saudis now envision the

---

135 Ibid., p. 194.
136 On this point CINCNELM reported that “I have assured Amb Hart that AFELM [Air Forces, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean] can produce a max show of force operation on the arrival date of force at Jidda....that the operations staff at Jidda could initially be increased (for show), that the first day could be a max effort with static displays....The whole idea is to impress Prince Faisal and the Jidda area of our presence, then taper-off to our planned operation.” CINCNELM Rep Jidda to Secretary of State, 14 May 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.
137 Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 22 May 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.
138 Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 3 June 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library. As senior U.S. administrative officials later put it, Operation Hard Surface was ostensibly presented as a “training” mission “as the best public pretext for what both the Saudis and we realized was the supplying of tangible deterrent to further United Arab Republic incursion over Saudi territory.” Talbot to Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) Paul Nitze, 4 October 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
deployment for an extended period and that its mission will include the establishment and maintenance of a continuing air defense system for Saudi Arabia.” CINCNELM recommended a strong message be sent to the Saudi Government “to keep this commitment in its proper perspective” or else risk jeopardizing long-range U.S. military programs in Saudi Arabia when the unit was in fact withdrawn.\footnote{CINCNELM to JCS, 17 May 1963, \textit{Saudi Arabian Operations}, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG 59).} For its part the USMTM team cautioned that the offered air defense program should be “under way prior to redeployment [of] Hard Surface forces to avoid creation vacuum in Saudi thinking regarding practical application U.S. conditional pledge [to] preserve integrity Saudi Arabia from external threat.”\footnote{Message from USMTM to USCINCEUR, \textit{Proposed Air Defense System for Saudi Arabia}, May 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG 59).} Having been burned before, USMTM added that every effort should be made to insure Saudi financial and leadership backing for the air defense system to avoid repeating the disappointing results of the five year defense modernization program begun in 1957.\footnote{USMILTNGMSN to Secretary of State, \textit{Proposed Air Defense System for Saudi Arabia}, 15 May 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), \textit{JFK Library}.} Readily apparent in all this was the fear of another cycle of inflated hopes followed by dashed expectations all the way around.

Following the April arrival of the advanced team, the first support elements of Hard Surface, a USAFE C-130 support aircraft along with an air rescue helicopter and combat support personnel, arrived at Dhahran on May 5.\footnote{CINCNELM to JCS, \textit{Hard Surface Summary No. 1}, 6 May 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG 59).} With these initial elements now in place and with a United Nations agreement in early June to provide the observer mission on troop withdrawals (the U.N. Yemen Observation Mission or UNYOM), evident closure was reached on implementing the disengagement. With this the President finally agreed on June 3, 1963, to the deployment of the air squadron to Saudi Arabia (officially code-named “Operation Hard Surface”) pending the arrival of the U.N. observers and verification that the disengagement was underway. There were still
lingering concerns that the aircraft not arrive prior to the implementation phase. The squadron was to consist of eight F-100D fighter aircraft and one transport aircraft serving as a command support center, plus KB-50 tankers. The aircraft would proceed to Dhahran via Zaragosa, Spain, then deploy forward to Jeddah once the U.N. observers were in place.  

This seemingly set stage was soon overturned. Renewed UAR air strikes against Saudi territory, reportedly in response to continued Saudi gun-running to the Royalists, now threatened to unravel the entire process. Hart immediately cabled that pressure was building on Faisal to resume full-scale aid to the Royalists and that the Ambassador could no longer credibly argue to the Crown Prince that the U.S. was living up to its commitments. Komer argued to the President that although the U.S. was committed to sending F-100s to Saudi Arabia, the timing was still not ripe despite the latest attacks by Egyptian aircraft:

Saudis are pleading for them in light of UAR raids. Because of the way Saudis are lying to us [about ceasing support to the Royalists], however, simple prudence dictates holding them up until we have concrete evidence observers are in place and disengagement has begun.

Faisal was indeed seeking the aircraft with renewed urgency, adding that he could no longer depend upon repeated promises. A presidential message was dispatched to Faisal on June 9 stating that the squadron was ready, and as promised, would be sent “as soon as

---

143 On President’s approval see Robert W. Komer, Memorandum for Record, 3 July 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.  
144 The Saudis very likely were still supplying the Royalists, but by this time British pipelines were also reportedly established. The Royalists were ready to do business even with the Israelis if they could get military support in return. Mr. Ahmed Ali Zaborah, former Chargé d’Affairs of the Yemeni Kingdom, told State Department officer Talcot Seelye that “We would turn to the Israelis for assistance if they could help, and we would not hesitate to recognize Israel.” Handwritten note by Talcot Seelye, attached to Department of State Airgram, 10 April 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).  
145 Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 6 June 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.  
disengagement was fully in effect.” Meant to be reassuring, the transparent message was that the squadron was still on hold, a point as usual not lost on Faisal.\footnote{For text of President’s message to Faisal see Telegram From the President’s Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kaysen) to the Ambassador to Saudi Arabia (Hart), 8 June 1963, \textit{FRUS}, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, \textit{Near East 1962-1963}, pp. 573-574. For Faisal’s response see attached footnote.}

As the Saudis grew more desperate, Prince Sultan began pressuring the Saudi Chief of Staff, Major General Abdullah Al-Mutlaq, to move the RSAF F-86 aircraft at Dhahran to an airstrip in the south at Bisha. A meeting was called by Al-Mutlaq on June 8 to discuss the concept with Colonel Wilson and his staff. Wilson detailed the reasons why this was not a realistic proposal. To begin with, the airstrip at Bisha was newly laid and had not yet cured. It would require another two weeks to do so. In addition if moved, the aircraft could not be maintained without USMTM personnel, something the U.S. Government would first have to agree to (as well as approve deploying the aircraft in this fashion). And most significant, the Saudi pilots were not qualified to conduct air-to-air combat. Al-Mutlaq conceded the futility of the operation to Wilson, but felt he had no choice but to attempt it in response to Sultan’s directive.\footnote{USMILTMGMSN message, 10 June 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), \textit{JFK Library}.}

Secretary of State Rusk was himself becoming increasingly concerned that the continuous delay of Hard Surface was further eroding U.S.-Saudi political relations. Rusk therefore recommended to the President that the USAF squadron be dispatched to Saudi Arabia as soon as the first detachment of U.N. observers was in place, and that Faisal be given an anticipated date of arrival of the squadron. A more assertive stance, Rusk still insisted on including a warning that the aircraft would be withdrawn if evidence arose of continuing Saudi support to the Royalists.\footnote{Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy, 12 June 1963, \textit{FRUS}, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, \textit{Near East 1962-1963}, p. 578.} Yet additional pressure to get on with it came with the British dispatch in June of a military mission to the Kingdom.
to help modernize and upgrade the training of the National Guard, marking the re-emergence of formal British military assistance to the Saudis.\footnote{According to Johns and Holden, British intelligence (MI-6) was already assisting the Saudis in clandestine gun running to Royalist forces. \textit{The House of Saud}, p. 229. State Department talking points prepared for an April meeting with British officials on Persian Gulf Policy record that the U.S. had “No objection to small UK training mission to White Army” provided there was close cooperation with USMTM. But “US should continue be principal supplier of arms, as well as principal western point of contact on most matters including advice and counsel.” See \textit{Talking Points for Assistant Secretary Talbot in US-UK Meeting on Persian Gulf Policy}, April 23-24, 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG 59). As it would later turn out, the British did supply the National Guard but also pushed hard to sell to the Regular Army and the RSAF as well. In his conversations with the British, Prince Abdullah, by then Commander of the National Guard, expressed interest in the wire-guided anti-tank missile the Vigilant. Abdullah asked if it could be fired from a camel. When told in typically dry English fashion by a British Aerospace Corporation representative that it could, but only if the Prince was willing to expend a camel for each one fired, Abdullah reportedly replied with equal dryness that he had plenty of camels to spare. \textit{The House of Saud}, p. 244.}

\textbf{The Flap Over Jewish Military Personnel}

Faced with this weight of events President Kennedy authorized the actual deployment of the aircraft on June 13.\footnote{For Komer’s request for the President’s final authority to deploy see Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy, 13 June 1963, \textit{FRUS}, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, \textit{Near East 1962-1963}, pp. 580-581. The JCS notified CINCSTRIKE and CINCNELM of the President’s approval that same day. See \textit{Editorial Note}, \textit{FRUS}, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, \textit{Near East 1962-1963}, p. 581.} After many months of effort and innumerable delays, the aircraft were finally moving. But no sooner did the aircraft go ‘wheels up’ enroute to the Kingdom when a political row now arose over the issue of American Jews serving in Saudi Arabia. It began a few days earlier when on June 9 Representative Emanuel Celler, Democrat of Brooklyn, was making a radio address in New York.

During that address he announced that he was officially informed by the U.S. Government that traditional Saudi policy prohibiting those of Jewish faith from serving among U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia had recently been reversed, and that Jews were now serving in the Kingdom. This triggered a front page story in the New York Times the following day and was also picked up by Radio Cairo and Voice of the Arabs.\footnote{“Saudi Arabia Lets Jews in U.S. Units Serve on Her Soil,” Monday, June 10, 1963, \textit{New York Times}, p. 1. On Radio Cairo and “Voice of the Arabs,” see Hart, \textit{Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership}, p. 195.} Four days later on June 14, when the U.S. officially informed the Saudis of the departure of the
fighter squadron, the other shoe dropped. Ambassador Hart was hit with Faisal’s demand that the U.S. Government publicly denounce Congressman Celler’s statement and that until he received a response from Washington no U.S. servicemen could enter the Kingdom. The deployment was immediately suspended until a mutually acceptable way could be found out of this latest conundrum.

The resulting flap over U.S. Jewish military personnel was to a large degree a self-inflicted wound. In assembling the original Hard Surface team, the USAF was operating under the 1953 provisions of the Mutual Defense Assistance agreement with Saudi Arabia. Paragraph 9 included the statement that

If the Saudi Arabian Government asks the Advisory Group to expel or replace any of its members, personnel or employees whom it does not desire to stay in its territory, the Advisory Group will carry out such requests at once.

As part of the ongoing U.S.-Saudi negotiations on a revised USMTM agreement, this clause was to be removed as it pertained to race, religion, or color. But the agreement had not been finalized. Therefore the original April 19 DoD/USAFE guidance on personnel for Hard Surface directed that “Personnel of Jewish faith or Jewish extraction will not be selected.” Upon discovering this directive the State Department informed Defense that this position was unnecessary, was inconsistent with the Department’s position to Congress that military personnel sent abroad were not screened on the basis of religion, and should be rescinded. The JCS promptly agreed to this rescission. However, the USAF did not convey the change to its commanders until May 10. By that time the advance support party had already been deployed to Saudi Arabia (4-6 May) without any Jewish members, and the entire Hard Surface unit was already selected, again without any Jews. In the middle of this leaks began about the existence of the directive.

Following a discussion between Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Chief of Staff of the

---

154 See Appendix C.
Air Force General LeMay was ordered to now include those of Jewish faith on the Hard Surface deployment, which was done. At that point it appeared that the matter had been caught and dealt with in time. But the Celler episode soon proved that wrong.

Faisal was now in a box, needing the deployment more than ever but also facing a major public relations problem. Hart reported back that “immediate Faysal concern is not whether our unit contains any Jews (Faysal does not care)” but that he needed a public statement “from U.S. official source to get Faysal off hook on which Celler put him.”

Saudi Deputy Foreign Minster Saqqaf further informed Hart that

SAG has no intention whatever of requiring visas for members Hard Surface and will not investigate any personnel after they arrive. No one will be asked his religion....All SAG needs now is some useable sign from USG which offsets stream of attack from Cairo.

But it was of course well recognized by U.S. policy makers that any refuting of Celler or his statement was both counterproductive and impossible.

While Cairo was lambasting the Saudis over the event, it simultaneously helped to break the deadlock over it. Additional bombings by Egyptian aircraft on June 23-24 acted as an added incentive for Washington and Riyadh to find a way out. In a face-saving solution, at a press conference on June 29 a Department of State spokesman


156 Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 17 June 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.

157 So too did intelligence estimates of growing Soviet involvement in Yemen. A Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) estimate at the time concluded that there were now about 1,000 Soviet technicians and trainers in the YAR, focused on military construction and instructing the Yemens in use of Russian military equipment. Operationally, Russian pilots were flying transport missions and “probably bomber operations against the Royalist forces.” Russian construction of an airfield was also underway at al Raudha, north of Sanaa. Memorandum From the Acting Chief of Staff of the Defense Intelligence Agency (Glass) to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Bundy), 21 June 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963, pp. 599-600. On a more positive note, the estimate concluded that Nasser’s desire to retain his dominant position in Yemen would lead him to advise the Yemeni leadership to limit its dependence on the Soviets.
announced the deployment of a “training mission” to Saudi Arabia, that Saudi Arabia retained its traditional visa policy as a sovereign state, and that in terms of U.S. personnel the American policy of non-discrimination was well established and no problems had arisen with the Saudis. This formulation was acceptable to Faisal and the way was finally cleared for deployment.  

CINCSTRIKE received the JCS Directive to execute Hard Surface on June 28. Yet even now the details of the deployment were still laden with political considerations. As scheduled before, the fighters proceeded to Zaragosa where they awaited further orders to proceed to Dhahran via Incirlik, Turkey. The support elements of Hard Surface were to be operational at Dhahran by July 1. With the U.N. observers scheduled to arrive in the forward area on July 5, this was also the planned date when the fighter aircraft would actually be sent to Dhahran. From there they would be held back from deployment to Jeddah until UNYOM was confirmed in place and another warning was issued to Nasser.

158 For background and description of the press conference see Editorial Note, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963, pp. 581-583. At the time Komer was of the view that continuing this ambiguity was likely to create more problems in the future and that the ‘screening’ issue should be definitively resolved. The costs of not doing so should be made clear to Faisal: “if this isn’t cleared up now we will just have another hassle every time Faysal wants another demonstration of U.S. support.” Komer memorandum to McGeorge Bundy, 18 June 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.

159 Strike Command (USSTRIKECOM) was established in September 1961 as a unified command formed by combining forces of the Strategic Army Command and the Tactical Air Command. Among its responsibilities was to provide forces for the Middle East. CINCSTRIKE therefore had command authority for the deployment of Hard Surface. For background and history of Strike Command and its many problems, including controversies over its role in the Middle East relative to other Commands and regional forces (e.g., CINCNELM, USMIDEASTFOR), see Robert P. Haffa, Jr., The Half War (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), pp. 91-105. For a more descriptive ‘period piece’ on CINCSTRIKE see Major General Clyde Box, “United States Strike Command,” Air University Review (September-October 1964), pp. 3-14.

Hard Surface Debut

The F-100 fighters landed at Dhahran on July 5, where they then fell under the operational control of CINCNELM. The final composition of the unit was eight F-100 fighters, two KB-50 tankers, two C-130 transport and command aircraft, several helicopters and total personnel of 541. As previously agreed, the unit itself was based out of Dhahran. The first six F-100s arrived in Jeddah on July 10, along with four F-86s piloted by Saudis flying out of Dhahran. The following day they conducted a local “air show” in conjunction with the F-86s in a demonstration for local consumption. This was followed by a program of training activities for Saudi pilots over the next several weeks.

The U.S. aircraft also began a series of flights in western Saudi Arabia but avoided airspace close to the Yemeni border area, something that aggravated Prince Sultan and Ambassador Hart. As with the deployment decision, political considerations were driving the details of military employment as well. The squadron was accordingly put on a very short leash when it came to mission definition and ‘rules of engagement’ (ROEs). First, any detected intrusion of Saudi airspace by hostile aircraft had to be reported directly to the JCS. Following a subsequent decision “at the highest government level,” only then would the Joint Chiefs direct implementation of the specified rules of engagement. Those rules called for intercepting aircraft, but not firing on them unless 1.) first fired upon, 2.) the aircraft maneuvered into a firing position, or 3.) enemy aircraft fired on or dropped ordnance on ground positions in Saudi territory.

---


162 Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 10 July 1963, Robert W. Komer Series (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.

163 Hard Surface aircraft were originally not authorized to approach closer than 100 miles from the Saudi-Yemen border, later reduced to 40 miles. CINCNELM message, 8 July 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, Records of the Department of State (RG 59), and Hart, Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership, pp. 210-212.
Otherwise U.S. aircraft were to use other techniques “to induce it to land or alter course to exit Saudi Arabian territory,” including signals, maneuvers, and communications.  

Sensitivities to minimizing the prospects for any actual combat were further reflected in a July 18 memo prepared by Talbot at NEA. The purpose of the memo was to lay out possible options in the event the UAR continued to bomb Saudi territory despite the presence of the U.S. squadron. Among the recommendations was that Nasser then be informed that the U.S. Government was contemplating issuing instructions that USAF combat aircraft in Saudi Arabia undertake regular patrols with view to intercepting UAR combat aircraft which overfly Saudi Arabia and, if circumstances require, to destroy the intruding aircraft; that USG does not desire issue such instructions since wishes preserve friendly US-UAR relationships; but that further UAR aggressions against Saudi soil may force US to do so and thus risk US-UAR confrontation, which is in neither of our interests.

Every effort would apparently be made to give Nasser an out in order to avoid any direct confrontation.

Needless to say the Saudis had no such sensitivities, indeed quite the opposite. Shortly after the operation began Prince Sultan was pressing hard for more aggressive U.S. air patrols. He wanted U.S. flights over Jizan and visible low-level flights over Nejran to bolster the morale of the local Saudi population there. Following repeated requests, these flights were finally approved but on a very restrictive basis.

---

164 Revised “Mission and “Rules of Engagement,”” attachment to Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy, 12 June 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963, pp. 578-579. As Secretary of State Rusk later noted, “we do not intend this be hostile action toward UAR, and for that reason operating mission and rules of engagement were carefully drawn to preclude possibility any action which could be construed to be offensive in military sense.” Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Saudi Arabia, 14 June 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963, p. 587. These highly restrictive ROEs were not to be disclosed to the Saudis, but soon leaked, triggering additional Saudi complaints. Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy, 12 June 1963, and Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy, 13 June 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963, pp. 580-581.


166 For Sultan’s repeated requests see Jidda (Thacher) to Secretary of State, 1 August, 3 August and 4 August, 1963. For JCS authorization to CINCNELM for flights up to 40 miles from Yemen border see Joint State-Defense Message, 3 August, all in Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-
Revisiting the Prospects for USMTM and Saudi Military Modernization

While the immediate U.S. military focus was on Operation Hard Surface, the entire Yemen episode re-raised questions on the longer-term subjects of Saudi military modernization and USMTM’s role in this. The poor condition of the Saudi armed forces was readily apparent; but so also was the potentially expanded military assistance commitments by the U.S. stemming from the disengagement process. It was time for another U.S. examination of where things stood and were heading.

