

THE SAUDI-AMERICAN AID RELATIONSHIP 1961-1968

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about the intersection of domestic and foreign politics, and how they can shape the aid relationship between two countries. The United States and Saudi Arabia have shared a connection since the early 20th century, and it was not until the 1960s and the Kennedy and Johnson administrations would that relationship begin to change dramatically.

Saudi Arabia's strategic importance was beginning to become realized as oil production began to increase. This increase in natural resources led to Saudi Arabia becoming a critical part of American Cold War politics. Kennedy and Johnson, along with their State Departments, believed that foreign aid was a tool by which they could influence the nations of the world.

That is not to say that these policies went unopposed or were free from changing political forces around the world. Congress began to push back on the policies of the President and questioned the role of foreign aid going to governments that do not share the same values as the American people. Congress would not be the only force acting on the Presidents. Changing Saudi domestic politics also forced the State Department to change the way in which they handled the American aid relationship with Saudi Arabia. These forces together, would shape the aid relationship between the two countries for the 1960s and for decades after the scope of this thesis.

Introduction

The 1960s was a time of change in American politics. After the Eisenhower administration came John F. Kennedy who took a great interest in foreign aid. For Kennedy, aid was one of the best tools for influencing nations. Aid took on many forms: grants, development, critical infrastructure and military assistance. These were among the tools available to Kennedy in order to win the Cold War and curb the influence of the Soviet Union throughout the world.

The aid relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States did not begin with the Kennedy administration. However, the early 1960s represented a time when forces within Saudi Arabia, and the United States began to shape the relationship between the two countries and new movements in Congress helped to set the stage for the Saudi-American aid relationship in the 1960s and beyond. There has been much written about the internal strife in Saudi Arabia during a power struggle between the ruling King Saud and his half-brother Crown Prince Faisal on Saudi-American relations. There has been equal attention paid to Kennedy's (and Johnson's) relationship with the Middle East, in particular Israel. However, there is little written about the impact that American domestic affairs had on Kennedy's foreign policy, especially with Saudi Arabia.

Before evaluating the historiography of U.S.-Saudi relations, it is important to look at the geographic importance and placement of Saudi Arabia. The largely desert country is flanked on either side by the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. During the 1960s, the geography of the Middle East changed. Some nations were replaced in name, others added territory or lost it. Israel grew in size, and the Kingdom of Yemen became the Yemen Arab Republic. The United Arab Republic combined Egypt and Syria only to

have the latter break with Egypt in the early 1960s. Saudi geography posed problems for policy makers. Generating electricity, creating fresh water and building infrastructure were huge problems given the lack of fresh water sources and the shifting sands of the desert.¹

Most importantly, Saudi Arabia sat on top of massive oil reserves. First discovered in the eastern part of the country near Dhahran, the region quickly grew in importance as Aramco (a conglomerate of American oil companies) built its headquarters in the city and the first American consulate in the country was based out of Aramco facilities. These oil deposits and the location of Saudi Arabia as a transitory point between Europe and Asia gave Saudi Arabia importance within the Cold War struggle. Additionally, Saudi Arabia's geographic location close to Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Iran, North Yemen and Jordan gave the Saudi rulers potential for important partnerships, but also put it at odds with regional opponents like Egypt.

The literature that went into supporting this thesis comes from a variety of sources and topics. Robert David Johnson in his book, *Congress and the Cold War* looks at the growing impact of Congress on American foreign policy in the early 1960s however, Saudi Arabia is left out of his work. But Johnson's book is important because it establishes that there was a willingness from Congress to challenge presidential authority on foreign policy before the Vietnam War. This work will take Johnson's argument and

¹ Rachel Bronson in her book, *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*, gives a great breakdown of the critical importance of Saudi geography and its importance on the course of Saudi history. See: Rachel Bronson, *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership With Saudi Arabia*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006),

push back the foundation of what Johnson describes as a 'Great Revolt' from 1963 to 1961, with Saudi Arabia at the center of this movement that lasted through the decade.²

The historiography of US-Saudi relations is deep, however there remain some standout works and some gaps within the research. Rachel Bronson's book *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* is an excellent survey of the history between the two countries that goes beyond how oil impacted the relationship.³ However, her book like many others within the historiography generally focuses on the 1970s as the time of great importance in the course of the political and economic relationship that these two nations shared.