In many respects the problems and prospects identified were a repetition of now well-worn themes. In response to a June 14 request from the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) on how the Defense Department’s interests and responsibilities might best be pursued through USMTM, the Joint Chiefs once again made clear the overriding political function of the military mission and the limited prospects for any real military progress. “Increased emphasis on the military aspects of this program is unlikely to produce a Saudi Arabian military force that could contribute in a significant way to Western military strength.” As for expanding the military mission in the future,

Examination from the military point of view reveals little justification for continuation of the USMTM, Saudi Arabia, even at its present size and scope of activity. Nevertheless, the political benefits of this mission are recognized and efforts to improve the political advantages should be considered.167

In a role-reversal, while the Joint Chiefs were emphasizing the essentially political function of USMTM and the dim prospects for any significant military advances with the Saudis, State Department Embassy personnel were stressing the need to improve military progress. The politicos waxed frustration at the lack of military modernization

---

but mixed it with optimism about future prospects. Writing back in February

Ambassador Hart made both points to Colonel Wilson:

> We have too little to show for our almost ten years of effort. I know that over and over again we have been frustrated by Saudi failures to cooperate financially and administratively and that the generally undisciplined characteristics of a still primitive people have too often defeated our good intentions. But with reform and progress in the air, we now have an opportunity to set the stage for a period of greater accomplishment.  

Now in a memorandum to Ambassador Hart the Chargé in Jeddah, Nicholas Thacher, conceded that in the military assistance domain “I feel we have little to show for our many years of effort in Saudi Arabia,” adding “it is a bleak prospect to look ahead over the next ten years and see U.S. money and effort continuing to be spent with so little result.” Still, Thacher felt there was a need for

> some better understanding on the part of the rank and file of our [military] mission of their objective here. We hear frequently that officers assigned to Saudi Arabia are informed during their training period in Washington that they are being sent to Saudi Arabia to carry out a pro forma task in which U.S. goals are psychological-political, with little hope of achieving any tangible improvement in Saudi military capabilities. One can understand the practical reasons for this advice but it tends to vitiate the enthusiasm of officers before they arrive.

Thacher thought that new arrivals should be “made to understand that with the expanding fabric of US-Saudi relations we are more committed to concrete achievements in the military field.”

---


170 Thacher also complained about the negative effect short tours of USMTM personnel had on making real progress with the Saudis. The Defense Department continued to resist State Department efforts to expand training personnel tours beyond one-year. As short as this was, the problem was frequently even worse. In the case of USAF personnel, Thacher saw four Chiefs of the air training mission pass through Saudi Arabia in one year! Thacher to Hart, 6 August 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59).
**Enduring U.S. Differences Over the Future of Hard Surface**

The policy splits over extending Hard Surface sharpened as the Yemen conflict dragged on. In August 1963 UAR bombings by air again occurred inside Saudi territory. Komer felt that the U.S. had to react or lose credibility with Nasser. In addition to a strongly worded message to President Nasser from Kennedy, Komer proposed “One or two F-100 sweeps right down over Najran area to increase chance UAR will see us.” Komer was of the opinion that it was unlikely the Egyptian pilots had yet seen the U.S. aircraft.  

In a State Department-JCS meeting, military representatives continued to emphasize that Hard Surface was primarily a political mission and that the unit had little actual military capability. On this basis Admiral Griffin (CINCNELM) advocated its removal and replacement with an extended training program. Brig Gen Lucius Clay, Assistant Director of the Joint Staff, added that the JCS was strongly of the opinion that the unit should be withdrawn and more long-term programs put in its place, to include sending an air defense survey team to the Kingdom to make a broader assessment of Saudi requirements. It was the State Department representatives who pushed hard for continued deployment, both as a signal to Nasser of U.S. interests and more importantly on the grounds that its withdrawal would have major negative political consequences with the Saudis. The end result was that the Joint Chiefs agreed to keeping the unit in Saudi Arabia for 60 more days, but also that plans would be prepared for withdrawing the force in mid-October.  

As September and October wore on without a peace breakthrough, decisions on the future of Hard Surface were now tightly tied to the political future of the UNYOM

---


mandate. The administration’s position on Yemen remained that of pressing for disengagement while using UNYOM as a “buffer between the UAR and Saudi Arabia.” Meanwhile the U.S. would use its efforts behind the scenes to bring about a “compromise regime” in Sanaa acceptable to both Cairo and Riyadh. The President’s threefold guidance was to maintain efforts to keep UNYOM effective, continue pressuring the UAR to withdraw its troops and the Saudis from restarting their covert support to the Royalists, and retain the U.S. air squadron as long as the Saudis continue to abide by the disengagement agreement.\footnote{National Security Action Memorandum No. 262, 10 October 1963, \textit{Yemen Disengagement}, NSAM Files, \textit{Records of the National Security Council} (RG 273), located at National Security Archives.}

In early October the State Department sought another extension of Hard Surface for 60 days, citing the overriding political imperative of its role in the ongoing efforts to reach a political settlement on Yemen.\footnote{Talbot to Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Nitze), 4 October 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG 59).} Following a meeting of the JCS and the Secretary of Defense on October 7, the Defense Department agreed to an extension of 30 days, arguing that a 60-day extension would pose substantial difficulties. Assistant Secretary of Defense Nitze also maintained that the thirty days should be sufficient to allow Ambassador Hart to negotiate the withdrawal of the force with the Saudis, especially when combined with the other incentives now being offered by the U.S. Recently added to this list of incentives was an invitation to Minister of Defense Sultan to visit the U.S. in early 1964 as a guest of the U.S. Secretary of Defense.\footnote{Letter From the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Nitze) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot), 8 October 1963, \textit{FRUS}, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, \textit{Near East 1962-1963}, pp. 728-729.}

The 30-day extension soon came under renewed political pressure as being too short. The UNYOM was approaching a November 4 deadline for its continuation. Without Saudi agreement to extend its mandate and fund the Saudi portion of the mission’s activities the mission would end. While the U.S. was pressuring the Saudis to
agree to extend UNYOM, Hard Surface was also rapidly approaching the end of its
scheduled stay. Preparing to pull out the aircraft at the very time Washington was hoping
to get an extension of UNYOM from Riyadh raised obvious problems of timing.
Consequently, the President authorized, as per his previous guidance, another extension
up to the end of the year if the Saudis continued to support UNYOM and the
disengagement process.  
Faisal finally agreed on October 31 to finance UNYOM for an
additional two months, provided the U.S. pressed the UAR on troop withdrawals. With
this in hand, Hard Surface was extended again, now until December 31, 1963.

With all the emphasis on political signaling through military activities, even
totally unconnected military developments now took on political overtones. A case in
point was a general DoD-wide reduction in military assistance training programs
underway at the time. Ambassador Hart was informed of a potential cut of 80 slots in
USMTM by the end of Fiscal Year 1964 as part of this process. Representing more than
one-third of the military training mission in the Kingdom, Hart argued that such a
reduction would seriously impair USMTM’s effectiveness. Based on an assessment
conducted by Colonel Wilson, he contended that the reductions would change the
character of the training mission “from close daily supervision of Saudi armed forces
training and progress to advisory group offering intermittent comment and suggestions.”
While recognizing that the training mission “is indeed aimed at essentially political
objectives” Hart remarked on the critical phase he believed Saudi military developments
were entering:

While in past ruling family of Saudi Arabia has tended view its armed forces with
some suspicion there are now clear signs of change reflected particularly in
activist, dynamic approach of Minister of Defense Prince Sultan....We expect
Sultan will authorize important new purchases of material in near future. Thus,
whole Saudi defense program is in crucial, transitional phase and accordingly it

176 Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Saudi Arabia, 28 October 1963, FRUS, 1961-
seems of utmost importance we maintain to fullest our present intimate influential position in Saudi military affairs: 1) as best means encouraging purchase of US. equipment at time when Saudis about to undertake important acquisitions material; 2) as means maintaining firm orientation Saudi military toward U.S. forms and procedures; 3) as wise investment not only in future strength existing regime but also that of any successor which might well draw leadership from among ranks present armed forces.

Far more worrisome for Hart was that regardless of the true reason and general nature of the reductions, under current conditions these “will be interpreted by Faysal as politically motivated” and signaling a shift in support for the regime. On this basis the Ambassador recommended that the proposed level of cut in USMTM personnel be reconsidered in the case of Saudi Arabia. “[T]his is wrong time [to] allow administrative measure become uncontrolled political gesture,” he argued. As with the earlier State Department opposition to the proposed placement of USMTM under CINCEUR, purely internal U.S. military decisions again were having these wider ripple effects.

**The Johnson Administration Inherits the Yemen Headache**

November proved to be a dark month in ways that no one could have predicted. The month began with deeply troubling news for the President from another, and more encompassing, conflict. Ngo Dinh Diem, the President of the Republic of Vietnam, was murdered along with his brother in a military coup, raising fundamental issues in Washington over next steps in southeast Asia. Three weeks later President Kennedy himself fell victim to an assassin in Dallas.

Faced with all of the demands of a new President, Johnson was given no quarter in the situation in the Yemen. By late November the disengagement and general situation was again coming apart. There was little evidence of Egyptian troop withdrawals as

---

178 Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 31 October 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library. Colonel Wilson’s assessment is in the same file, written on 23 October. Among other things it details the military training consequences of the proposed reductions, concluding that they would be substantial.

mandated by the disengagement agreement, with equally little prospects for the future. There was no stable regime in the YAR and loose central political control was exercised only by the Egyptian forces. Their withdraw would presage a collapse of the existing regime, a political failure Nasser could not accept. Estimates had Egyptian military forces in Yemen at 30,000, or about one-third of the Egyptian armed forces. Meanwhile the U.S. efforts to keep Faisal on board were suffering, given the lack of progress on Egyptian troop withdrawal, continued Egyptian bombings of Saudi soil, and no let up in the UAR propaganda campaign against the Saudi monarchy. The fact that the U.S. continued economic aid to Nasser despite all this further strained relations with Faisal. Indeed Ambassador Hart now reported back that even the threat of withdrawing Hard Surface would not be enough to convince Faisal he should continue with the UNYOM (now scheduled to expire on January 4, 1964) and abide by the Bunker agreement. Hart concluded that Faisal would strongly resent the U.S. withdrawal, but would “take his chances on basis requirements for self defense as he sees them” to include resupplying the Royalists. In the absence of any demonstrable U.S. leverage on Nasser’s behavior, Hart believed his own and Washington’s influence on Faisal in these matters was now seriously compromised.

The latest impasse was helped neither by Johnson’s substance or style. Johnson did not bring the same willingness or ability to distinguish between communism, nationalism and neutralism of his predecessor. This had obvious implications for how the new President would relate to Nasser. There also was no personal chemistry between Johnson and Nasser—indeed quite the opposite. As a result, as one author characterized it the Johnson Administration in effect “was a throwback to the Eisenhower

---

180 Telegram From the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to the Department of State, 30 November 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963, pp. 807-808, and The Situation and Prospects in Yemen, Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE 36.7-63), 6 November 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963, Volumes XVII, XVIII, XX, XXI, Near East, Africa, Microfiche Supplement, Document #326. The SNIE also concluded that Nasser was now stuck in Yemen, was unlikely to have the assets necessary to topple the Saudi regime, and had few options for extricating himself.
The situation was hardly better with the Saudis. "The Saudis in general didn’t give Johnson a tumble" Hart recalled, and were so suspicious of Johnson that I had to constantly knock down the argument that Johnson had caused Kennedy to be killed. They were persistent in saying, "You Know, he’s a Zionist." Johnson. "He spoke before the Zionist group. He knew that Kennedy was a friend of the Arabs. He caused Kennedy to be killed."  

With all this baggage neither the circumstances nor personalities appeared to hold out any serious prospects for improving the deteriorating situation in Yemen.

"No Feasible Alternative:“ Keeping Lines Open to Nasser, Further Extending Hard Surface

A review of U.S. policy on Yemen undertaken for the new president revealed "no feasible alternatives" to the current approach, but suggested that President Johnson consider a modification placing “primary emphasis on broadening the base of the current Yemeni regime as a precursor to, rather than as an aftermath of, the withdrawal of the bulk of UAR troops from Yemen." The clear sensing was that Nasser could not be persuaded to withdraw his troops only to then see the current weak Republican regime collapse.

The State Department’s Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, while recognizing the importance of protecting Saudi Arabia and U.S. interests there, still held to the line that the degenerating situation in Yemen was not worth wrecking relations with Nasser and jeopardizing the larger regional objectives of the U.S. such a relationship entailed:

181 Kaufman, The Arab Middle East and the United States, p. 45.
The Stakes. What Faisal wants [U.S. siding with Saudi Arabia] would mean abandoning, over so minor an issue as Yemen, the gradual influence over certain UAR policies we feel we achieved under President Kennedy. So long as the UAR does not trespass on our vital interests, the limited understanding we have achieved is of real value in our area wide policy. To break openly with Nasser now over Yemen would: (a) increase the danger of an Arab-Israeli explosion; (b) destroy our ability to get anywhere on Arab refugee or Arab-Israeli arms control issues; (c) nullify our influence with the key Arab state just when the Jordan Waters issue is heating up, and (d) cause the UAR to turn to the Soviets, as it did when it alleged we reneged on the Aswan Dam.  

The Bureau also outlined the quandary now presented by Hard Surface. The aircraft were deployed as a demonstration of support for Saudi Arabia in order to help persuade Faisal to end his support to the royalist forces. Since its deployment Faisal had also been told that U.S. policy was to withdraw the aircraft if the Saudis resumed such support, that U.S. forces would not serve as an “umbrella” of protection for this activity. Herein lay the dilemma. If Hard Surface remained in place while Riyadh resumed support, U.S. policy would no longer be credible to either the Saudis or Nasser. Of greater military consequence, Saudi actions could well trigger additional UAR air attacks in response. The U.S. would then be forced either to respond militarily and in effect side with the Saudis “or look like paper tigers to both sides.” Alternatively, to withdraw Hard Surface in the face of renewed Saudi support would be seen as abandonment by the Saudis and could serve as a signal to Nasser that he could bomb with impunity. If he did, the U.S. would again be forced to “either react strongly or look like paper tigers in this case too.” With no ready way out of this dilemma, the Bureau recommended continuing efforts to persuade Faisal not to resume aid to the Royalists and that Hard Surface be extended yet again until the end of January 1964.  

---


185 Ibid. The appraisal and recommendations were included in a memo sent to Secretary Rusk with a request that he approve them and forward to the President. NEA to The Secretary (Rusk), Yemen, 10 December 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
The Joint Chiefs reacted as before, outlining their continuing reservations over any further extension. They again advocated its withdrawal on both military and political grounds. Militarily, the JCS still considered the small force inadequate to perform an effective air defense mission. Politically, they raised the same arguments as the State Department in the event of Egyptian attacks. U.S. aircraft would either have to respond or lose credibility. Likewise, if Hard Surface was removed this “will be a clear signal to the UAR that the United States has withdrawn its support of Saudi Arabia and an invitation for further UAR aggression.” Unlike State, however, the JCS concluded that the lesser risk was in pulling out Hard Surface now. Despite the likelihood this would be interpreted as giving up on the disengagement process, this was considered preferable to the greater risks posed should Hard Surface stay. Furthermore, the JCS argued that the consequences of removing Hard Surface could be ameliorated by providing more effective military deterrents than the air unit. These were contained in CINCSTRIKE OPLAN 531-6, and included measures for introducing various levels of U.S. military forces around and into Saudi Arabia.\(^{186}\) The plan contained an accompanying series of increasingly strong military actions from a naval show of force in the Mediterranean and Red Seas (Phase I), to a blockade of UAR shipping involved in the Yemen conflict (Phase II), to air strikes against military targets and bases in the UAR and YAR and interdiction of hostile shipping (Phase III). If U.S. policy required an ongoing American

\(^{186}\) Effective 1 December 1963 CINCSTRIKE officially assumed responsibility for joint planning in the Middle East in addition to his responsibilities for South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. USCINCEUR’s Area of Responsibility under EUCOM was reduced to NATO-Europe and North Africa west of Egypt. In recognition of the regional countries’ sensitivities to the aggressive sounding title ‘CINCSTRIKE,’ the CINC was given the additional title of CINCMEAFSA (Middle East, Africa, and South Asia). CINCMEAFSA also now had responsibility for the various MAAGs and other training missions operating in the region, including USMTM. In December CINCNELM was also disestablished; MIDEASTFOR now fell under the operational command of CINCMEAFSA. These changes were codified in a new Unified Command Plan in December 1963. *History of the Unified Command Plan, 1946-1977*, Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff. Special Historical Study, 20 December 1977, pp. 33-35, and United States Central Command, *The United States Military in North Africa and Southwest Asia Since World War II* (MacDill AFB, Florida: CENTCOM History Office, January 1988), p. 30.
military presence, this could be accomplished by periodic deployment of a Composite Air Strike Force (CSAF)\textsuperscript{187} to Saudi Arabia or elements of the Sixth Fleet into the vicinity.

All of these arguments bolstered the JCS perspective on getting Hard Surface out of the Kingdom as soon as possible. As it turned out, however, while the JCS was preparing the above position the State Department did in fact recommend an extension to the White House until the end of January. This was approved.\textsuperscript{188}

**Renewed Confrontation Between Faisal and Saud**

As if the complexities of the disengagement process and Hard Surface alone were not enough, a revival of the power struggle between Faisal and Saud, underway since the King’s return to Saudi Arabia in September, was now approaching another crisis. Throughout much of the first year of the Yemen conflict Saud was largely out of the picture. The Family decision in October 1962 to give Faisal effective control of the government, combined with Saud’s very poor health, left the King with little leverage. Saud did undertake some efforts in mid-1963 to appoint individuals personally loyal to him. These were largely blocked by Faisal with the support of the other senior princes. All he could manage was a one-for-one trade on the Royal Guard, appointing his son Sultan ibn Saud as Commander to replace his other son Mansur in May 1963.\textsuperscript{189}

Saud’s absence in no way reduced the mutual antipathy of the brothers, however. According to Holden and Johns, by mid-1963 the contempt and hatred Faisal had for Saud was so strong he refused to refer to him by name, even though he still resisted those

\textsuperscript{187} The CSAF was in theory designed for sustained combat operations in any part of the world for at least 30 days. Aircraft numbers and support varied, but clearly the envisioned CSAF for Saudi Arabia would be substantially greater than Hard Surface. For background on the emergence of the CSAF see Haffa, *The Half War*, pp. 91-92.

\textsuperscript{188} Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara (JCSM-1003-63), 24 December 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol XVIII, Near East 1962-1963*, pp. 856-858. Upon discovering that the decision to extend had already been made, General Taylor recommended to Secretary McNamara that the JCS assessment still be passed on to the Secretary of State. See Source note, p. 856.

who wanted to forcibly remove the King. He would instead bide his time for a consensus on peaceful removal and one supported by the Ulema.  

Until that time Faisal undertook his own set of actions to further strip the King of his remaining sources of power. During Saud’s eleven month absence (aside from one brief visit home) Faisal replaced Saud’s son in command of the National Guard Saad ibn Saud with Abdullah ibn Abdul Aziz. While Saud was abroad Faisal also took the opportunity to send some elements of the King’s Royal Guard to the Yemeni border. How much this was based on a military requirement and how much an attempt to exert authority over Saud’s personal military—if not actually disperse its power from Riyadh—is unclear. Strongly suggestive is Deputy Foreign Minister Saqqaf’s report to Hart that it was a “checkmate” by Faisal, with the movement of the forces “not for military purposes but rather keep them out of Riyadh upon return of Saud.” When Saud discovered this deployment he was furious and ordered the forces returned to Riyadh at once. Faisal reportedly responded that the forces were necessary for defending the Kingdom and that the Minister of Defense had decided that Royal Guard tanks were needed at Khamis Mushayt. What was Faisal to do but the right thing to protect the Kingdom?

---

190 Among those reportedly advocating the King’s forcible removal was Abdullah, who presumably would have employed the National Guard if necessary to do so. Holden and Johns, The House of Saud, pp. 237-238.


193 Untitled and unsigned memo, 16 September 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). About this same time additional changes were underway with the small Coast Guard and Border Patrol forces. In August 1963 the Council of Ministers decided to merge these two into a single organization, the Frontier Force, with six frontier commands (Jeddah, Jizan, Najran, Eastern, Northern, and Northwestern) and place it under the Ministry of Interior. This Frontier Force came into formal existence a year later, in August 1964. American Embassy Jiddah to Department of State, New Saudi Frontier Force Takes Up Stations Along Borders, 10 November 1964, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political and Defense, Near East, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
Clearly the two were on a collision course. The triggering event became Nasser’s call for an Arab summit in January to address the ostensible threat posed by Israel to divert the Jordan River waters. This raised the issue in Riyadh as to who should be the senior Saudi representative at the summit. Saud claimed the position as head of state, while Faisal argued his preeminence as the one in charge of national policy. This confrontation precipitated an armed standoff in mid-December when Saud deployed an estimated 800 Royal Guard troops around his Nasariya palace. These deployments were answered by movement of National Guard troops under the command of Abdullah, fiercely loyal to Faisal.

U.S. assessments of the situation at the time were quite accurate, both in identifying Faisal’s political support among senior princes and in his unwillingness to tolerate bloodshed in the feud. As to possible U.S. actions, NEA thought none was required during the unfolding events:

We do not believe that any USG action is advisable or necessary in connection with the current worsening of the Saud-Faisal rivalry and we do not anticipate any internal disorders that might invoke our contingency plans…It is clearly in our interest that Faisal continue to rule Saudi Arabia instead of the King.

The Ulema in fact resolved the standoff using both stick and carrot. The stick was the signatures of leading princes and Ulema reaffirming their previous views on the limits of the King’s power. The carrot was the Ulema’s decision that Saud would attend as head of state but that all decisions would be referred to Faisal. Saud backed down in what was to prove another temporary retreat.195

194 NEA Memo, Assessment of Current Confrontation Between King Saud and Crown Prince Faisal, 18 December 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). The contingency plans referred to are outlined in a paper entitled Contingency Plan—Saudi Arabia, which described possible contingencies arising from attempts or an actual overthrow of the Al Saud and a range of U.S. responses, also in the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk files.

195 Holden and Johns, The House of Saud, p. 237, and Safran, Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security, p. 100. According to Hart the deciding factor was the grand mufti warning to the King that any actions leading to violence would result in the withdraw of the Ulema’s pledge of loyalty to him. Hart, Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership, p. 239.
The U.S. Air Defense Survey

If Operation Hard Surface was the near-term and most visible U.S. military response to the Yemen crisis, of greater long-term consequence was the agreement to provide the Saudis with a survey of their future air defense requirements and on that basis assist them in developing an air defense system. Conducted in the Fall of 1963, internal U.S. political and military deliberations over the survey’s findings and over the appropriate level of assistance to provide the Saudis revealed much of the same uncertainty and ambiguity associated with Hard Surface. Nonetheless, the air defense offer would lead to a major additional U.S. military assistance commitment to the Kingdom and become the doorway for multi-billion dollar military programs undertaken by the Saudis. It also soon became a nightmare in military procurement for the Saudis, what Cordesman has called “the worst single failure in Saudi Arabia’s military modernization efforts and perhaps the most damaging single U.S. mismanagement of a major military sale to any developing country.” Furthermore, given the stakes involved, the proposed air defense program soon was wrapped up in the growing U.S.-U.K. sparring over military assistance to the Saudis.

Aside from the obvious military requirement for such a survey, as noted previously Washington offered it up as part of a larger package of inducements to get Faisal to end support to the Royalists and ultimately sign a peace agreement with Egyptian President Nasser over Yemen. The survey itself was done in September by the

---

Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability*, p. 123. The reasons for this are complex and beyond the scope and time period of this study. Among the factors were a growing competition for defense exports among the U.S., British, and French, the need for the U.S. and U.K. to work out an arrangement whereby the British would get a significant part of the Saudi package to help compensate for a decision to purchase U.S. F-111s for its own defense forces, and the growing involvement of various private-sector “middlemen” in the increasingly lucrative process. This also marked the beginning of the era of serious Saudi money available for weapons purchases, with all that implied for drawing the attention of various parties, many unsavory. A journalistic and engaging account of this episode is in Anthony Sampson, *The Arms Bazaar* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), pp. 158-164. Worth noting on the Saudi side, beyond exorbitant personal profit and corruption among some participants, a major contributing factor was the lack of Saudi administrative capacity to take on and manage the proposals and programs. Twenty years of U.S.-Saudi security assistance apparently led to little institutional machinery for managing even the basics of programs, with the US MAAG/USMTM taking on this responsibility.
By October the Air Defense Survey Team had completed its report on Saudi air defense requirements, transmitting it to the JCS on October 4. Its principal recommendations were that the Saudis acquire Hawk surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), an integrated radar network, and three squadrons of F-5s or F-104s (twelve aircraft per squadron), as well as outfit their existing F-86s with air-to-air missiles. The SAMs were to consist of three U.S.-made Hawk missile battalions deployed in three areas. The basic cost for the entire package was estimated at $111.3 million, to be underwritten by the Saudis.

Now began an interesting internal U.S. debate both over the findings of the report and what should in fact be released to the Saudis. At the heart of the matter was the issue of Saudi military competence and the advisability of providing them with advanced capabilities that would strain their existing manpower and financial resources. In pure military terms Headquarters STRIKE Command concluded that the proposed systems “are recognized to be well beyond the capabilities of the country to assimilate.” Past Saudi ability to maintain and operate less sophisticated aircraft (F-86s, Vampires, B-26s) “has been most discouraging.” Operation Hard Surface had pointed out Saudi “total dependency on the USMTM for aircraft maintenance” and the lack of trained pilots and crews permitting effective bilateral training. Indeed the training portion of Hard Surface effectively ended in late September when the AFELM commander reported that the RSAF was unable to present any further qualified personnel for training. Furthermore...

---

199 Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 30 September 1963, Robert W. Komer Series, Saudi Arabia, JFK Library.
“the SAG has consistently demonstrated a lack of enthusiasm and support for a force which might defect or could be instrumental in overthrowing the government.”

Consequently, only realizable goals should be set and “no effort should be made to sell a system which the SAG is incapable of operating and maintaining, and thereby tying the U.S. to perform these functions for the indefinite future.” These were clear attempts to limit U.S. long-term military liabilities associated with any proposed package.

Members of the State Department were particularly concerned over the inclusion of Hawk surface-to-air missiles which they considered “completely beyond the range” of Saudi abilities to handle. In addition to the absorption problem, they worried about the diversion of resources from other reform priorities and the heightened internal discontent this could trigger. There was also the existing U.S. policy position to the British opposing any sale of their surface-to-air missiles (i.e., the U.K.’s Thunderbird) to Saudi Arabia, a position put at risk by any proposed sale of Hawks instead. Therefore State recommended that any reference to the missiles be excluded. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Frank Sloan responded that the Saudis had been quite explicit in their desire for such missiles, that the system represented the only viable defense for the Jeddah area, would be phased in slowly, and was consistent with U.S. policy of limiting weapons sales to the Middle East to defensive weapons. It would also reduce the political fallout from an ongoing transaction with Israel to supply it with Hawk missiles. Still, Sloan agreed

---

200 Incoming Message from HQ USSTRICOM, Department of the Air Force Staff Message Branch, 25 December 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). During Hard Surface 80 USAF technicians were required to do basic maintenance on the eleven Saudi F-86 aircraft. In a separate memorandum Colonel Wilson reported that “unless radical improvement is made in many areas, both at unit and at RSAF/SAG levels, there is slim prospect that the RSAF will ever possess the capability to man, support and successfully operate one effective fighter squadron, let alone attempting to develop additional squadrons as per existing proposals.” Wilson to Hart, Future of F-86s on Loan to SAG, 23 December 1963, Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).

201 The British had been exploring the possibility of marketing the Thunderbirds to MODA since at least June of 1963. Jidda (Hart) to Secretary of State, 4 June 1963, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library.

202 This introduction of Hawks to the Middle East was stimulated by a recent and very large Soviet defense package deal with Egypt that included front-line Soviet tanks and aircraft. This raised sufficient fears in the administration to have the President lift the self-imposed arms embargo on sales to combatants in the
to exclude reference to the Hawks in the version of the survey released to the Saudis if the State Department insisted on doing so.  

In the face of this broad opposition to the Hawks, the decision was made to delete the recommendation from the Air Defense Survey to the Saudis and a modified survey was prepared. The Chief, USMTM was directed to make the case to the Saudis for holding off on any purchase of SAMs and of the U.S. willingness to facilitate the purchase of more realistic military hardware to strengthen the Saudi armed forces.

Consistent with this decision, but also increasingly stimulated by growing concerns over a possible U.S.-U.K. arms competition over a country ill-suited for advanced weaponry, Secretary of State Rusk summarized the policy underpinning past U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia:

US policy for arms sales to Saudi Arabia has been based on mixture (1) concern for successful strengthening Saudi armed forces without proliferation varied types weapons complicating supply, maintenance and training; (2) attempt keep Saudi weapons acquisition within rational limits set by general Near East arms policy and realistic appraisal SAG needs; (3) necessity keep Saudi military purchases from damaging development program; (4) desire maintain our position as essentially sole advisor to SAG armed forces and maintain political leverage which that gives us; and (5) keep potentially lucrative growing Saudi arms market for ourselves in view need narrow dollar gap.

---


204 For the exchange between Deputy Under Secretary of State Alexis Johnson and Deputy Assistant Secretary Sloan on these points see 10 December (Johnson to Sloan) and 13 December (Sloan to Johnson) correspondence, as well as the attached Memorandum outlining the State Department position in *Air Defense Survey Report for Saudi Arabia*, in Records of the Arabian Peninsula Affairs Desk, 1958-1963, *Records of the Department of State* (RG 59).


End of Hard Surface and Transition to Long-Term Military Assistance Activities

By January there was a convergence of developments allowing for Hard Surface’s removal under suitable political conditions. The senior U.S. military leadership continued to push for no further extensions beyond the end of January. At the same time a package of longer-term military incentives for the Saudis was now in the offing. Far more important, the larger political landscape was beginning to shift. The Arab summit in Cairo that month emphasized Arab reconciliation. Under Nasser’s direction, the focus was on the purported threat that the Israelis were about to begin plans to divert the Jordan River waters. In actuality this threat, along with the venue of the summit, was used by Nasser to extricate himself from the deteriorating situation and criticism he was facing from his involvement in Yemen. It also became a forum for restarting a direct dialogue between Nasser and the Saudi leadership. With these political developments and the enhanced military assistance commitments the U.S. was prepared to make, the conditions were now ripe for removing Hard Surface. It would be withdrawn at the end of the January extension.206

Following the initial thaw with Nasser, Faisal undertook parallel efforts at internal reconciliation with outcast members of the Royal Family. By late February Badr, Fawwaz, Saad ibn Fahd and Talal all had returned to Saudi Arabia with admissions of

206 Hart makes the point that much of this was due to good fortune, not planning. Hard Surface had been withdrawn “primarily on pressure of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,” especially LeMay. “He [LeMay] kept the pressure up, and eventually he caused the entire unit to be withdrawn without previous agreement by the Saudi air force.” But the January summit made the withdrawal less damaging. “In fact, the timing was accidental, but it was fortuitous.” Hart, Second Oral History Interview, 27 May 1969, pp. 47, 55. Cordesman states that as a result of Faisal’s success in patching up relations with Nasser at the January Arab summit “This led Faisal to request U.S. withdrawal of Operation Hard Surface after an argument with the Kennedy administration over the terms of disengagement in North Yemen.” This assessment omits the record of multiple U.S. military efforts to get Hard Surface out while Faisal clearly wanted it to remain, and the hard press by LeMay and others to end any further extensions. Cordesman, The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability, p. 114.
guilt and pledges of loyalty to Saud and Faisal. All around things appeared on the mend.

In the meantime lobbying efforts by U.S. and U.K. officials aimed at influencing the Saudis on future aircraft and missile sales were heating up. The American Embassy in London increasingly saw this first hand, but considered the real clout in besting the British on arms sales to be in Saudi Arabia. The U.S. should exploit its assets there, especially USMTM. “Staffing and organization pattern of USMTM should be such to enable it [to] exercise maximum leverage and influence on Saudi arms purchases.” And in a bit of hard-ball the American Embassy in London recommended that the U.S. “impress on SAG close relationship between US defense commitment to Saudi Arabia and Saudi arms purchases.” If these efforts failed to persuade the Saudis the U.S. might then politely explain that it would “view adversely Saudi arms purchases from non-American sources for cash (which we assume is involved in Brit sales) when substantial monies still owed US for credit extended at Saudi request in connection with earlier US arms deliveries.”

Ambassador Hart noted that the U.S. and U.K. Embassies in Saudi Arabia had frank discussions over the mounting balance of trade considerations each faced as part of the arms chase. The Saudis, Hart noted, were maneuvering to retain the support of both countries as the best form of insurance. On the one hand Riyadh worried that disregarding U.S. recommendations on arms could cause the U.S. to “lose some of its interest in defense of Saudi integrity.” On the other, the Saudis valued highly its renewed friendship with London:

Being fundamentally more concerned with internal stability and development than with foreign adventures and being more sure of UK than US support for monarchical principle, it put internal defense for regime (White Army) under UK advisorship and tried to cut latter off from association with USMTM. Thus, US

---

and UK emerge as SAG’s RPT SAG’s best friends for different purposes. SAG does not want to lose either and can be counted upon to try to keep both interested.\(^{209}\)

Like his London-based colleagues, Hart also called for more effective use of USMTM to support U.S. interests on arms sales. He strongly urged that Headquarters USMTM be moved to Riyadh for more direct liaison with MODA, and hence influence on Saudi procurement decisions. In the face of growing U.K. competition, he also called for increasing the tours of key USMTM personnel to two years (accompanied) to establish more long-term and effective person-to-person relationships. He also advocated that with Defense Department approval USMTM should be permitted to make specific recommendations on hardware purchases (e.g., Northrop’s F-5 versus Lockheed’s F-104) and not remain neutral among competing U.S. contractors, thereby eliminating conflicting signals.\(^{210}\)

A significant step-up in U.S. efforts to capture future programs came when the modified U.S. air defense survey was formally presented to Prince Sultan and his senior staff on January 20, 1964.\(^{211}\) The U.S. entourage consisted of the Ambassador, the Chief, USMTM and three Defense Department representatives.\(^{212}\) The Hawk issue was side-stepped by previous agreement between a joint USMTM and MODA team that surface-to-air missiles would not be acquired until other elements of the air defense system were first in place. However the U.S. also made clear that a Saudi desire for Hawk missiles


\(^{211}\) Apparently an initial report was made to Sultan earlier on December 23, 1963.

would be given “sympathetic consideration” when the appropriate time came. MODA and U.S. Department of Defense officials met for the next ten days on the details of the defense survey. No Saudi decision was arrived at on which new aircraft to purchase for the air defense plan, but it was agreed that the air defense system should rest first on RSAF interceptors, later incorporating surface-to-air missiles. Wrapping up its business at USMTM Headquarters at Dhahran Air Field on February 1, the U.S.-SAG joint team also reached Saudi agreement to purchase the F-86 aircraft on loan to them since November 1962 as part of the USAF training program.

Next Round of Saudi-Faisal Clashes

As previously noted, one of the byproducts of the January Arab summit was the re-initiation of efforts between Egypt and Saudi Arabia to resolve the Yemen crisis. In March 1964 UAR Vice President Abd al-Hakim Amir visited Riyadh and met with Faisal. These talks began movement toward agreement on the need for an independent Yemen and the re-establishing of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

The gradual relaxing in Saudi-Egyptian relations and the internal Saudi reconciliation with the wayward ‘Free Princes’ had no counterpart when it came to Faisal and Saud’s chemistry. The next major battle between the two brothers came in mid-March when Saud, claiming his health fully restored, sent a letter to Faisal requesting his resignation as Prime Minister and restoration of all powers under Saud. He also wanted his sons installed in ministerial positions “within five days or face the possibility of no

---


sixth day.\textsuperscript{216} Faisal would have none of it, nor would most of the senior Saudi princes. The Ulema was again convened and issued a religious decree (\textit{fatwa}) that Faisal should retain full powers over Saudi policy while Saud retained the title of King. Citing the tensions between His Majesty and the Crown Prince, the \textit{fatwa} declared:

\begin{enumerate}
\item His Majesty King Sa’úd will remain the Sovereign of the country, with all the respect and reverence due to his position.
\item His Royal Highness Prince Faisal, Heir to the Throne and Prime Minister, shall discharge all the internal and external affairs of the state, both during the presence and in the absence of the King, and without referring to him.\textsuperscript{217}
\end{enumerate}

A clear victory for Faisal, this judgment was rejected by Saud triggering yet another confrontation between the Royal Guard and National Guard. Saud finally relented and the \textit{fatwa} was formally announced and executed on March 29.\textsuperscript{218} The power realities were codified by the Council of Ministers, making it clear that decision making authority rested with Faisal, not Saud.\textsuperscript{219} A Royal Decree was then signed by Faisal based on both the \textit{fatwa} and a “Royal Family Decision” signed by 72 princes.\textsuperscript{220} In an unmistakable effort to strip Saud of any remaining military capability and avoid future standoffs, the Council of Ministers then ordered that the Royal Guard be placed under the authority of the Minister of Defense and Aviation.\textsuperscript{221} And despite earlier misgivings about the strength and functions of the National Guard, Faisal now made the decision that it was to be the premier force responsible for internal regime security against domestic threats.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{216} As noted in American Consul Dhahran to Department of State, \textit{Weekly Summary}, 18 March 1964, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political and Defense, Near East, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
\textsuperscript{218} According to Holden and Johns, the \textit{fatwa} declared the King unfit to govern and had been heavily orchestrated behind the scenes by Faisal. \textit{The House of Saud}, p. 239.
\textsuperscript{220} American Embassy Jidda to Department of State, \textit{Joint Weeka No. 13}, 7 April 1964, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political and Defense, Near East, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
\end{flushright}
Royal Guard was stripped of its independent role of protecting the monarchy and in the process of serving as Saud’s personnel armed force.²²²

In the face of this latest Royal upheaval U.S. contingency plans for Saudi Arabia were again looked at and vetted. A State Department (NEA) paper focused on U.S. interests and the role of U.S. military intervention to protect those interests in the event of a threat to, or actual overthrow of, the Al Saud regime. It foresaw “no U.S. military force involvement within Saudi Arabia except to prevent the imminent entrance of foreign forces or to safeguard American lives.” The position paper was clear on not using force to prop up the regime: “It is not in U.S. interests to introduce its deterrents to shore up the Saudi regime against purely internal forces of change.” In terms of maintaining Saudi territorial integrity and Saudi control of the country, the U.S. should provide as much support as possible to the Saudi Government but “U.S. forces should not become involved in a Saudi revolution or civil war.” If faced with an internally-based revolution “The local revolutionaries would be informed of the U.S. belief that Saudi Arabia should remain intact but that U.S. forces will not intervene except to prevent external forces from entering Saudi Arabia.”²²³

As for U.S. responses to a change in regime or fragmenting of the Kingdom,

Should the dethroned Saudi regime seek U.S. military intervention in restoring it to power (once having lost effective control of the country), we would refuse to do so unless there were a clear and present danger of Soviet-inspired control of the new regime....