That is not to say that Rachel Bronson's argument that the relationship between the two countries is about more than just oil is invalid. However, this thesis and the time period it covers reveals that a chief concern amongst American policy makers in maintaining this two-way exchange were interested in oil given its strategic importance within the context of the greater Cold War struggle for the Middle East. This thesis draws extensively on Bronson's work, not only because of the strength of her argument, but also because of the painstaking research that she conducted. The clear way in which she traces the impact that executive action had on shaping the bond between the two countries makes her book essential for understanding how Saudi Arabia and the United States grew as partners. However, Bronson's book like many that cover the development

² Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006),

³ Rachel Bronson, *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership With Saudi Arabia*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006),

of Saudi-American relations is lacking when it comes to covering the time period between 1961 and 1968.

The 1960s is a relatively under-researched space within the field of Saudi-American relations. There is considerable attention paid to the internal struggle between Crown Prince Faisal and his older half-brother Saud in works like Sarah Yizraeli's *Politics and Society in Saudi Arabia* and Rosie Bsheer's "A Counter-Revolutionary State: Popular Movements and the Making of Saudi Arabia."⁴ These works not only cover the internal politics of Saudi Arabia during the time period discussed in this thesis, they do so from the perspective of Saudi society adding critical insight and depth to the bilateral relationship.

This work will aim to integrate the arguments of Bsheer, Yizraeli and other scholars of Saudi history in order to understand how the early 1960s in Saudi Arabia affected American attitudes towards Saudi Arabia. It will evaluate how the internal strife within Saudi Arabia made American diplomats change and adapt their foreign policy with regards to Saudi Arabia, and how the American Congress took into consideration Saudi internal politics while pursuing a new and growing opposition to Kennedy and Johnson's foreign policy. Additionally, this work will try to bring more attention to a time that is lacking an understanding of how Congress, the executive and Saudi internal politics converged to create a relationship that persists up to the writing of this thesis.

⁴ Sarah Yizraeli, *Politics and Society in Saudi Arabia*, (New York; Columbia University Press, 2012), and Rosie Bsheer, "A Counter-Revolutionary State: Popular Movements and the Making of Saudi Arabia," *Past & Present* 238, no 1, (1 February 2018).

By focusing on American domestic politics and how it helped to shape the modern discourse between Saudi Arabia and the United States, this thesis will aim to prove that congressional opposition to executive action and state building within Saudi Arabia had a direct impact on the evolution of how both countries approached one another. Additionally, this work will try to show that modern American concerns about Saudi social life, religious freedom and domestic politics that have recently come to light as the Saudi-American partnership has garnered more attention in the post-9/11 world, have actually always been on the mind of law makers concerned about American tax dollars financing discrimination in the Middle East.

The works mentioned above are not the only books and articles that will help to provide depth of understanding and context to this thesis. In particular, Warren Bass' *Support Any Friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-Israeli Alliance* looks at how President Kennedy and President Johnson approached aid in the Middle East, and how congressional opposition or support for their plans in the region was shaped by their personalities, desires, and goals.⁵ His argument, while focused on America's relationship with Israel, still evaluates how American interest in the region, particularly during the North Yemen Civil War affected American-Israeli diplomacy. However, this thesis goes further than just looking at executive action and looks at how legislation during tumultuous events across the Middle East during the 1960s shaped the American discourse with the Saudi state.

⁵ Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Another work that is of great interest to this thesis focuses on the domestic pressures the American aid program faced. *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. Their work evaluates the impact of pro-Israel groups on American legislation and American political discourse in the early 1960s, something that is important when looking at how Saudi discriminatory policies directed at Jewish-American citizens shaped the aid relationship with the Saudi government.⁶ Finally, Steven Spiegel's *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict* helps to relate the entirety of executive policy in the Middle East and the impact that Congress had on the progression of that program.⁷ These books will be integrated into the greater argument of this thesis and help to create a solid understanding of the domestic forces driving Congress to take action against the President and his aid program.

These works give an excellent understanding of how Congress shaped the progression of the aid program throughout the 1960s. When you take these works and you look at them side-by-side with many works that cover the diplomatic relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, what emerges is a complete picture of how the entire government contributed to the development of the foreign policy, not simply the State Department.

Other works that this thesis will utilize include Robert Vitalis' *America's Kingdom* and Thomas Lippman's *Inside the Mirage*, look more closely at the role that the American government and oil concerns had on the course of diplomatic history between

⁶ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and American Foreign Policy*, (New York; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

⁷ Steven Spiegel, *The Other Arab Israeli Conflict*, (University of Chicago Press, 1985), 95.

the two countries.⁸ While oil plays a part within this thesis, it is not the focal point of this work and both Lippman and Vitalis' work will be used for their research covering the impact of American companies and NGOs (like the Ford Foundation) on the internal development of Saudi Arabia, and how these efforts helped to add an additional consideration for American policy makers addressing Saudi Arabia's place within American foreign policy.

Finally, no study of diplomatic history would be complete without the inclusion of primary source material. This work draws heavily on two major primary sources. The *Foreign Relations of the United States* or FRUS papers from the Kennedy and the Johnson administrations offer critical insight into how the administration was viewing the rest of the world, and how the events within both Congress and Saudi Arabia were shaping the nature of their aid relationship with the desert kingdom. The second major primary source is the Congressional Record. Mainly drawn from committee debates over the Foreign Assistance Acts (1961-1968), these debates and testimony from a variety of senators, representatives, lobbyists and State Department officials help to illuminate what issues were pressing within Congress and how congressional attention moved the way in which the State Department and Saudi Arabia interacted with one another. Additional consideration of material from the Congressional Record helps to increase the understanding of how prevalent these movements were throughout Congress and it also helps to illuminate some general trends regarding what groups were supporting which policies.

⁸ Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, (Stanford, : Stanford University Press, 2007) and Thomas W. Lippman, *Inside the Mirage: America's Fragile Partnership With Saudi Arabia*, (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2004),

Kennedy, Johnson and their State Departments are just two players in a much larger story. This thesis will aim to look at how a host of pressures from domestic and international sources helped to shape the American relationship with Saudi Arabia. In order to complete this task, this work will look heavily at the American aid relationship with Saudi Arabia, and how Congress, the executive branch and Saudi internal politics all helped to shape and change the way in which the United States aided the development of the Saudi state. The aid relationship that these two countries share is not only important for understanding how the modern relationship got to where it is, but it is also useful for looking at how the pressures of both domestic and foreign concerns (from both parties) can impact how the American State Department tackled these challenges to maintain their influence in the midst of the Cold War.

The saga really starts with the founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Founded by Ibn Saud shortly after the end of the First World War, Saud was able to unite Wahhabism (a sect of Islam in Saudi Arabia), tribal allegiances and military force to conquer the rival kingdoms and forces in the region, proclaiming a unified state in 1932.⁹ The unification of Saudi Arabia had implications on a global scale in the decades to come, but it was an American company, Aramco, that opened up Saudi Arabia to American influence. Aramco was a conglomerate of American oil companies granted a large concession in the eastern part of Saudi Arabia. This concession started a seventy-year relationship centered on America protecting the oil concessions and protecting the House Saud from internal and external threats.¹⁰ Aramco helped to establish much of the

⁹ Lippman, *Inside the Mirage*, 8-9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 274.

infrastructure present in the kingdom after the Second World War. Pipelines, roads, living quarters for American workers and rail roads were starting to make their way across the country and Aramco represented a strong modernizing influence within the kingdom.¹¹

The Second World War represented a time during which the American government began to construct a policy of utilizing military assistance and aid as a way of influencing foreign and domestic policy of recipient nations. The Saudi government was a recipient of Lend-Lease Aid towards the end of the war, and relations between the United States and the House of Saud were predicated on the idea that Saudi Arabia's geographic position was valuable in moving materials from the Western Theatre to the fight against the Japanese in the east. To assist in this effort, the United States at the end of the Second World War, constructed what would become Dhahran airfield. Deemed "critical to national security" this airfield was not only essential to bringing in foreign workers and improving infrastructure in the country, but also it represented the start of the American military mission in Saudi Arabia. Its placement at Dhahran should be of no surprise because not only did the airfield help the American government (even though its efficacy was a subject of debate), but it also assisted in helping to advance the interests of Aramco.¹²

Aramco's headquarters were located in Dhahran, and the company was instrumental in starting the American diplomatic mission in the country, even going so

¹¹ Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 24.