Should the Saud regime be dislodged from only a part of Saudi Arabia and retain control over the rest, the latter including the Eastern Province (repository of Saudi oil), we would consider appropriate measures, military or otherwise, to prevent the further erosion of Saudi power....

Should a revolutionary non-Communist regime gain effective control of the country, USG would recognize it and seek to maintain correct and friendly relations with it.\footnote{224}

While this paper was not a statement of U.S. policy, it does indicate the way State Department officials responsible for Saudi Arabia were at least thinking about the problem and U.S. options.

**Saudi Armed Forces Defense Plan No. 1**

Dating from Sultan’s January 1963 request to Colonel Wilson for a master defense modernization plan, the *Saudi Armed Forces Defense Plan No. 1* was produced by 1964 as the latest blueprint. Among other things the new five-year Defense Plan called for an Army organizational structure based on a modified U.S.-brigade system, moving away from the traditional regimental structure. Combat units were to consist of four Combat Brigades and one Air Defense Brigade, organized and located as shown in Table 7.1. The Defense Plan also sought to provide a functional organizational for the Saudi Air Force and made another attempt at defining a mission and structure for a Saudi navy.

This same Defense Plan was soon instrumental in greatly expanding the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) involvement in Saudi military modernization. While the Corps had already been involved in construction activities in the Kingdom, outside of Dhahran airfield these were relatively minor and non-military in scope. That now changed with Saudi interest in using the Corps of Engineers for the major military

---

\footnote{224} Ibid., p. 12.
Table 7.1
Proposed Assignment and Stationing of Combat Units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Combat Brigade</td>
<td>Tebuk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Infantry Battalions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconnaissance Battalion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tank Battalion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery Battalion, 105/155 Howitzer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Defense Battery, 40 mm SP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer Battalion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Combat Brigade</td>
<td>Khamis Mushayt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Infantry Battalions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconnaissance Company</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tank Company, M41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery Battalion, 105/155 Howitzer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Defense Battery, 40 mm SP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer Battalion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Combat Brigade</td>
<td>Qaysumah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Infantry Battalions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconnaissance Battalion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tank Battalion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery Battalion, 105/155 Howitzer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Defense Battery, 40 mm SP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer Battalion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Combat Brigade (General Reserve)</td>
<td>Al Kharj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Infantry Battalion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconnaissance Battalion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tank Battalion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery Battery, 105 mm SP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery Battalion, 8 inch Howitzer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer Battalion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signal Battalion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airborne Battalion</td>
<td>(Dhahran)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Air Defense Brigade</td>
<td>Jidda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun Battalion, 120 mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun Battalion, 90 mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automatic Weapon Battalion, 40 mm towed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Batterys, 40 mm towed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Batterys, 40 mm towed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Warning Radar Detachment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Warning Radar Detachment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Warning Radar Detachment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Memorandum for the Record, Meeting with Staff of Ministry of Defense and Aviation, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 7 May 1964, MDDVE
construction of Army cantonments associated with the Armed Forces Defense Plan No. 1. Preliminary discussions were held in May 1964 between Saudi Ministry of Defense and Aviation officials and officers from the Mediterranean Division of the USACE. In a meeting on May 2 with Prince Sultan, the Minister of Defense expressed his dissatisfaction with ongoing construction of military facilities. He wanted the Corps to take on this responsibility. The major construction would consist of building three cantonments at Khamis Mushayt (southwest corner of Saudi Arabia), Tabuk (northwest corner of Saudi Arabia) and Qaysumah (located along the northern border area, due north of Riyadh). Each cantonment was to have facilities sufficient to house a brigade-sized force of 5,000 troops. By June a three-man Corps liaison office was set up in the Kingdom and a draft agreement was prepared by the Mediterranean Division and submitted to the U.S. Embassy.

While these major military construction programs were being finalized, continuing discussions over the proposed air defense program culminated in a June 18 meeting between General Adams (CINCSTRIKE/USCINCMEAFSA) and Minister of Defense Prince Sultan. General Adams delivered a memo on behalf of the U.S. State and Defense Departments stating U.S. willingness to assist the Saudi Arabian Government in developing an air defense system of the type the two countries had been negotiating. The memo expressed U.S. willingness to enter into a government-to-government agreement (known as a Cooperative Logistics Agreement) to help insure delivery of equipment on the best possible terms. The U.S. would also agree to assist in the development and

---

225 Memorandum for the Record, Meeting with Prince Sultan, Minster of Defense and Aviation, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 5 May 1964, MDDVE, prepared by Colonel John W. Burfening. Also present at the meeting on the U.S. side were Ambassador Hart and Colonel Wilson along with the USMTM Army Section Chief, Colonel Elmer Schmierer.

226 Memo For Record, Briefing of Ambassador Eilts on MDD Saudi Arabian Activities, 14 January 1966, U.S. Army Engineer Division, Mediterranean, WNRC 77-922-0002, Box 5, and Memorandum for the Record, Meeting with Staff of Ministry of Defense and Aviation, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 7 May 1964, MDDVE, prepared by Colonel Burfening.

227 The USACE would also be involved in construction of a television system in Saudi Arabia as part of the Bunker negotiations. These efforts began in early 1964.
administration of contract arrangements and extend letters of credit repayable to the U.S. Government over a four year period without credit or interest payments. Technical assistance in helping the Saudis to formulate a multi-year plan for orderly acquisition, training, maintenance and support of the air defense program would be provided as well, to include training and technical assistance on a reimbursable basis. Under the agreement Saudi Arabia would be classified as a high priority customer, enjoying the same price and handling advantages as the U.S. Air Force.228 Quite aside from pushing the process along on its own merits, establishing the U.S. as the provider would help eliminate the prospects the Saudis might choose the British Lightning or the French Mirage as air defense aircraft.229

Yet another case of expanding American assistance was in the area of motor transportation. In response to a request from Prince Sultan to General Adams in April, a U.S. motor transportation survey team was sent to the Kingdom and tasked with evaluating MODA’s existing vehicle fleet and recommending a phased modernization program. One of the objectives was to standardize the Saudi fleet of vehicles in order to reduce the complications of maintaining and operating a wide variety of vehicles from different countries.230 The sinews were growing, as were the amounts of money involved

---

229 In the case of the French, for example, the U.S. State Department made a strong representation to the French Government that it not sell arms to the Saudis on a number of grounds, including the long-standing U.S.-Saudi arms relationship. Rusk Telegram to American Embassy Jidda, 8 August 1962, Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia), JFK Library. The U.S. would later work with the British to spread the wealth as part of an overall deal for British purchase of American F-111s. Given the dollars involved and fierce competition by U.S. contractors, the trick was to have King Faisal make the decision for a joint U.S.-U.K. bid, thereby distancing the role of the U.S. and U.K. governments. John Stonehouse, who worked for Roy Jenkins when he was the Labour Party’s Minister of Aviation and became the principal British advocate of arms sales to the Saudis, perhaps best captured the moment: “If the American companies competing for the sale, who knew they had it in the bag, thought their own defence secretary was making it easy for the Limeys all hell would be let loose and our chances would be lost in a welter of recrimination.” Faisal did agree to a joint arrangement and British Lightnings were sold to the Saudis. Stonehouse quoted in Sampson, The Arms Bazaar, pp. 161-162.
230 Telegram from General Adams to DCSLOG Dept of Army, Demonstration of US Wheeled Vehicles, 18 June 1964, Jidda 1152 6-18-64, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political and Defense, Near East, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). This survey effort would lead to a major U.S. logistics undertaking, the Saudi Arabian Mobility Program (SAMP) approved in 1966, which later became the Saudi
due to the Saudis increasing ability to finance major programs. Paradoxically then, while the Yemen conflict created major frictions between Washington and Riyadh, it simultaneously served to significantly expand the scope of military assistance between the two parties.

Another Setback in Yemen

Despite the political progress and direct negotiations between Riyadh and Cairo over Yemen, another reversal hit in mid-August. In an August 17 meeting with Ambassador Hart, Faisal reported that UAR aircraft had penetrated Saudi airspace and made provocative low-level flights over the last few days. In addition, UAR troops were moving toward the Saudi border. Faisal informed Hart that in response he had ordered Saudi troops moved to the border area to defend if necessary, and that he now considered the disengagement agreement dead. After September 4 (the latest expiration date for the UNYOM Mission) Faisal “would feel himself free to help Royalists in any way he saw fit, even with tanks if they could be used.” The Crown Prince wanted to know exactly where the U.S. stood in the event of a conflict with the UAR; “If US could not help he would seek help anywhere he could get it, since SAG alone did not have requisite strength.”

On August 29 Ambassador Hart again met with Faisal to deliver a letter of reassurance from President Johnson. After reading it the Crown Prince remained unclear on how strong the U.S. commitment to Saudi Arabia in fact was. But there was no lack of clarity in Faisal’s position delivered to Hart: “with all my power I will fight against the UAR in the Yemen, if the situation requires, whether we win or lose....I shall avoid by all

---

possible means sending troops into the Yemen but I shall send the Royalists every aid in my power….The disengagement agreement has no meaning.” When Hart warned him that U.S. help would not be forthcoming in the conflict if the Saudis once again “got back into Yemen imbroglio” Faisal answered that while he respected America’s “sincerity of purpose” in taking that position, Saudi Arabia would have to act as best it could to protect its interests. U.S. statements to Cairo to fulfill its disengagement commitments were viewed by Nasser as merely empty words. The real leverage, Faisal argued, was in the economic assistance the U.S. continued to provide him. By Faisal’s estimate a cut off in this U.S. aid would make Nasser “bow his head within two months.”

With U.S. credibility once again under fire, Hart was looking for any opportunity to bolster it. In early September 1964 he worked up a proposal for CINCSTRIKE to provide USAF surveillance aircraft for Prime Minister Faisal’s flights along the Red Sea coast. Hart likened such a gesture to President Truman’s sending of the White House physician to care for King Abdul Aziz at a time of major strain in U.S.-Saudi relations, turning Truman into the King’s friend despite their ongoing differences. In Hart’s view the low risk effort would serve a very useful purpose by being “aimed demonstrating to Sultan and Staff our willingness [to] act [to] reinforce Faysal’s personal safety at time when Saudis plainly unhappy other aspects our policy.”

Adding to the complications in the military sphere was the next change-out in the Chief of USMTM. Army Brigadier General Osmund A. Leahy arrived in the Kingdom on September 8, 1964, to replace Colonel Wilson. General Leahy made his first call

---

234 American Consul Dhahran to Department of State, Weekly Summary, 9 September 1964, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political and Defense, Near East, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). In recognition of its growing importance, and in a reversal of then current policy, the USMTM Chief was elevated from rank of Colonel to Brigadier General, and the chief of the air force section to the rank of full Colonel. Also, following the end of the Dhahran agreement and the departure of Colonel Wilson, the
on Prince Sultan on September 17. Sultan had already informed the U.S. Chargé that he had suspended the decision to relocate the USMTM Chief from his existing Headquarters at Dhahran to Riyadh as planned. The U.S. had been pressing for the move in order to place the Chief in close proximity to MODA Headquarters to increase the effectiveness of the mission (and, as noted, to more favorably influence Saudi decisions on arms purchases). It is unclear whether the Saudi action was taken out of pique and meant to convey displeasure at the lack of U.S. support on Yemen, or due to other considerations. Regardless, it was not a propitious start for the new Chief.

Luckily another diplomatic break came at a second Arab summit held in September in Alexandria, Egypt. President Nasser and Crown Prince Faisal met for the first time to directly discuss the Yemen crisis. The two agreed to mediate between the Royalists and Republicans to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict. On October 30 representatives of the Royalists and Republicans met in Sudan and agreed to a cease-fire, to be effective November 5, and to a National Congress to be attended by both parties later that month.

Pushing Ahead on U.S. Military Assistance

Despite ongoing friction with the Saudis over Yemen, U.S. military assistance proposals continued apace. On October 12 U.S. Corps of Engineers and USMTM representatives submitted cost estimates to Prince Sultan for design, supervision and construction of the three military cities. Total project cost was estimated at $102 million. As noted by U.S. officials, this was the first time that military construction was being addressed by MODA in other than a piecemeal fashion (although the Chief of the U.S.

---


Army Section of USMTM reported that little or no justification for the military cities was provided to USMTM or to the Corps by the Saudis. 237

With regard to the lucrative—and still open—air defense program, the U.S. continued to press the British to not sell its Thunderbird surface-to-air missiles to Saudi Arabia. An Aide Memoire was formally submitted by the American Embassy to the British Foreign Office expressing the U.S. Government’s deep concern over an offer. Noting its continuing misgivings over any purchase of surface-to-air missiles by the Saudis, and the hope that Her Majesty’s Government would comply with this, the Memoire resolved that

It hardly appears to be in our mutual self interest to encourage Saudi Arabia to place resources into extremely technical and expensive military hardware of relatively marginal military value to Saudi Arabia. It was for this reason that a recommendation for surface-to-air missiles was removed last year from the United States prepared Air Defense Survey Report for Saudi Arabia. 238

Left unsaid was the U.S. pledge to the Saudis to give “sympathetic consideration” to a future Saudi request for Hawks.

Back in the Kingdom the final showdown between Saud and Faisal was unfolding. Saud clearly never accepted the March fatwa and continued to work to build a coalition to restore his full powers as King. But by now Saud had no standing to pull such a coalition together. He brought the leadership issue to a head by again challenging Faisal and the legitimacy of the Crown Prince’s powers, forcing the hand of the Al Saud and the Ulema. Following a meeting of the senior princes and religious authorities in Riyadh on October 29, the decision was made to proclaim Faisal King. This was

237 Embassy Jidda (Murphy) to Department of State, Corps of Engineers Submits Estimates on Military Construction Costs, 20 October 1964, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political and Defense, Near East, Records of the Department of State (RG 59). The draft agreement was later submitted to the Saudi Arabia Government in November 1964, and would be signed as a formal agreement on May 24, 1965. Long, The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies, p. 49. It marked the beginning of a decades-long and substantial involvement by the USACE in the Kingdom.

238 American Embassy London to Department of State, Aide Memoire Given to UK Foreign Office re Thunderbirds for Saudi Arabia, 6 October 1964, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political and Defense, Near East, Records of the Department of State (RG 59).
legitimized in a *fatwa*. After holding up in his Nasriyah Palace for three days refusing various delegations’ requests that he abdicate, he finally conceded on November 3. The many years of power struggle finally came to an end. Equally if not more important, the transfer of power was accomplished without bloodshed.239

A welcome outcome in Washington, Faisal’s ascendancy did not bring about quick closure on the Saudi aircraft purchase. Still hanging in the balance, there was growing concern on the part of USMTM and the Embassy that the Saudis might not only purchase the British Lightning but also the Lockheed F-104s, which virtually all USAF experts agreed was not the preferred choice given limited Saudi capabilities. Acting in Ambassador Hart’s absence, the Chargé in Saudi Arabia Nicholas Thacher advocated that Secretary of Defense McNamara write a letter directly to Minister of Defense Sultan recommending a contract for the F-5. Thacher believed this could strengthen Sultan’s hand against those Saudis promoting another choice.240

Yet despite the strong recommendations of the U.S., to now include Secretary McNamara’s endorsement of the Northrop F-5 as the most suitable follow-on aircraft, by the end of 1964 the decision remained undecided. Likewise at year’s end there was no final agreement yet reached on the future conditions and status governing USMTM. Thus two major pillars of future Saudi military modernization were unresolved. Still, By the end of 1964 the core material elements of a long-term Saudi military modernization program were largely in place: plans for an air defense system, major Army infrastructure development, initiatives to rationalize and standardize military logistics, and the planned purchase of major military hardware. These programs would, for better or worse, become the foundation for Saudi military developments over the next two decades. But these would be implemented alongside enduring patterns of cautiousness, hesitation and

---

239 For a description of these final days of decision in late 1964 see Lacey, *The Kingdom*, pp. 355-357.
extremely measured progress on military professionalism and effectiveness.\footnote{241} The coming vast infusion of military infrastructure and hardware would not alter these fundamental realities.

As for the civil war in Yemen, it would continue until the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, a watershed event that compelled an Egyptian military withdrawal from Yemen. Along with the Arab militaries, Nasser’s pan-Arabism would suffer a shattering defeat. Recovering from the wreckage meant in part ending the protracted inter-Arab bloodletting in Yemen. Even with these pressures, however, a final political resolution would not be reached until 1970. And so like the military assistance it helped generate, the Yemen conflict too remained an open issue at the end of 1964.

\textit{Observations}

The early 1960s and the Yemen conflict represented the most trying period to date in U.S.-Saudi relations. The Kennedy Administration's Cold War containment policy in the Middle East had as its central feature co-opting Arab nationalism and specifically Nasser as instruments in the fight against communist expansion and Soviet influence. Based on more than a raw calculation of the political forces most important to harness for containment, it also reflected a philosophical perspective of siding with 'progressive' states and leaders. The corollary was to view conservative Arab monarchies as backward if not reactionary, subject to instability and possible overthrow, and therefore in need of serious reform. This virtually guaranteed there would be friction between the new administration and Riyadh. But Nasser's direct military involvement in the Yemen and the acute threat that intervention posed to the rule of the Al Saud put the relationship to an especially severe test.