¹² *Ibid.*, 24.

far as to help fund the building of the American consulate in Dhahran.¹³ After the 1940s the American relationship with Saudi Arabia grew closer, due in large part to the amount of oil that was flowing out of the Kingdom (after the Second World War) and the presence of American servicemen at Dhahran.

While oil began to flow from Saudi Arabia to America's allies, American foreign policy makers began a shift towards facing a new threat, the Soviet Union. The threat of a Soviet invasion into the Middle East in order to seize oil fields was certainly a possibility in the minds of some American military planners.¹⁴ Decolonization and the expansion of nationalist sentiments throughout the Middle East had an impact on the Cold War. Throughout the 1940s and most of the 1950s America was not as oil dependent as it was in the 1970s. That means that oil coming from the Middle East were not necessarily important to continue to American Cold War struggle, but Saudi oil was crucial for supplying America's allies in their reconstruction and defense efforts.¹⁵ As Saudi Arabia became a critical piece of American Cold War policy, the Eisenhower administration began the process of entrenching Saudi Arabia into American foreign policy.¹⁶ The American policy planners of the 1950s had to face a quickly changing Middle East. A rash of revolutions inspired by Arab nationalism swept across the region, throwing the established post-war order into question. The threat that nationalism posed was a direct result of the colonial legacy left by the British throughout the Gulf and the French in the Levant.

¹³ Lippmann, *Inside the Mirage*, 31.

¹⁴ Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 35.

¹⁵ Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 110.

¹⁶ Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 5.

The disturbances of the 1950s started in 1952 with General Nasser's Young Officers coup, which effectively ended the Egyptian Kingdom and the role of the British in Egypt. The nationalist fever carried over in 1956 when General Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal much to the chagrin of the British and the French. The French, British and Israelis invaded Egypt in an attempt to prevent the Canal from being nationalized and to try to remove Nasser from power.¹⁷ The conflict only lasted days and the allied objective of capturing the canal was successful. However, the United States, and Dwight Eisenhower in particular, detested the idea of colonialism and imperialism retrenching itself around the world.¹⁸ Without American support, the allied position was untenable. The forced withdrawal of British troops from the Suez was a sign of events to come. With Nasser firmly entrenched in Egypt, the British began a slow and steady decline in both influence and position throughout the Arab world. In 1958 the United Kingdom preemptively launched an intervention in order to help preserve the Hashemite Kingdom in Jordan.¹⁹ At the same time, Eisenhower sent Marines to occupy Lebanon and preserve the delicate balance of power between competing religious and ethnic groups that threatened to destabilize the country. Then, in the same year as the Jordan intervention, Iraq underwent a nationalist revolution of its own. Deposing the Hashemite King of Iraq, General Qasim proved to be one of the final dominoes that resulted in the retreat of the British "East of the Suez" in the late 1960s.²⁰ Qasim represented a threat to the British investments in Kuwait. The threat was real enough to prompt the British to once again

¹⁷ Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 42-44

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Nigel Ashton, "A Microcosm of Decline: British Loss of Nerve and Military Intervention in Jordan and Kuwait, 1958 and 1961." *The Historical Journal* 40, no. 4 (1997), 1074.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1073.

launch a preemptive occupation in Kuwait in 1961. The purpose of the intervention was to dissuade the Iraqi government from invading the oil rich sheikdom of Kuwait.