\footnote{241} A minor but revealing example, as the Saudis were preparing to purchase a future combat aircraft, the Royal Saudi Air Force carried out its first-ever practice (aside from a demonstration firing during Operation Hard Surface) of air-to-ground firing in December 1964 using its F-86s. American Consul Dhahran to Department of State, \textit{Weekly Summary}, 23 December 1964, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political and Defense, Near East, \textit{Records of the Department of State} (RG 59).
Yet that same test revealed the concerted efforts by both parties to avoid a rupture in relations. Washington pressured Riyadh and Faisal on a number of fronts throughout this period, but always with corresponding political reassurances, even though measured. And when pushed by events and by the Saudis, military assurances and actions were ultimately supplied as well. To be sure, the Kennedy Administration was as sparing in its offers of direct military assistance to the Saudis as it was forceful in seeking to extract concrete policy concessions in return. But even when the Saudis balked at the administration’s policies, cutting them off never arose as a serious policy option.

The prevailing conditions, however, required a more nuanced approach on military assistance in which offers of support were linked to specific policy objectives on Yemen, namely cooperative disengagement with Nasser. This meant that any military assistance also had to be characterized or 'packaged' in ways that did not unduly threaten or antagonize Nasser. As it turned out, the long history of U.S. military assistance and of training missions in the Kingdom provided a ready means and cover for this. Yet in spite of all the emphasis on the practical use of military assistance to achieve concrete disengagement objectives (and also Saudi internal reforms) it was during this time that the U.S. undertook the largest expansion in both its modernization planning assistance and in long-term military equipment and construction programs for the Saudis.

Much of the success in keeping relations solid and in actually strengthening military assistance ties during this strained period was due to Faisal's statecraft. From the outset he proved astute at understanding Saudi Arabia's weak condition and his limited options. These were exacerbated by the near-constant feuding and intrigues of Saud. Faisal grasped the risks of using Saudi military forces in the Yemen conflict at the same time he recognized that a Nasser-backed Republican victory would be an intolerable outcome. His two-pronged strategy was to fight a limited proxy insurgency war on the military front while expanding the conflict politically to include involving the U.S. All of this he had to do with an administration in Washington that clearly was working hard to
engage Nasser and beating the drum of internal reform when it came to Saudi Arabia. Arguably good reasons to minimize any sense of reliance on Washington and the exposure it represented (to say nothing of the resentment of being lectured to on reform) Faisal was able to rise above it all and make the strategic calculation of how best to use U.S. power. Aside from making tactical uses of that power throughout the conflict, he managed to parlay the give-and-take into long-term expanded U.S. military assistance commitments. He also managed to simultaneously reopen relations with the British and with that another avenue of political and military support. Given the circumstances he inherited and what he accomplished, Faisal's performance can rightfully be called masterful.

While Yemen was the crucial test for U.S.-Saudi relations, the latest version of the dance between Washington and Riyadh began earlier with Dhahran's non-renewal. With the long history of U.S. military presence there and its link to providing the Saudis with various forms of military assistance, its non-renewal could be viewed as a major break with the past and opening a new phase in U.S.-Saudi security relations. But the ending of the Dhahran airfield agreement was most noteworthy for the absence of significant change in security relations. Despite Saud's last-minute heavy-handedness in the matter, both parties worked toward a joint solution that was least disruptive to all concerned. After non-renewal MATs activity continued, if now under a cloak of informality and unwritten agreement. Likewise, USMTM and the military assistance programs continued apace. To be sure, this continuity was not a foregone conclusion and efforts were certainly required to keep things on track. This success is notable nevertheless given the frequent attention over the years to Dhahran as the major symbol of U.S.-Saudi military cooperation, and the justification for military assistance to the Saudis as a *quid quo pro* for routine access to Dhahran. Once that traditional access ended there was still considerable support—especially within the State Department, but inside the Defense Department as well—for continuing the programs. That the formal
demise of the symbol had so little practical impact was a testament to the deeper roots of mutual interest and the well-established mechanisms already in place from an extended history of military assistance activity.

On the more negative side, when the Yemen conflict hit it starkly revealed the poor condition of Saudi armed forces and the dearth of any significant progress on military modernization. One major consequence of this, from the outset the Saudis had to turn to the U.S. for direct military help. This triggered renewed efforts by the Saudis to create yet another set of modernization plans, once again relying heavily on the U.S.—and specifically USMTM—for the necessary design, training and equipping. Indeed by its presence and history USMTM was positioned both to advise the Saudis on near-term responses to the threat they faced (providing as it did both military and political guidance) and to respond to Saudi requests for longer-term assistance to its armed forces. What is striking during this period, however, is how little there was to show for the previous twenty years of activity. That the Saudis would be no match for the Egyptians in conventional combat is no surprise. But the evidence suggests a lack of even rudimentary planning or the ability to field the most basic modern military capabilities, even if it made no sense to do so under the circumstances.

As for Operation Hard Surface, it captured in microcosm the many conflicting strands imbedded in the U.S.-Saudi security relationship. In Washington both civilian policymakers—to include the President—and the senior uniformed military leadership had substantial concerns over getting American forces directly involved in diplomatic efforts to dampen the conflict between the UAR and Saudi Arabia. The primary policy consideration was that such actions would be viewed as taking the side of the Saudis, which the administration clearly wanted to avoid. Faisal by contrast was looking for a strong sign of support from the U.S. which the squadron represented. Likewise, the squadron's presence in Saudi Arabia had to be viewed in terms of longer-term objectives beyond Yemen, to include the prospect that its withdrawal would risk triggering a
“vacuum” in Saudi thinking over how much it could rely on the U.S. This in turn could jeopardize the ongoing military assistance activities and the mutual security links they provided. The renewed prospects of British involvement added to these concerns. Kennedy and his advisors constantly worked the balance and the tight linkage between any deployment and Saudi cooperation on the disengagement process. Several times the President personally refused to make the final deployment decision until the situation ripened.

Beyond the major policy decision of whether to send the force at all, the need to accommodate conflicting policy objectives and expectations affected all aspects of the squadron’s deployment and employment. From initial sensitivities over how to characterize the deployment, to where and how the force should deploy inside the Kingdom, to what the rules of engagement should be all took on high political content. This resulted in even tactical details becoming the purview of high policy.

Once deployed, a subtext of Operation Hard Surface was the continuous differences among U.S. decision makers over its future. On the one hand was the policy desire to keep the tactical fighter squadron in Saudi Arabia as a show of support to Faisal and to the disengagement process. On the other were military efforts to get it removed as quickly as possible. Senior U.S. officers never considered the idea a good one. They were concerned about the very limited capabilities of the deployed forces, considered it a distraction from other priorities, and viewed the Yemen situation as best handled by diplomacy alone. If force was required as an adjunct to diplomacy in this case, a much bigger stick should be wielded. By contrast the policy community was more focused on the need for using a small military force as a signal of U.S. political support, enough to signal the UAR and hopefully deter Egyptian escalation and to get Faisal's agreement to end aid the Royalists as part of the diplomatic disengagement process. Kennedy made it clear on numerous occasions that larger military options that seriously threatened the UAR were not in the offing, nor operations that were likely to lead to actual shoot-downs
of Egyptian aircraft. Disagreements over the proper show and use of force remained throughout Operation Hard Surface.

The future of long-term military assistance to the Saudis also sparked controversy. While the U.S. was becoming more committed to this as a result of the Yemen conflict, concerns were raised over the downsides of these expanded activities. This was most pronounced in the proposal to provide the Saudis with an air defense system. Serious reservations were raised over the Hawk SAMs and their appropriateness for the Saudis by both civilian and military advisors. These were based on both larger policy considerations (e.g., the desire not to divert resources necessary for internal economic reform, the need to keep British sales and influence out) and on practical military grounds of Saudi inability to absorb and use the system. The hard lessons of past modernization failures added weight to these latest reservations.

Finally, this period witnessed the escalating conflict between Saud and Faisal and its culmination with Saud's removal from the throne. Saud's repeated efforts to regain his authority back from Faisal revealed his weakened status. But there was still plenty of room for mischief-making and dangerous confrontations. This was dragged out by Faisal's decision that the King not be forcibly removed from power and certainly not with bloodshed. In part stemming from Faisal's pledge to his dying father to honor and support his elder brother Saud as King, it also reflected Faisal's astute instincts on internal Saudi political dynamics. Despite the widespread recognition of Saud’s many failings, the forceful overthrow of the monarch could well have had dangerous implications for the legitimacy of the dynasty and of Faisal's reign. It also risked unleashing new rounds of internecine struggles for power. As Robert Lacey observed, “Deferece to elders is one of the Al Sa’ud’s inviolable ground rules, the best corset they know to discipline the outward thrust of so many assembled appetites.” 242 Faisal successfully maneuvered Saud

242 Lacey, The Kingdom, p. 349.
out while preserving the basic principle. His ascendancy to the throne would usher in a period of major stability and internal development in Saudi Arabia under his stewardship until Faisal’s assassination by a nephew in March 1975.  

243 In an interesting twist of fate, the assassination was linked to Faisal’s earlier introduction of television into the Kingdom, a project undertaken by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In 1965 religiously conservative protesters seized a broadcast house in an effort to stop the project. A shoot-out with police ensued in which one of the protesters, a nephew of Faisal, was killed. The nephew’s brother assassinated Faisal a decade later. Safran, *Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, p. 118.
Looking across many years of political-military engagement and military assistance between two countries provides an opportunity to determine if enduring patterns of behavior exist, despite the many changes in particular events and personalities over those years. It also helps to illuminate the many ends and means at work over time, and on that basis, make more analytically sound judgments in evaluating the overall security relationship. Likewise, a long-term focus points out the deficiencies of relying on too narrow a set of explanations and objectives that can arise from shorter time frames. Three fundamental themes that characterized the first twenty years of the security relationship are summarized here. This is not to exclude the many other factors determining that overall history, but rather to argue that these three are central to understanding the history of military assistance during this period.

**Multiple Objectives Served by Military Assistance and The Tensions Among Them**

Military assistance served multiple political and military objectives for both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, objectives that were frequently in tension with one another. These tensions not only were between U.S. and Saudi objectives, but within the policy
objectives of each country itself. Accordingly, the military assistance process was the product of constant shifts and trade-offs among these and not governed by a central coherent ‘strategy.’ Indeed it was the absence of a highly focused and directed effort that permitted the flexibility to routinely accommodate changes and the internal inconsistencies they often produced.

In one sense it is stating the obvious that military assistance served many different, oftentimes conflicting political and military objectives. Arguably this would be true of any long-term military assistance relationship among states. But in the Saudi Arabian case the number and degree of these considerations were so high that in effect they defined the very nature of the security relationship rather than being a secondary set of concerns as is more commonly the case. As such, the evolution of military assistance to Saudi Arabia can only be understood by explicitly recognizing these multiple objectives and tensions and the formative role they played. They are summarized here, U.S. objectives first, followed by Saudi objectives. The fundamental distinction drawn in both is that between the political and military functions served by military assistance and the tensions frequently produced.

**The U.S. calculus of objectives.** From the outset U.S. military assistance was used heavily to support political objectives toward the Kingdom. In its most basic form, this meant gaining influence with the King, other key members of the Royal Family, and the inner stable of non-Royals influential in the affairs of the Kingdom better to support U.S. political, economic, and military objectives. A corollary to this principal political objective was to maintain and promote the security and stability of the rule of the Al Saud.

Prior to becoming a belligerent in World War II, the primary political objective of the U.S. was insuring that the American oil concession remained secure. The overriding concern was that a failure to bolster Abdul Aziz financially and politically could lead to the collapse of his regime, and with it, the oil concession. Just the same, the failure to
extend military Lend-Lease to the King and the substitution of an agricultural mission was indicative of the level of U.S. commitment at the time. Military assistance was not a consideration, unsurprising given the far greater and important demands for armaments facing the U.S. as it girded for war, and the inappropriateness of military assistance for the acute problems then facing the King. Furthermore, most of Washington continued to view the security of the region as a British responsibility—a responsibility the U.S. did not wish to yet challenge in the case of Saudi Arabia.

Once in the war as a belligerent, U.S. perceptions of Saudi Arabia’s importance changed, but not dramatically. Oil as a strategic asset took on greater meaning, but was framed in fairly broad and unspecified terms. Given that most of Saudi Arabian oil represented long-term potential rather than near-term war supplies, which were fairly abundant, the elevation of oil’s importance did not impel a fundamental shift in U.S. military attitudes regarding the Kingdom’s importance. Many different interests now began to swirl around the issue of oil, revealing early tensions among them even within individual government departments. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, for example, repeatedly expressed the importance of oil to Allied operations and American defense at the same time they were leery of committing forces or other military resources to Saudi Arabia. At the State Department, NEA’s sense of intense and predatory rivalry with the British was mixed with Roosevelt’s (and frequently the U.S. military’s) concern to avoid a collision with the British given the much greater shared interests of the two allied powers.

Once the Kingdom attained operational military interest to the U.S., the State Department vigorously promoted and supported these efforts, oftentimes advocating more strongly than the military itself. This was especially the case once military assistance became the primary means available to support the King during the war. For those pushing political bonds, the military content and concrete value of that assistance was less significant than the act itself. And while it was oftentimes difficult to draw clear distinctions between State Department efforts to promote its political objectives and its
diplomatic efforts aimed at getting the U.S. military what it wanted from the Saudis, the record suggests a pattern emphasizing the former.

With the end of the World War Two and the transition to the Cold War, Washington viewed Saudi Arabia as a possible political partner in the containment of communism in the region. The hope was that King Abdul Aziz, with his stature as protector of Islam’s holiest sites, could wield considerable influence among his fellow Arab leaders against Soviet designs. Also was the enduring problem of Palestine and then the creation of the state of Israel. Clear sources of regional instability (and therefore openings to the Soviet Union), Washington looked to the King for help in keeping these matters from exploding. The State Department in particular continued to push military assistance hard as a tool for further solidifying ties to the King (and his successors) in dealing with these troubling events. And so the political incentives to favorably respond to the requests of the Al Saud for military assistance were again prominent in the immediate post-war period.

Saudi Arabia also took on a different military dimension in the eyes of the U.S. as the Cold War emerged. This was essentially twofold. First was the desire on the part of the U.S. Air Force to retain access to Dhahran airfield for possible strategic bombardment of the Soviet Union. Second was the desire to retain some residual military presence at Dhahran and elsewhere in Saudi Arabia as a means to deter and prevent any ready Soviet access to the oil fields by light airborne forces. In order to accomplish these objectives a certain amount of military assistance was required as a *quid pro quo* for a continuing military presence, simply the cost of doing business. But part of the military assistance approach was also directed at building up a local Saudi armed force that could assist the small American military presence in at least rudimentary defense and denial operations. Here there was an emphasis on developing real Saudi military capabilities, though very limited ones.
At the same time the U.S. military continued to resist any efforts to commit significant resources to protecting Saudi Arabia. As the global demands of the Cold War escalated, U.S. military equipment was in high demand for its own forces, plus there was a long list of priority countries much closer to Soviet and Eastern-bloc countries in need of excess material and training. Under these circumstances any significant commitment to Saudi Arabia was regarded as a dangerous diversion. It was also well recognized that unlike many other states, Saudi armed forces and infrastructure were so threadbare that there was no prospect her military could contribute to any western-led defense of the region regardless of the level of military assistance provided. The U.S. military objective was essentially to provide the minimum assistance necessary to secure limited American political and military interests.

During the Yemen conflict, the Kennedy administration tied U.S. military assistance to very specific policy objectives on disengagement. While the long-term programs adopted made good sense in their own right, the particulars and timing were heavily influenced by events in the Yemen and the administration’s need to bring Faisal around on disengagement. But this tactical use of military assistance to achieve near-term policy objectives had the ironic consequence of setting in motion long-term military assistance programs that would extend many years past the Yemen conflict. In the absence of the war and the objectives of the disengagement process, U.S. military assistance likely would have unfolded quite differently.

The use of military assistance in the Yemen context also triggered misgivings within certain U.S. quarters. Those with the most direct military experience in the field with the Saudis (USMTM) were quite concerned over the prospects that largely politically-driven new and expanded programs would, like so many before them, soon wither away due to Saudi inattention and lack of support once the crisis passed. For the trainers in the field who were focused on concrete military progress, these expanded and advanced programs were not the preferred solution and regarded as counterproductive.
Finally, during this period British efforts to re-enter the military assistance business with Saudi Arabia complicated U.S. calculations. There was little early U.S. enthusiasm for letting the British back in, and quite a bit of resistance to the prospect. U.S. deliberations over the sale of Hawk missiles to the Saudis were significantly influenced by these considerations.

In sum, there were a great number of disparate objectives guiding the course of U.S. military assistance to the Saudis over these two decades. Conflict and inconsistency among them was as common as was harmony.

**The Saudi calculus of objectives.** The Saudi calculus throughout the period was equally diverse if governed by very different considerations, priorities and constraints. For King Abdul Aziz the overwhelming negative effect of World War Two was that it curtailed his revenues from oil and the annual pilgrimage, reducing his coffers and hence his ability to use the King’s ransom to keep the tribes and clans loyal through his dispersements to them. This threatened his control over the vast still unwieldy Kingdom and with it the future of the Al Saud monarchy itself. His paramount concern was retaining control, and getting money was the principal means to do so. Second in importance was military assistance, useful both to bolster his own forces to help him directly with internal security during this trying time and indirectly as a sign of prestige and political support of the U.S. and British Governments. More than ego, this was about having a visible military symbol to convey to other Saudi leaders of the King’s influence with great outside powers, a direct factor in insuring his own stature, ability to rule, and to sustain his legitimacy. Therefore he had a strong internal security incentive to acquire U.S. military hardware and training.

But Abdul Aziz faced his own set of contradictions when it came to American military cooperation and assistance. That he needed a strong outside patron was clear. But reliance on a western power posed risks of being accused of compromising Saudi Arabian sovereignty, and of not protecting the purity of Islam. A U.S. military presence
in the Kingdom, however modest, raised these specters even under the strong rule of Abdul Aziz. Furthermore, the King had to balance his need to strengthen his armed means for holding the country together against the dangers of competent armed forces and leaders turning on the regime. Further complicating matters, there was the risk that a demonstrably incompetent armed force incapable of defending against regional or even localized threats would itself raise disturbing questions on the Al Saud’s ability to protect the country and the cradle of Islam, and hence its legitimacy to rule. And never far from the King’s mind was the Hashemite threat and the dangers it posed of dismembering his still fragile Kingdom. Therefore some tangible level of military modernization and improved defensive capability was also required despite the attendant risks.

This Saudi emphasis on developing some real self-defense capability was made clear, for example, in its insistence that U.S. military support could not be focused on protecting just Dhahran and the oil facilities in the Eastern Province, key American interests. Rather, a much broader defense assistance approach for the entire Kingdom was mandated by the monarch.

With Abdul Aziz’s death, another set of conflicting objectives entered the military assistance picture. King Saud, lacking his father’s stature and ruling legitimacy, had to on the one hand take a more aggressive approach to securing military assistance as a sign of his status and support by a strong outside patron, on the other exercise far more caution than his father in his dealings with the U.S. to avoid any appearance of being dependent or servile. The growing rise of Arab nationalism added to the pressure on Saud. The result was even more incongruity on military assistance that included Saud’s efforts to have the U.S. provide grant military assistance for armaments at the very time he was striving to avoid any political vulnerability by too close an association with Washington. As a weak and less secure leader, his reign in fact heightened the pressure for providing increased military assistance while simultaneously reducing Saudi Arabia’s capacity to use it effectively to improve military capabilities.
A second and related new dynamic was the near-constant fraternal dueling between Saud and Faisal and their respective backers. Shortly following their father’s death the two became locked in a struggle over power and philosophy of governance for the Kingdom. Saud moved quickly to consolidate his power by placing his sons in all key leadership positions within the armed forces (Royal Guard, White Army/National Guard, and Regular Army). Marching to Saud’s orders, his sons determined the direction and roles the individual armed bodies would take, and by extension, the content of requests for U.S. military assistance. Furthermore, the power struggle also meant that Saud looked to U.S. willingness to provide various military assistance as a test of support for him relative to his brother. Later, when Faisal’s fortunes were on the rise the Crown Prince took actions to replace or limit the influence of Saud’s sons, again shifting the priorities and directions of the individual armed forces in the process. U.S. military assistance activities were subjected to the turbulence of the internecine battles, and the process reflected this. Stable, long-term modernization plans essential to making real progress were repeatedly overturned. There was no escaping the link between the internal power struggle and its impact on the shape of U.S. military assistance activities.

The Yemen crisis visibly demonstrated the poor capabilities of Saudi armed forces and dearth of progress over the years. For Faisal and the senior Saudi leadership, this reality not only had immediate military implications but high political content in terms of the monarchy’s legitimacy. Faisal had to renew efforts to improve Saudi capabilities with new modernization programs. For all practical purposes this meant relying heavily on the U.S. Even so, he still exercised great caution in not compromising what he felt were Saudi Arabia’s security imperatives.

A final point worth noting on the larger process has to do with the mutation that frequently took place between the original objectives of military assistance and the ones that materialized as part of the process itself. In many instances the genesis of a military assistance proposal was clearly to meet larger political goals, to include improving or
solidifying political relations. But once a military assistance package and modernization plan was put together it created certain expectations that real military progress would be realized. This was especially true on the part of the Saudis who had to demonstrate practical benefits to all of this, if again even largely for internal political reasons. In a Catch-22, when these practical military benefits failed to materialize, or only came exceptionally slowly, this oftentimes led to tensions with the U.S. over the lack of military progress, itself with important political repercussions.

In looking back, the most pronounced effect of U.S. and Saudi pursuit of their varied objectives over time was to make any stable and methodical security assistance process virtually impossible. This highlights the larger point; the military assistance process was not a clean and orderly one in which specified plans and agreements readily translated into corresponding training programs and phased arms deliveries. Much of the actual process was fluid and untidy, in no small measure due to frequent shifts by either or both parties in the face of new conditions and personalities.

**The Mutual Imperative to Retain the Equilibrium Between Closeness and Placing Distance**

The imperative to retain equilibrium between closeness and placing distance in security relations and military assistance was a central feature of both U.S. and Saudi motives and actions throughout the twenty-year relationship. That the Saudis were sensitive to too close a relationship with the U.S. is well recognized. But the emphasis placed on this observation oftentimes overlooks the equal evidence of a consistent U.S. pattern of limiting its liability and closeness to the Saudis. U.S. administrations faced persistent pressures from a variety of directions to limit both the U.S. political and military commitments to the Kingdom, including domestic pressures from Congress.

The record is fairly clear that while the U.S. always viewed Saudi Arabia as of strategic importance, it was not prepared to extent what could be considered a definitive commitment to come to the defense of Saudi Arabia. President Truman’s October 31,
1950 letter to Abdul Aziz, often cited as providing such a commitment, is not definitive in its language, nor was the intent behind the original letter focused on this. Rather, the words of support were designed to help ease the bad feelings and potential concerns of the King when he was informed of the limited level and type of military assistance he was going to get, and as a means to help along negotiations on Dhahran. These were hardly the circumstances under which one could construe the letter as a firm commitment to come to Saudi Arabia’s defense.

To the extent military assistance was used as a yardstick for actual or implied commitments, the evidence again indicates a very measured U.S. approach. First, the U.S. consistently sought to limit the extent of its military assistance to Saudi Arabia, always well under what the Kingdom desired, in significant part to avoid entanglements that such assistance might entail. The governing principle was determining the minimum military assistance necessary to satisfy the exigencies of U.S. political and military requirements and without implying a larger commitment. Second, in terms of American military objectives, military assistance was used predominantly as a quid pro quo for U.S. access to the Kingdom, and as such, was a practical tool for purchasing such access, not a signal of U.S. security commitment to Saudi Arabia.

This early pattern of ‘limited liability’ toward the Kingdom during and immediately after the Second World War continued into the Cold War in the early 1950s. Washington resisted any formal security pacts even when the opportunity presented itself under Abdul Aziz. At the policy level the U.S. did not want to be tied to possible Saudi actions that were not in U.S. interests. Nor did it want needlessly to pit U.S. and British interests against each other in the Gulf. Certainly the U.S. did not want to give Riyadh leverage in this regard (e.g., definitively committing the U.S. to the territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia only to have that commitment invoked by Riyadh—as was attempted—in its disputes with the smaller Gulf shaykhdoms, protectorates of the U.K.). Any formalized security arrangements threatened to do this. Likewise, the U.S. military
persisted in its opposition to any military commitment to defend Saudi Arabia in the face of other more pressing demands, to now include Korea. On the military assistance front, the early 1950s did see formalized programs and activities, but largely in response to constant Saudi pressure on the U.S. to do so and tied to continued American access to Dhahran. Formalized military assistance also became a practical substitute for any formal defense pact. Therefore far from moving to take advantage of an opening, the U.S. continued to move slowly and sought to go only as far as necessary as a *quid pro quo* for maintaining good political relations and maintaining military access to Dhahran.

Additional patterns of ‘limited liability’ were reflected in the oftentimes hard line position of the U.S. to not provide the Saudis with any grant military aid when it came to equipment, a constant request under Saud. Quite aside from the unwillingness to give grant aid to an increasingly solvent country (and Saud’s resistance to the terms and conditions for grant aid), military aid for equipment was regarded by the U.S. as signaling a larger military commitment than the U.S. was willing to undertake. Therefore it used military *training* as the principal means to satisfy Saud’s desires for U.S.-financed military assistance, not the gift of armaments.

For their part the Joint Chiefs were clear and consistent in their view that there was no military justification for military assistance to the Saudis beyond that mandated for continued military access. Even then they repeatedly cited national political objectives as the fundamental justification for providing military assistance to the Saudis. This is not to say that there were not conflicting views within the military commands. The Commander-in-Chiefs, U.S. Air Forces Europe, were resolute in their perspective that Dhahran was of great operational importance, the loss of which would be severe. Similar views were held by Strategic Air Command, although these shifted with time. Each lobbied as best they could to support their positions. But higher decision making authority to limit the price paid for access was an ever-present force.
Arguably, the Kennedy administration brought the strongest policy perspective of circumspection and distancing from the Al Saud. The incoming administration was quite clear and insistent on the need for reform in Saudi Arabia. Even State Department officials with the brief for Saudi Arabia questioned the viability of the monarchy in the face of Nasser’s escalating strength and the energy of Arab nationalism. When the storm hit directly in the Yemen, the administration distinctly hedged its support to the Saudis, indeed made it clear that it would lean as much as possible in the direction of working with Nasser even at Saudi expense. Operation Hard Surface, while ultimately executed, spoke as much or more to the limits of U.S. support to the Saudis—even under the reform-minded leadership of Faisal—as it did to U.S. willingness to come to Saudi aid.

In the case of the Saudis, the need for maintaining an equilibrium largely had to do with the relative weight given to internal and regional political threats to the regime versus more traditional military threats to the Kingdom. Sensitivities to the range of political threats to the regime were consistently viewed with more gravity than conventional external military threats. Military cooperation and assistance ties to the U.S. reflected these priorities.

The paramount concerns were over maintaining the reality and perception of strict sovereignty to defend against both political and religious attacks on the regime. Clearly military cooperation with a western power that had uniformed forces on Saudi soil, and one supportive of Israel no less, was a lightning rod on the sovereignty issue. Therefore both the U.S. presence at Dhahran and the military assistance training teams were oftentimes portrayed by the Saudi leadership as providing a service to the Saudis, namely the means to develop an indigenous self-defense capability. American military assistance was in essence characterized as a commercial transaction, a service rendered, with no implication that it implied larger security cooperation with Washington.
The Central Role of Saudi Internal Political Dynamics

Saudi internal political dynamics were a driving factor affecting both the means and ends of military assistance. The importance of these dynamics on the evolution of U.S. military assistance cannot be overemphasized, permeating all aspects of the process. This ran the gamut from high policy decisions involving the Al Saud’s constant balancing of the multiple functions served by the Saudi armed forces, to the lower but no less important uses of political patronage, or of acquiring military equipment as a sign of personal prestige, or the use of the armed forces as part of the power struggle among senior royals. All significantly influenced the course taken by military assistance. The types of equipment, scale of purchases, scheduling, training, organization, and command and control arrangements all were deeply affected.

These factors no doubt were common—and still are—in many underdeveloped countries. But Saudi Arabia presented unique features of power-sharing and competition within a monarchical system. These features, combined with an extended period of political turbulence, both inside and outside the Kingdom following the death of Abdul Aziz, meant that internal factors proved central in shaping the form and substance of military assistance from the U.S.

Throughout the history the Saudis also were adept at using the threat of internal instability to pressure the U.S. At times it was used as the reason why the U.S. should provide the Saudi leadership with additional military assistance, at other times a means to limit or otherwise favorably alter the conditions under which the assistance was provided. When used cleverly, the very real concern over instability also became an effective device to manipulate the process and a source of Saudi leverage in its dealings with Washington.
Dispelling Some Myths

Finally, these themes are useful in dispelling some of the frequently propounded explanations of the U.S.-Saudi security relationship that are in fact simplified myths, at least when applied to the period under study here. Among these is that U.S. military assistance was never about seriously improving Saudi military capabilities, but simply a means for retaining and strengthening U.S. political and military access to the Kingdom. As such, the U.S. was a willing supplier of weapons and equipment recognized as inappropriate and of little real military use. Efforts to develop a modern Saudi military establishment were never taken seriously by either party.

To be sure the U.S. did focus heavily on military access, but it was not the unequivocal driver behind military assistance that it is so often portrayed. As for freely dispensing inappropriate equipment to secure this access, the record is replete with contrary examples. The unwillingness of the U.S. to provide grant aid for military equipment, but instead make available training services, was in part a reflection of the professional judgment that in the hierarchy of things what the Saudis really needed to modernize their force was training, not more modern equipment. Throughout much of the 1950s the Saudis pushed hard for grant military aid for armaments and were largely denied by the U.S. The Saudi leadership made clear the political importance it attached to getting grant aid for arms, but this failed to sway Washington. Both the State and Defense Departments also worried about the detrimental consequences for the Saudis of moving to develop a military beyond their ability to support financially. This was a serious factor limiting U.S. willingness to accommodate various Saudi requests for more advanced arms. Also in evidence are the frequent statements and formal studies by the U.S. military emphasizing the poor performance of Saudi modernization and the need for constant efforts to insure that any military assistance is appropriate to the goal of advancing Saudi military effectiveness. The reality was far more rigorous, hard-nosed and contentious on arms.
Another myth is that because of Saudi Arabia’s rich oil potential, the U.S. was unequivocally committed to protecting Saudi Arabia and the ruling House of Saud. It therefore took every opportunity to solidify this commitment. The evidence again does not support this view, but instead that of a consistent U.S. pattern of seeking limited liability toward the Kingdom and its leadership. The strongest example was Abdul Aziz’s desire for more concrete and formalized defense commitments and Washington’s refusal to do so. The King had to settle for the substitute of structured military assistance programs as the means to tie the U.S. more closely to his Kingdom’s defense. The experience of his son Faisal during the Yemen war was hardly a model of Washington’s unflagging commitment to the Royal Family.

A third myth is that of the uneducated, foolish and corrupt Saudi leadership that for all practical purposes was a pawn of the U.S., compliant to U.S. demands in return for America’s commitment to the regime’s survival. There is no denying that there was self-interest, greed and corruption aplenty by various Saudi personages, but there was also much evidence of hard attention to reasons of state. As for lack of sophistication, there is ample proof of Saudi abilities to more than hold their own when it came to dealing with the U.S. When the wisdom of the desert was insufficient, Abdul Aziz and others were quick to employ formally educated and more worldly Arabs (to include non-Saudis) to fill the void in dealing with westerners. A balanced reading of the record on military assistance deliberations and deliverables does not correspond with the notion of a passive and compliant Saudi leadership yielding to the U.S. for its survival.

A counterpart to the above myth is the myth of the Al Saud as cleverly manipulating U.S. decision makers and American policy into supporting the Saudi regime. This assertion holds that U.S. policy makers were duped into providing such support, even when inconsistent with U.S. interests. The history is thus one of U.S. complacency—if not stupidity—in being used by a small, backward country into giving the rulers what they wanted. The evidence shows that the U.S. in fact opposed many
Saudi requests even when it threatened the political relationship of the two countries. While there was frequent advocacy for the Saudis in the Near East State Department desks and from U.S. political representatives in Saudi Arabia, it was not unequivocal and certainly not uncritical of the Saudis. Analyses from these sectors oftentimes displayed an appreciation of Saudi efforts to manipulate U.S. policies. Beyond those with immediate responsibility for the Kingdom, U.S. policy makers in general, both civilian and military, did not place Saudi Arabia in any ‘special relationship’ category of countries during the period covered here. For the most part it was given a far lower priority than many other states in the region, much to the annoyance of the Saudis. At the level of U.S. national policy there was in fact little to suggest that senior decision makers were captivated by the Saudis, and certainly not captured by them.

To conclude, the first twenty years of significant U.S.-Saudi engagement was a rich and complex mix of political, economic, and military elements. The cooperation that emerged did so by virtue of the ability of the participants to constantly struggle to harmonize their oftentimes conflicting agendas, with neither party compromising on its core interests. Nowhere was this more true than in the sensitive arena of military cooperation and assistance. Perhaps most revealing of all throughout this period, despite the many changes in the world, the diversity of U.S. and Saudi leaders, and periodic crises between the two countries, policy operated in a very narrow range. Fundamental shifts in relations did not occur, even when intervening events and personalities looked to threaten the basic order. The intricate ‘Dance of Swords’ made this possible and sustainable. An appreciation of the elements of that ‘Dance’ can help provide a more accurate history of U.S.-Saudi relations, and the intimate role military assistance played. Perhaps this appreciation can also provide a better regard for the future.
APPENDICES
Appendix A: U.S. War Plans and the Middle East: 1945-1950

In analyzing the subject of how military assistance was used to support U.S. military objectives in Saudi Arabia, it is essential to place the Kingdom in the much broader context of U.S. security planning during this period. A too narrow focus on Saudi Arabia alone can impart more strategic significance to the Kingdom than is warranted. A brief examination of U.S. war plans from 1945 through 1950 helps provide this needed perspective along two dimensions: in determining Saudi Arabia’s relative value as a resource to be protected (or at least denied to the Soviets); in evaluating the importance of Saudi Arabia as a base for military operations in the event of a conflict with the USSR.

Once it became clear that the Soviet Union was going to be a long-term adversary, U.S. war planning wrestled with the prospect of how to wage war successfully against the communist state. War plans from the mid-to-late forties were heavily influenced by intelligence estimates of massive Soviet land power for which there was no western equivalent. This resulted in a series of assessments that the Soviets had the capacity to wage large-scale invasions of both Europe and the Middle East. The U.S. response involved heavy reliance on atomic bombs and conventional military counterattacks launched from outside Europe, primarily from the Middle East region, thereby avoiding a very costly war of attrition in Europe. Given the heavy emphasis on strategic bombardment (both conventional and atomic) as an offset to Soviet land-force dominance throughout this period, and the still limited range of Strategic Air Command’s (SAC) bomber force of B-29s and B-36s, the quest for overseas air bases was a central element of U.S. war planning.¹ The Middle East region therefore played a significant

role both as a military objective of the Soviets and as a staging area for western counterattacks in early U.S. Cold War military planning.

In the post-war period the U.S. concluded that Britain’s weakened position in the Middle East meant it could be quickly forced out of the region in the face of a Soviet invasion. Soviet incentives for striking into the region were postulated as a mix of interests in seizing oil resources (or denying them to the west) and preventing the west from using air bases in the region for attacking the Soviet industrial heartland.² In the case of seizing or denying oil resources, the strategic prizes for the Soviet Union were Iran and Iraq. In close proximity to the Soviet Union, these two comprised the vast majority of oil production from the region. Successfully occupying these two countries would deal a strategic blow to Great Britain, opening the road first to Palestine and then to Suez, effectively collapsing the British position throughout the region. It would also make any ground-based counterattack by western forces from the Arabian Peninsula exceedingly difficult if not impossible.³

Fort its part, Saudi Arabia was far more distant geographically and still a relatively minor and underdeveloped petroleum source. It clearly did not carry the strategic weight of its northern neighbors. Even within the Arabian peninsula, the oil facilities at Bahrain and Kuwait received more frequent attention in war plans than the Dhahran-based oil fields. As noted in Chapter 3, in its pursuit of staging areas for long-range bombers and conventional counterattack, the allied emphasis was on the British Base complex at Cairo-Suez. With its extensive air bases and infrastructure, this complex provided the most potential for striking at the Soviet heartland, along with

³ Strategic Study of the Area between the Alps and Himalayas (Cauldron study), November 1946, cited in Ross, American War Plans, 1945-1950, p. 36.
Wheelus Air Force Base in Libya.\textsuperscript{4} The Egyptian facilities also provided the added potential for amphibious assaults into the Balkans.\textsuperscript{5}

However, this defense strategy, hinging as it did on Cairo-Suez, soon came under mounting pressure. Throughout the mid-to-late 1940s the British were undergoing a wrenching debate over their position in the Middle East. The historical justification for holding fast in the region was based on the need to protect sea power lines-of-communication linking the imperial empire. This reasoning was now no longer credible. While inertia was still evident when it came to revising plans, a series of British currency crises added further fuel to those advocating a reduction in commitments suitable for a “post-imperial order.” As time wore on, the military justification for remaining in the region increasingly rested on arguments for securing bases necessary for launching strategic air strikes against a Soviet offensive. The British would have to maintain their position in order to insure that both they—and more importantly the U.S. —had the bases available when needed. This now became a basic element in British strategic thinking as reflected in her Overall Strategic Plan in the late 1940s.\textsuperscript{6}

But as Britain’s political-military presence and authority eroded, especially in Egypt, the need for an alternative strategy grew. The result was the ‘Northern Tier’ approach in which Turkey became a key country in the defense scheme. Turkey was well-positioned geographically both as a base for mounting a conventional ground defense against a westward Soviet offensive and for launching long-range air bombardment strikes against the Russian homeland. In relative terms, Turkey also had a good military infrastructure and collection of air fields.\textsuperscript{7} Turkey’s strategic importance would increase even more with the advent of a formal alliance to protect western Europe.