The purpose of evaluating these revolutions is to show that the 1950s was a time of change within the Middle East. It was a time when the traditional power structure in the region was reshaped and risked throwing the established order of British and American dominance into question during the early 1960s. This loss of British influence was a key component of American foreign policy makers attempting to fill in the gaps left by their retreat. Saudi Arabia was key to filling in these gaps, particularly given Nasser's revolution. The oil-rich kingdom was essential to American Cold War policy makers, and maintaining stability in the Middle East was a crucial piece of American plans. Nasser's power grab and the subsequent revolutions that followed threatened to open up the Middle East to the influence of the Soviet Union.²¹ For years, the American government was fine with allowing the British to police the troubled spot, but what was becoming more and more clear to American policy makers was that the United States was going to have to step up and try to resist the perceived inroads that the Soviet Union had already made in the region.

Understanding the context under which the American government began its program of influencing Saudi Arabia in the 1960s is important to understanding the arguments in this thesis. The closure of Dhahran airfield in 1962 left the American government without its best tool with which it could influence the development of the Saudi government. The closure brought to light the discriminatory policies of the Saudi

²¹ "Testimony of Representative Judd," U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1962*, 1063.

government and their resistance to allowing Jews into their country. This caught the ire of Congress who were already engaged in a movement to oppose Presidential aid policies.

These fights culminated in the Foreign Assistance Acts of 1961 and 1962, which sought a legal framework for opposing the President on foreign policy. The Foreign Assistance Act would continue to be a favorite tool of the legislature to try and build a coalition aimed at curbing American tax dollars financing programs that they perceived to be against American interests.

Operation Hard Surface, the deployment of American jets to curb Nasser's attacks on Saudi territory during the North Yemen Civil War provided American legislators with another opportunity to influence foreign policy. Once again, Congress used this conflict and America's involvement in the region to try and place even greater restrictions on Kennedy's aid program. However, the aid battles within Congress in 1961 and 1962 already had an impact, and the State Department began the process of phasing out grant aid, in favor of direct military assistance and sales. The lessons the State Department learned from their experiences in dealing with Congress while at the same time dealing with a power struggle between King Saud and his half-brother Faisal changed the way in which the American government interacted with Saudi Arabia.

It was clear for many in the State Department that grant aid was no longer an option for Saudi Arabia and direct military sales to the Saudi kingdom were the best and most effective way to influence the Saudi royal family. Congressional oversight created a situation in which the State Department sought to move millions of dollars of weapons

to Saudi Arabia in order to help maintain Faisal as leader and grow the Saudi state's military capabilities.

However, Congress was not a passive participant in this movement towards greater arms sales. Congress continued on its mission of creating more oversight of presidential programs and craft legislation aimed at addressing what they viewed as an unchecked program.

All of these pressures forced American planners to court the Saudi government as an ally in the region. The threat that Nasser and the increasing Soviet activity in the region represented to American oil companies and American influence in the region was real. The State Department had hurdles that it needed to overcome in order to protect the established order on the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi discriminatory policies, the risk of an all-out war between Nasser and Saudi Arabia, and the injection of lethal aid to the Saudi government were amongst the top considerations for American and Saudi officials. However, all these programs were carried out during a time when Congress began to have a deep interest in reigning in the foreign policy programs of the president. This forced the president to shape and change his approach in order to appease domestic and international challenges to their foreign policy.

Chapter 1-Dhahran and the 1961 and 1962 Foreign Assistance Act Debates

Introduction

The Kennedy administration believed that foreign aid was an essential part of the Cold War struggle. With aid dollars came influence and with American guidance and money the Middle East quickly became an important region within the greater global, post-war conflict. That is why when in 1961 Saudi Arabia announced that they would in fact not be extending the terms on a five year agreement to house the American military mission at Dhahran airfield, it set off a series of events that took place within Congress and the executive branch centering on American aid legislation. While there were many issues that contributed to what was a two-year struggle over America's role in Saudi Arabia, their arguments centered on two things: religious freedom and winning the Cold War.²²

While the argument centered on religious freedom shined most clearly through the debates on the Foreign Assistance Act, there were a variety of causes that united the members of the Foreign Affairs Committee in their crusade for greater oversight and control of what President Kennedy called, "a historic opportunity for a major economic assistance effort by the free industrialized nations to move more than half the people of the less-developed nations into self-sustained economic growth."²³ Members of

²² Morality as it was applied to this policy is never explicitly defined. Rather, in typical Cold War style, morals are generally those "Exceptionally-American" traits; specifically in this case, equal protection based not on race, but religious affiliation.