\textsuperscript{5} Ross, \textit{American War Plans, 1945-1950}, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{6} For background on this evolution and debate see Cohen, \textit{Fighting World War Three From the Middle East: Allied Contingency Plans, 1945-1954}, pp. 73-94.
\textsuperscript{7} For a discussion of early U.S. thinking on the role of Turkey as a base for strategic operations against the Soviet Union, see Ibid., pp. 53-56.
The remote and rudimentary infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and the Dhahran air
field paled in comparison to Cairo-Suez and Turkey. The U.S. continued to emphasize
the importance of the British commitment to the Middle East region as part of allied
strategy. The U.S. military quite clearly had little desire to supplant British
responsibilities there. Indeed it was the British military that was pulling for a
commitment of U.S. forces to bolster their eroding position. Yet as global demands on
U.S. forces grew, the practical prospects for such a commitment dimmed further.

A final shift came with the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty
Organization (NATO) in 1949. Now the U.S. became politically bound to the defense of
western Europe. American military planning had to reflect this fact. Subsequent war
plans placed protecting Europe west of the Rhine above the previous priorities of Cairo-
Suez and Middle East oil regions. This European requirement would consume already
highly-strained U.S. military capabilities. The onset of the Korean War brought a
dramatic increase in defense spending, but much of this was used to prosecute the war
itself. If anything, resources available for Middle East operations further declined, at
least in the near-term. Staging conventional counterattacks from the lower Gulf, while
not ruled out, now represented a remote prospect at best. Therefore, throughout this
period the Kingdom was not central to either U.S. estimates of Soviet objectives or to
allied contingency planning.

---

8 For the political-military dynamics at play between the two countries, see Peter L. Hahn, *The United
pp. 78-80, and Cohen, *Fighting World War Three From the Middle East: Allied Contingency Plans, 1945-
1954*, pp. 41, 47.

9 Against the backdrop of NSC 68 and the defense buildup from the Korean conflict, the Joint Chiefs of
Staff approved War Plan Reaper in November 1950, which called for an active defense of the Gulf in the
1954 timeframe. This was based on the expected increase in capabilities from the defense buildup over the

10 This is not to say that Saudi Arabia and its vast potential oil reserves were not identified as important
strategic objectives in a global war with the Soviet Union. They were. But the war plans identified almost
every part of the globe as having some importance in plans for total war. More to the point, given all of the
other higher priorities identified in the series of war plans, and recognition of the severely limited U.S.
ability to meet even those priorities, for all practical purposes Saudi Arabia was peripheral.
Appendix B: Agreements of June 18, 1951

Agreement between the United States of America and Saudi Arabia on the Air Base At Dhahran, June 18, 1951

The American Ambassador to the Saudi Arabian Minister for
Foreign Affairs
THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AMERICAN EMBASSY,
Jidda, June 18, 1951.

YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS:
I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of Your Highness’ note of this date reading as follows:

“I have the honor to inform Your Excellency that as of this date the Agreement between the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Government of the United States of America concerning Dhahran Airfield, concluded on June 23, 1949,[1] as extended, will be terminated. In view of the desire of the Government of Saudi Arabia to offer to the Government of the United States of America certain facilities after that date, I have the honor to transmit to Your Excellency herein below the provisions upon which agreement was reached for the continuation of the use of facilities and services at Dhahran Airfield by the transient and supporting aircraft of the Government of the United States, in accordance with the conditions mentioned in this letter. It is my hope that you will inform me in your reply of the approval thereof by the Government of the United States in order to consider this note and Your Excellency’s reply an agreement committing the two parties.

1. The term Dhahran Airfield as used in this Agreement means the area of land located in the so-called Dammam tracts measuring five statute miles on each side of a square with the center located at the terminal building of the existing airdrome.

2. (a). In accordance with the request of the Saudi Arabian Government, the Government of the United States agrees to send, at its expense, to Dhahran Airfield a Mission to be employed for training Saudi nationals and for organizing the operations of the Dhahran Airport technical administration.

(b). The number of the members of the Mission will be determined by request of the head of the Mission and approval thereof by the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defense. Such specification in numbers of personnel will be reviewed from time to time in the light of developing circumstances and requirements.

(c). The Mission referred to in paragraph (a) above is permitted to employ an additional number of civilians on the Airfield on condition that such civilians shall be the subjects of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or the subjects of the United States or the subjects of

a third state friendly to both, and that the number of non-Saudi personnel will be determined by request of the Mission and approval of the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defense. Such specification in numbers of personnel will be reviewed from time to time in the light of developing circumstances and requirements.

(d). It is provided that there must not be among members of the Mission or among the other employees any individual who is objectionable to the Saudi Arabian Government, and that the Government of the United States will submit a detailed list of the names and identity of these personnel and employees.

(e). If the Saudi Arabian Government requests the Mission to send out or replace any of its personnel or employees whom the Saudi Arabian Government does not desire to remain in the country, the Mission will carry out such request promptly.

3. (a). United States aircraft are permitted to use the Saudi Arabian Government Airport at Dhahran to land and take off for refueling and other technical services such as maintenance and repair.

(b). United States aircraft are permitted to fly over those air routes of Saudi Arabia of which the Saudi Arabian Government permits the use.

(c). United States aircraft are permitted to perform air rescue operations for aircraft which are in need of aid, upon notice to the Saudi Arabian Government. In performing such air rescue, vehicles and crash boats may be used to the extent necessary for air rescue operations.

(d). The number of aircraft which will be permitted to be based at Dhahran Airfield and which will be used for air rescue and other authorized operations will be determined by request of the United States Mission and approval of the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defense. Such specification in the number of aircraft will be reviewed from time to time in the light of developing circumstances and requirements.

4. In accordance with paragraph 23 of the existing Dhahran Airfield Agreement which states that all fixed installations and other property used in operation and maintenance of the Airfield will be returned to the Saudi Arabian Government upon termination of the Agreement, and in view of the fact that the said Agreement is being terminated and that such installations and properties thereby revert to the Saudi Arabian Government, and, due to the desire of the Saudi Arabian Government to facilitate the errand of the Mission, it agrees to place at the disposition of the Mission at Dhahran Airfield, rent free, certain existing buildings and installations as specified in the list agreed upon by the appropriate authorities of the two Governments.
and approved by the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defense. This list will be reviewed from time to time in the light of developing circumstances and requirements.

5. (a). The United States Mission at Dahrnan Airfield will perform the necessary technical operations, and such operations will be determined and agreed upon between the members of the Mission and the appropriate officials of the Saudi Arabian Government, and, after obtaining the approval of the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defense, the Mission will perform its duties on the Base, provided that such duties will be reviewed from time to time subject to the technical developments and circumstances.

(b). The United States Mission is permitted to administer, at Dahrnan Airfield only, and in addition to what is mentioned in paragraph (a), matters connected with United States military aircraft, the military personnel and the civilian employees of the Mission. The Mission at Dahrnan Airfield will not act in any other matters except when specifically authorized by the Saudi Arabian Government.

(c). Civil aviation operations and all other aviation operations at Dahrnan Airfield, with the exception of those mentioned in paragraphs 5 (a) and (b) will be administered by the Saudi Arabian Government under its responsibility. The Saudi Arabian Government will take the necessary action to prevent interference with the operations of United States aircraft as authorized under this Agreement. All regulations and instructions of the Saudi Arabian Government will be applied to civilian aircraft which are permitted by the Saudi Arabian Government to use Dahrnan Airfield, including compliance by such aircraft with the international provisions which are accepted by the Saudi Arabian Government. The Saudi Arabian Government will also perform customs procedures, collection of fees, inspections, passport control and similar matters.

6. (a). To assure efficient operation and the furnishing of technical services at Dahrnan Airfield to the best possible extent the United States Mission will be permitted to improve, alter, modify and replace buildings and facilities for improvement purposes or, after notifying the Saudi Arabian Government, and obtaining its approval, to construct such buildings and facilities at Dahrnan Airfield (including runways, taxiways, parking aprons, weather services, radio communications and navigational aids) as may be deemed necessary for the purpose of this Agreement. The Saudi Arabian Government will issue instructions to the appropriate authorities to prohibit the construction of buildings or obstacles for a distance of five kilometers in the plain west of the present Airfield, and it will also issue
instructions to prevent the construction of obstacles in the approaches to the runways.

(b) Such installations and constructions will become, as soon as they are established, the property of the Saudi Arabian Government. All fixed properties will also be considered as belonging to the Saudi Arabian Government as soon as they are established. The Saudi Arabian Government will permit such new installations and fixed items to remain at the disposition of the United States Mission during the period of this Agreement.

(c) It is agreed that the United States Mission will not remove any of the property and installations which have been installed and have become the property of the Saudi Arabian Government. In case the Mission replaces any installations or property which has become the property of the Saudi Arabian Government, then such replacements will become the property of the Saudi Arabian Government and the items which were removed will become the property of the United States Government.

(d) Neither the Mission nor the United States Government has the right to sell, lease, donate or pledge to a third party anything granted to it in this Agreement or which has been put at its disposition at Dhahran Airfield under this Agreement.

7. The Mission is permitted to employ radio codes.

8. The Mission may construct at the expense of the United States Government a railway spur to connect Dhahran Airfield with the railway which passes through the city of Dhahran. This spur will be considered as soon as constructed the property of the Saudi Arabian Government. The use of such spur during the period of this Agreement will be subject to a special agreement.

9. (a) The Saudi Arabian Government will accord exemption from customs duties, taxes and all Government charges on materials, equipment and supplies necessary for the construction, maintenance, supply and operation of the Airfield, provided that the Mission will submit to the appropriate authorities of the Saudi Arabian Government the official bills of lading and manifests on the material, equipment and supplies imported for the operation and maintenance of Dhahran Airfield.

(b) The Saudi Arabian Government accords the military personnel of the Mission personal exemption from customs duties and Government charges for themselves or their personal effects which may be brought in for their personal use provided that such effects will be subject to submission of official bills of lading and manifest and provided that quantities of such effects will be within reasonable limits and that no such articles will be sold unless the appropriate
authorities of the Saudi Arabian Government are informed in order that the applicable taxes may be collected. Civilians of United States nationality who are attached to the Mission will also be accorded exemption from customs duties, taxes and Government charges for themselves or on their personal effects which may be brought in for their personal use provided that such effects will also be subject to submission of official bills of lading and manifest and provided that the quantities of such effects will be within reasonable limits and that no such articles will be sold unless the appropriate authorities of the Saudi Arabian Government are informed in order that the applicable taxes may be collected.

(c). It is understood that the Mission will inform the appropriate authorities of the Saudi Arabian Government of anything the Mission may intend to sell in order that the applicable taxes may be collected.

(d). Subject to the provisions of paragraph 6 (b) the Mission may withdraw from Saudi Arabia any of those items which have been brought in after notifying the Saudi Arabian Government; if the United States has no special interest in using such items in some other place outside Saudi Arabia, these items will be offered for sale to the Saudi Arabian Government at a fair price. In case the Saudi Arabian Government does not wish to buy these items they may then be exported free of any export charges.

10. The Mission is permitted to receive its military mail and to send it to and from Dhahran Airfield exempt from customs duties provided that parcel post will be in accordance with the terms of paragraph 9 (a).

11. The members of the Mission, its personnel and employees may carry on any social activities on condition that they will take into account the local customs and laws in effect in Saudi Arabia.

12. (a). The complete authority and sovereignty inside and outside of Dhahran Airfield is the absolute right of the Saudi Arabian Government and it will make arrangements for guarding and maintaining the safety of the Airport.

(b). The United States Mission will assign special guards for the installations which are used by the Mission and such guards will be responsible for such installations under their guard inside the Airfield.

(c). The Mission shall comply with the request of the Director of the Dhahran Airport in appointing certain responsible persons from the Mission to accompany the Saudi patrol guards to identify members of the Mission and to cooperate during patrol duty.
13. (a). All United States military personnel, members of the Mission, and all civilian employees of the Mission who are United States nationals or the nationals of other friendly states and their dependents at Dhahran Airfield shall obey all applicable laws and regulations of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

(b). Any offense committed by any of the individuals referred to in (a) with the exception of American military personnel will be subject to the local jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

(c). Depending on international authority, the Saudi Arabian Government agrees that:

(i) If any member of the armed forces of the United States commits an offense inside Dhahran Airfield he will be subject to United States military jurisdiction.

(ii) In the case of any offense committed by a member of the armed forces of the United States outside Dhahran Airfield at Al Khorah, Damam, Dhahran, Ras Tanura, the beaches south of Al Khorah to Half Moon Bay, and the roads leading to these places, the Saudi Arabian authorities will arrest the offender and after promptly completing the preliminary investigation will turn such person over to the Mission at Dhahran Airfield for trial and punishment under American military jurisdiction.

(iii) Any offense committed by a member of the armed forces of the United States outside the places mentioned in (i) and (ii) will be subject to the local jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

(d). Claims for compensation for damages arising out of acts of members of the armed forces of the United States will be settled by agreement between the appropriate Saudi Arabian authorities and the Head of the Mission. In case no agreement is reached, settlement will be made through diplomatic channels.

14. Members, personnel and employees of the Mission who are United States nationals will be in possession of valid passports or identification papers to be presented to the appropriate authorities upon arrival at Dhahran Airfield. All of them must obtain Saudi visas from the point of departure, and if, for unavoidable reasons, it is impossible to obtain such visas, the Saudi Arabian Government will honor competent United States Government travel orders on condition that such persons are not undesirable. If anyone arrives without having followed the said arrangements, he will be subject to the laws and regulations of the Saudi Arabian Government.

15. The United States Government agrees to provide the Saudi Arabian Government the following services:
(a) A military training program, the details of which will be agreed upon in a separate agreement and whereby an American military mission will be sent to Saudi Arabia.

(b) Training in the maintenance and operation of airfields to a maximum at one time of one hundred Saudi Arabian students selected by the Saudi Arabian Government. The Saudi Arabian Government will select from these students, in consultation with the Mission, twenty Saudi Arabian students to pursue at United States Air Force schools in the United States advanced technical training in airfield operation and maintenance, under conditions embodied in the attached annex.

Saudi Arab students of the Training Mission who have completed a course of technical training in United States schools and who have been found fully qualified in their technical specialty will, to the maximum degree possible, be given consideration and priority for employment at Dhahran Airfield. Every opportunity will be taken to increase the training and experience of these advanced graduates to the degree where they will be capable of administering and operating the international airports of Saudi Arabia. Rates of pay will be on the same scale as others of equal qualifications.

(c) In cases of emergency the United States will provide Saudi Arabia for its state-owned aircraft at delivery cost price, aircraft parts, including engines, when such parts can be made available from stock at Dhahran Airfield. In the event that such parts cannot be made available at Dhahran Airfield, the United States will assist Saudi Arabia in procuring them from commercial sources.

(d) The Mission will make available, within the capabilities of its facilities in operation at Dhahran Airfield, its weather services, radio communications, air rescue and aircraft operation services for the use of civilian aircraft which are authorized by the Saudi Arabian Government to use Dhahran Airfield.

(e) The United States Mission will provide to the best of its ability and within its capabilities at Dhahran Airfield medical treatment and dispensary services for Saudi Arabian nationals who are employees of the United States Mission and for Saudi members and students of the United States Training Mission.

In the event of epidemic or infectious diseases the United States Mission will assist the Saudi Arabian Government to the extent possible to combat the situation.

16. Upon the termination of this Agreement, the Mission will return to the Saudi Arabian Government in sound operating condition
all fixed installations, properties and equipment of which it makes use in the operation and maintenance of Dhahran Airfield.

17. (a). The Mission is permitted to construct wells, water reservoirs or dams to insure an ample supply of water for Dhahran Airfield.

(b). The Mission will undertake, in cooperation with the appropriate Saudi authorities, to take such steps as may be mutually agreed upon to improve health and sanitation in areas contiguous to Dhahran Airfield.

18. The Mission is permitted to contract for any construction work at Dhahran Airfield authorized by this Agreement without restriction as to choice of contractor provided that the contracting firm or the people working with it will not be unacceptable to the Saudi Arabian Government. So far as may be practicable, Saudi nationals will be given preference in employment and contracts.

19. Nothing in this Agreement shall be interpreted or construed to infringe or detract in any way from the complete and absolute sovereignty of the Saudi Arabian Government over Dhahran Airfield, nor does it include any authorization whatsoever which would for any reason permit flying over, landing or conducting any aviation operations over or near the Holy Places or over any prohibited areas.

20. This Agreement shall come into force as of this date, shall continue in force for a period of five years, and shall remain in force for an additional period of five years thereafter unless, six months prior to the termination of the first five year period, either party to the Agreement gives to the other notice of intention to modify or terminate the Agreement.

* * * * * *

ANNEX

The following are the conditions covering the training of Saudi Arabian students in the United States as specified in paragraph 15 (b).

1. Transportation from Dhahran to the United States and return will be furnished by the United States Air Force via military aircraft at no cost to the Saudi Arabian Government. Travel within the United States will be at the expense of the Saudi Arabian Government although the United States Air Force will render all advice and assistance to trainees.

2. Saudi students will mess at their own expense on a cost basis at Officers' Messes at the established local rates.

3. Where quarters are available, they will be furnished on a scale equivalent to that authorized officers of the United States Air Force.
No reimbursement will be made to the United States for this service. Where quarters are not available, the officer trainee or the Saudi Arabian Government will make their own arrangements at no cost to the United States Government.

4. All training will be without cost to the Saudi Arabian Government except as herein provided. Special clothing and equipment required for the prescribed training courses will be furnished for use during the training course upon a temporary loan basis at no cost to the Saudi Arabian Government.

5. Commissary, post exchange and similar privileges which are ordinarily available to officers of the United States Air Force will be extended to these trainees.

6. Medical care will be furnished when available on the same basis as furnished United States Air Force personnel, at no cost to the Saudi Arabian Government other than for subsistence."

I have been authorized to inform Your Royal Highness of my Government's agreement to your proposal that your note and this reply should constitute an Agreement between our two Governments effective as of this date.

Please accept, your Highness, the assurances of my highest consideration.

RAYMOND A. HARE

His Royal Highness
Prince FEISAL,
Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Jidda.
Agreement on Mutual Defense Assistance, June 18, 1951

SAUDI ARABIA
MUTUAL DEFENSE ASSISTANCE

TIAS 2289
June 18, 1951

Agreement effected by exchange of notes signed at Jidda and at Mecca
June 18, 1951; entered into force June 18, 1951.

The American Ambassador to the Saudi Arabian Minister for
Foreign Affairs
THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AMERICAN EMBASSY, Jidda, June 18, 1951.

YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS:

1. In view of the friendship existing between the Government of
Saudi Arabia and the Government of the United States of America,
in pursuance of conversations which have been held over a considerable
period of time regarding the desire of Saudi Arabia to obtain military
arms and equipment from the United States, and in confirmation of
recent discussion with representatives of the Government of Saudi
Arabia regarding the extending of procurement assistance to Saudi
Arabia for the transfer of military supplies and equipment, I have the
honor to confirm that by executive decision of the President of the
United States Saudi Arabia has been found eligible for such assistance
under Section 408 (E) of the Mutual Defense Act of 1949 (Public Law
329, 81st Congress) as amended by Public Law 621, 81st Con-
gress, which provided inter alia for the extending of procurement
assistance to a nation whose ability to defend itself, or to participate
in the defense of the area of which it is a part, is important to the
security of the United States.

2. I understand that the Government of Saudi Arabia desires to
take advantage of such procurement assistance and to have sent to it
a United States Army, Navy and Air Force group to come to agree-
ment with the appropriate Saudi Arabian authorities on the training
program and the phasing of deliveries of arms and equipment required
by the Saudi Arabian Government.

3. The cost of supplies or equipment provided by procurement
assistance shall be the fair value as determined by the President of the
United States under the terms of the Act.

4. The United States Government, in addition to providing the
procurement assistance mentioned above, as indicated in paragraph
15 (a) of the Embassy's note of this date, is prepared to make avail-
able adequate numbers of qualified United States Army, Navy and
Air Force personnel to provide training in the use of equipment acquired under procurement assistance as well as for tactical training. Certain expenses of the United States personnel assigned for these purposes will be borne by the United States Government. These expenses will include payment of salaries of such personnel, allowances, per diem and other concomitants of military duty.

5. The United States Government will, to the extent it is possible to do so, accept Saudi Arabian cadets of outstanding promise for study and training in the United States.

6. I understand your Government is prepared to agree to use such items as may be provided to foster international peace and security within the framework of the Charter of the United Nations; and moreover, that items to be provided by the United States Government are required by the Saudi Arabian Government to maintain its internal security, its legitimate self-defense or to permit it to participate in the defense of the area of which it is a part, and that it will not undertake any act of aggression against another state.

7. I understand also that your Government will obtain the consent of the Government of the United States prior to the transfer of title to or possession of any equipment and materials, information or services furnished, and that your Government will take measures to protect the security of any article, service or information furnished.

8. In order to pay for military assistance, the Saudi Arabian Government will open an irrevocable letter of credit in favor of the Secretary of State in a United States bank for the full cost, including accessorial and administrative expenses incident thereto of each order of equipment to be purchased when the order is made. Drafts on this letter payable to the Treasurer of the United States will be drawn before equipment out of United States Government stock is transferred to the Saudi Arabian Government.

9. Regarding equipment for which orders must be placed with manufacturers, contracts will be placed in behalf of the Saudi Arabian Government by an agency of the United States Government. Payment for such equipment must therefore be arranged in advance in the same manner outlined above, including such amounts as may be required to defray progress payments on contract. It is understood that any damages resulting from cancellation of contract by the Saudi Arabian Government may be reimbursed by drawing upon the irrevocable letter of credit under reference. Any remaining funds will be returned to the Saudi Arabian Government. Similarly, refund will promptly be made of any deposits for material out of United States Government stocks on which payment is made but transfer of which is not made by the United States Government.
10. The Government of Saudi Arabia will also understand that the Government of the United States necessarily retains the privilege of diverting items of equipment or of not completing services undertaken, if such action is dictated by considerations of national interest.

11. Under the established eligibility of Saudi Arabia under Section 408 (E) of the Mutual Defense Act, the foregoing conditions regarding the furnishing of procurement assistance would also be applicable to further requests of the Saudi Arabian Government additional to those which have been currently under discussion and on which agreement in principle has been reached. Compliance with such requests by the United States Government will be in accordance with its capabilities and existing legislation.

12. A reply by the Government of Saudi Arabia to the effect that these understandings are correct will be considered as constituting an agreement between our two Governments.

Accept, Your Royal Highness, the renewed assurance of my highest consideration.

RAYMOND A. HARE

His Royal Highness
Prince Faisal,
Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Jidda.
Appendix C: Agreement between the United States of America and Saudi Arabia on Mutual Defense Assistance, June 27, 1953

MUTUAL DEFENSE ASSISTANCE

United States Military Assistance
Advisory Group to Saudi Arabia

Agreement between the
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
and SAUDI ARABIA

Implementing Agreement of
June 18, 1951

- Effected by Exchange of Notes
  Signed at Jidda June 27, 1953
- Entered into force June 27, 1953
The American Ambassador to the Saudi Arabian Minister of
Defense and Aviation

American Embassy,
Jidda, June 27, 1953.

Your Royal Highness:

I have the honor to propose the following conditions to govern
the status, duties, administration and conduct of the United States
Military Training Mission, to be known as the United States Military
Assistance Advisory Group to Saudi Arabia and hereafter referred to
as “Advisory Group”, in implementation of the agreement for assist-
ance in procurement of military arms concluded between the United
States Government and the Saudi Arabian Government signed on
June 18, 1951, [*] corresponding to Ramadan 13, 1370.

I should appreciate being advised by your Royal Highness of the
acceptance of these conditions by the Saudi Arabian Government in
order that this note and your Royal Highness’ reply thereto may
constitute an agreement binding both parties.

1. The Advisory Group shall consist of such number of U.S. Mil-
itary personnel as may be determined by the Chief of the Advisory
Group, with the approval of the Department of Defense of the
United States and the concurrence of the Saudi Arabian Minister of
Defense and Aviation.

2. Subject to the provisions of the following paragraphs, the mem-
ers of the Advisory Group shall be detailed for duty with the Saudi
Arabian Ministry of Defense and Aviation under such arrange-
ments as may be determined by the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defense and
Aviation in agreement with the Chief of the Advisory Group.

3. The Advisory Group will administer assistance furnished by
the United States Government to the Saudi Arabian Government.
This assistance and administrative functions pertaining thereto will
be in accordance with the provisions of the Mutual Defense Assist-
ance Act of 1949 [*] and the Mutual Security Act of 1951 [*] and
amendatory and supplementary acts thereto.

4. The duties of the Advisory Group will include assistance and
advice to the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defense and Aviation, as
well as units of the Saudi Arabian armed forces, with respect to plans,
organization, administration principles, training methods and the
conduct of such training as is agreed upon between the Saudi Arabian
Minister of Defense and Aviation and the Chief of the Advisory

[*] Treaties and Other International Acts Series 2289; 2 UST 1400.
Group. This training will include the use of the various kinds of weapons, tactics and logistics. In the conduct of their duties members of the Advisory Group may make inspections and investigations and carry out such other duties as may be recommended by the Chief of the Advisory Group and approved by the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defense and Aviation.

5. Each member of the Advisory Group is obligated not to divulge or in any way disclose to any foreign government or to any unauthorized person whatsoever any secret or confidential matter of which he may be cognizant or which may be revealed to him in his capacity as a member of the Advisory Group. This obligation shall continue in force after the termination of the services of the member of the Advisory Group or after expiration of this agreement.

6. (A) The Saudi Arabian Government will accord exemption from all taxes, customs duties and/or other government imposts on material, equipment and supplies, including food-stuffs, clothing and stores, imported into Saudi Arabia by the United States Government for the official use of the Advisory Group or its members, provided that the Advisory Group shall submit to the appropriate authorities in Saudi Arabia the official bills of lading and manifests of the aforementioned items.

(B) The Saudi Arabian Government will accord the military personnel of the Advisory Group personal exemption from taxes, customs duties and all Government charges applicable to individuals and/or personal effects which may be brought in for their personal use, provided that such effects will be subject to the submitting of official bills of lading and manifests and provided that quantities of such effects will be within reasonable limits and that no such articles will be sold unless the appropriate authorities of the Saudi Arabian Government are informed in order that the applicable taxes may be collected. Civilians of United States nationality who are attached to the Advisory Group will also be accorded exemption from taxes, customs duties and all Government charges for themselves or their personal effects which may be brought in for their personal use, provided that such effects will be subject to submission of official bills of lading and manifests and provided that the quantities of such effects will be within reasonable limits and that no such articles will be sold unless the appropriate authorities of the Saudi Arabian Government are informed in order that the applicable taxes may be collected.

(C) It is understood that the Advisory Group and its members will notify the appropriate authorities of the Government of Saudi Arabia of anything which they intend to sell in order that the applicable taxes may be collected.
7. (A) All United States military members of the Advisory Group, all United States civilians and personnel attached to the Advisory Group and their dependents shall comply with all applicable laws and regulations of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

(B) Any offense committed by one of the individuals referred to in paragraph (A), excluding military personnel of the United States armed forces, shall be subject to the local jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

(C) On the basis of international authority, the Saudi Arabian Government agrees that:

I. If any military member of the Advisory Group commits an offense against the laws of Saudi Arabia in the areas which are or may be specified for training operations under the supervision of the Advisory Group by the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defense and Aviation, the Saudi Arabian authorities may arrest the offender and, after promptly completing the preliminary investigation, will turn him over without delay to the United States authorities for appropriate trial and punishment and/or disposition under American military jurisdiction.

II. Any offense committed outside the places described in (I) by a United States military member of the Advisory Group will be subject to the local jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

(D) Claims for compensation for damages arising out of acts of military members of the Advisory Group shall be settled by agreement between the appropriate authorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Chief of the Advisory Group or such other official as may be designated. In the event that no such agreement is reached, settlement shall be made through diplomatic channels.

8. (A) The Saudi Arabian Government will bear all the expenses connected with the travel and transportation of the members of the Advisory Group if such travel and transportation are on official business within Saudi Arabia. It will put at the disposition of the Advisory Group a suitable number of vehicles necessary for the performance of official duties and for such other reasonable transportation requirements as may be necessary for their daily well-being. The Saudi Arabian Government will also provide the members of the Advisory Group with convenient and acceptable facilities for their accommodation and will furnish appropriate offices with facilities and equipment, together with interpreters and secretarial and administrative personnel within the necessary limits which the work of the Advisory Group requires. All the foregoing will be without cost to the United States Government.
(B) The United States Government shall pay all expenses in connection with the salaries of the members of the Advisory Group, their allowances, including subsistence, per diem and other concomitants of military service, including transportation expenses for each member of the Advisory Group and his dependents and household effects to and from the United States. All the foregoing will be without cost to the Saudi Arabian Government.

(C) Authority shall be granted for the entry and exit from Saudi Arabia, in accordance with Saudi Arabian regulations, of aircraft and crews as considered necessary for the performance of duties connected with the Advisory Group. It is agreed that the Chief of the Advisory Group will inform the Saudi Arabian authorities prior to such entrance or exit from the country.

(D) The Advisory Group is permitted to employ radio codes.

(E) The Advisory Group will be permitted to send and receive military mail exempt from customs duties, provided that postal parcels shall be treated as prescribed in paragraph (A) of paragraph 4.

9. Members, personnel and employees of the Advisory Group will be in possession of valid passports or identification papers to be presented to the appropriate authorities upon arrival in Saudi Arabia. All of them must obtain Saudi Arabian visas from the point of departure and if, for unavoidable reasons, it is impossible to obtain such visas, the Saudi Arabian Government will honor competent United States Government travel orders on condition that such persons are not undesirable to the Saudi Arabian Government. If anyone arrives without following the said arrangements, he will be subject to the laws and regulations of the Saudi Arabian Government. If the Saudi Arabian Government asks the Advisory Group to expel or replace any of its members, personnel or employees whom it does not desire to stay in its territory, the Advisory Group will carry out such requests at once.

10. This agreement shall enter into force on the date of signature and will continue in force until one year after receipt by either party of written notice of the intention of the other party to terminate it. The two Governments may, however, upon the request of either of them, consult regarding any matter relating to the application or amendment of this agreement.

Accept, your Royal Highness, the renewed assurance of my highest consideration.

RAYMOND A. HARI

His Royal Highness
PRINCE MISHA'AL

Minister of Defense and Aviation.
Appendix D: Agreement Between the United States of America and Saudi Arabia on United States Rights At Dhahran Airfield and Related Matters, April 2, 1957

SAUDI ARABIA

United States Rights at Dhahran Airfield and Related Matters

Agreement effected by exchange of notes
Signed at Washington April 2, 1957;
Entered into force April 2, 1957.

The Secretary of State to the Saudi Arabian Ambassador

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON
April 2, 1957

EXCELLENCY:

I have the honor to refer to the discussions which have taken place between His Majesty King Saud and President Eisenhower and representatives of our two Governments between January 30 and February 8, 1957, concerning the relations between the two countries and their common interest in promoting and consolidating their cooperation. The Government of the United States is now pleased to confirm its understanding of the general agreement reached during these discussions.

1. The United States Government acknowledges the comments of His Majesty King Saud to President Eisenhower and recognizes that Saudi Arabia has a need to strengthen its armed forces for the purposes of the defense of the Kingdom, including the defense of the Dhahran Airfield.

2. In this connection, the United States Government will, within its constitutional processes, continue its cooperation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by providing military equipment on a reimbursable basis in accordance with the exchange of notes between the two Governments of June 18, 1951, which provides that the equipment shall be used to "foster international peace and security within the framework of the Charter of the United Nations." Equipment to be provided will be in accordance with understandings reached during the foregoing mentioned discussions. The two Governments further agree that the equipment to be provided will be used by Saudi Arabia for the purpose of defending the independence and territorial integrity of Saudi
Arabia and for the maintenance of internal security. It is understood that the two Governments will arrange appropriate terms of payment for such equipment.

3. The United States Government agrees to provide at no cost to the Saudi Arabian Government certain additional construction at Dhahran Airfield designed to improve civil aviation facilities. The United States Government agrees also to provide a program of training for the Saudi Arabian Air Force, to augment the present advisory training program for the Saudi Arabian Army and to train Naval personnel. Details of these services will be as agreed.

4. In the same spirit and re-asserting the close cooperation between the two countries, the United States Government is pleased to be able to continue the use of the facilities granted at the Dhahran Airfield in accordance with the Agreement of June 18, 1951, which is extended for a period of five years from the date of this exchange.

5. To facilitate and improve the implementation of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement and related agreements, the two Governments agree to hold further discussions in Saudi Arabia looking toward possible additional understandings.

6. The United States Government, in considering the economic needs of Saudi Arabia, is prepared to assist in mutually agreed projects. In this connection, the expansion of the Dammam port will receive primary consideration. It also agree to the provision of some engineering and technical assistance, as well as lending its good offices to assist in establishing credit arrangements for economic projects. These matters will be discussed between the competent representatives of the two Governments and confirmed by subsequent understandings.

7. These foregoing measures will be undertaken in accordance with due legislative processes of both countries.

If the foregoing is acceptable to the Government of Saudi Arabia, the Government of the United States agrees that this note and Your Excellency’s reply concurring in its content will constitute firm agreement between the two Governments.

Accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

For the Secretary of State:

ROBERT MURPHY

Robert Murphy

Deputy Under Secretary of State

His Excellency

Sheikh ABDULLAH AL-KHAYYAL,

Ambassador of Saudi Arabia.
Appendix E: Saudi Arabian and United States Statements on Non-Renewal of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement, March 16, 1961

SAUDI ARABIAN STATEMENT REGARDING NON-RENEWAL OF THE DHAHRAN AIRFIELD AGREEMENT

Announcement by Radio Mecca, March 16, 1961*

"His Majesty the exalted King has summoned in Foreign Minister Sheikh Ibrahim As-Suwayyil and ordered him to contact the United States Ambassador and inform him that His Majesty's Government does not intend to renew the agreement concluded between His Majesty's Government and the United States Government regarding the administration of Dhahran Air Base. The agreement ends in April, 1962."

* As translated from the Arabic by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)
The Department of State issued the following statement today following the announcement by the Royal Government of Saudi Arabia that its agreement with the United States for the operation of the Dhahran Airfield would not be renewed when it expires April 1, 1962.

Discussions have been proceeding for some time with His Highness, former Prime Minister Faisal, and more recently with Foreign Minister Suwayyi, under the direction of His Majesty, King Saud, looking toward the non-renewal of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement of 1957 which expires in April 1962.

The history of Dhahran Airfield dates back to the days of World War II when His Majesty, the late King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, approved plans for the construction of the airfield with the assistance of the United States. The late King's decision was based on a desire to make an effective contribution logistically to the Allied war effort and also to prepare for Saudi Arabia to participate significantly in the post-war world of aviation.

Today the Saudi Arabian Government has at Dhahran an Airfield which is a major international aviation center with modern facilities. It has been serving as a training and operations center for the Royal Saudi Air Force. It has also become a center not only for Saudi Arabian, but also for international civil air routes. In assisting the Saudi Arabian Government in the transformation of Dhahran into an international civil air terminal, the Government of the United States is constructing a modern civil air terminal building, the completion of which should occur within a year.

Always recognizing and respecting the Saudi ownership and character of Dhahran Airfield, the United States Air Force has assisted in developing Saudi military aviation. It has also enjoyed certain use of the facilities at the Dhahran Airfield under agreement with the Saudi Arabian Government and, at the request of the Saudi Arabian Government, has aided in the operation of the services of the Air Force.

The United States Government expects that its close and friendly cooperation with Saudi Arabia in various fields will continue.

* * *
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

PUBLISHED GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS


U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Situation in the Middle East, Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 84th Cong., 2nd sess., 24 February 1956.


U.S. Department of State. Department of State *Bulletin*.

U.S. Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. Washington, D.C. (cited below as *FRUS*).


U.S. Department of State. Treaties and Other International Agreements Series (TIAS)
Government Archives

Operational Archives Branch of the U.S. Naval Historical Center,
Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.
CINCNELM Annual Reports, 1947-1953

National Archives, Washington, D.C., and College Park, Maryland
Principal Record Groups consulted:
Records of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC), 1944-1949
Records of the Department of State, Record Group (RG) 59
Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group (RG) 84
Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Record Group (RG) 218
Records of the National Security Council, Record Group (RG) 273
Records of the Office of Secretary of Defense, Record Group (RG) 330

Presidential Libraries

Harry S. Truman Library.
Papers of Harry S. Truman, President’s Secretory’s Files
Papers of Harry S. Truman, Official File
Papers of Harry S. Truman, White House Central Files, Confidential Files

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.
Records of the White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, 1952-61
Ann Whitman File, International Series
Ann Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series
Ann Whitman File, NSC series
White House Office Central Files
White House Office, National Security Council Staff: Papers, 1948-61
White House Office, National Security Council Staff, Operations Coordination
Board Central File Series
White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs:
Records, 1952-1961, NSC Series
John Foster Dulles Papers, 1951-1959

John F. Kennedy Library
Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Saudi Arabia)
Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Yemen)
Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Countries (Egypt)
Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, 1961-1963, Meetings and
Memoranda Series, Staff Memoranda, Robert Komer
Robert W. Komer Series (Saudi Arabia)
ORAL HISTORIES


UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS


DISSERTATIONS


SECONDARY SOURCES

BOOKS


**ARTICLES AND MONOGRAPHS**


Brownell, George A. “American Aviation in the Middle East.” *The Middle East Journal* 1 (October 1947)


**NEWSPAPERS**

*New York Times*