²³ John F. Kennedy, "Special Message to the Congress on Foreign Aid" (March 22, 1961).

Congress united against what they saw as a program that might cost the taxpayer money and actually do more harm than good to the American reputation amongst their constituents and the nations of the world. This also explains why the moral issue dominated the House Foreign Affairs Committee debates, while these concerns were largely omitted from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. These representatives were beholden to a smaller number of constituents and thus more prone to the pressures of lobbying groups, both political and economic.

Central to the representative's arguments against extending aid to Saudi Arabia was related to the long-held Saudi policy that discriminated against Jews.²⁴ Jewish-American citizens and servicemen were not permitted to serve at the military mission at Dhahran, and for increasingly bold representatives on the Foreign Affairs Committee; they utilized the legislative process in an attempt to regulate American foreign policy directed at Saudi Arabia. The push for greater oversight is due to the increased scrutiny that presidential foreign policy was receiving in light of an increased unreliability of party politics amongst members of Congress during this time period.²⁵ The State Department and the president had to react to these new pressures in order to maintain a central tenant of their Cold War, Middle East policy and to continue their close relationship with the House of Saud.

On the one hand, the president and his State Department were concerned about the deterioration of relations between the United States and their Cold War ally, on the other, the Foreign Affairs Committee believed that the termination of the agreement

²⁴ Spiegel, *The Other Arab Israeli Conflict*, 95.

²⁵ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 92.

represented a slap in the face to the American taxpayer whose hard earned dollars went to funding the discriminatory policies of the Saudi government. The hearings and testimony present within the Foreign Affairs Committee illuminated Saudi-American collusion regarding Jewish military personnel and Jewish-American citizens whom were not allowed to serve at Dhahran nor allowed into Saudi Arabia at all.

The closure of Dhahran airfield was not an insignificant event in the course of US-Saudi relations. The closure risked throwing into question thirty years of American diplomatic wrangling and relationship building. However, Dhahran also represented a chance for the State Department to reshape the relationship between the two countries in a way that permitted the president to try to utilize aid outside of the prying eyes of Congress. Some members of Congress viewed the closure of the base as a way of advancing their own foreign policy objectives, and an opportunity to argue against direct tax payer funded money going to a country that discriminated against Jews.²⁶

The non-renewal of the airfield agreement created agitation across all levels of government and opened a new dialogue centered on the role that Saudi-American relations played within the greater context of the Cold War. According to author Robert David Johnson, the 1960s represented a time when Congress was beginning to try to take a more active role in the foreign policy sphere.²⁷ His argument focuses on the appropriations and legislative aspect of this fight between Congress and the president over executive branch power. While appropriations was a tool through which Congress could effectively limit the president's ability to utilize aid through monetary regulations

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

and restrictions, there was also a legislative movement happening at the same time. Certain members of the Foreign Affairs Committees were committed to passing legislation that legally inhibited the president's foreign aid program.

Dhahran airfield was part of the military assistance package that the United States extended to Saudi Arabia at the end of the Second World War.²⁸ The Saudi government was eager to modernize and expand their capabilities (particularly their air force) and Dhahran was an important piece to this development project.²⁹ The Saudi royal family could not complete this project with the resources that they had on hand and they were anxious to have American material and guidance in how to run and operate a military airfield and a civilian airport.³⁰ The field was completed during the final stages of World War II (utilizing American tax payer dollars), and never saw major use in combat operations. However, the early part of the 1950s found a new king, Saud, take the reigns head of the Saudi Arabia and the base rose to new prominence.

The new ruler had great interest in maintaining the American presence through the 1950s. By 1957 the Americans and the Saudis entered into the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement, setting the stage for American military training in the country for the next five years.³¹ By the time that King Saud unilaterally announced on Radio Mecca his intent to not extend the American lease on the airfield in March of 1962, there

²⁸ Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 24.

²⁹ Sarah Yizraeli in her work, talks at length about the use of this term of development, rather than modernization or Westernization. Her reasoning is that modernization and Westernization are inherently bias terms that fail to properly describe the process of economic, social and military development within the Saudi kingdom. Yizraeli, *Politics and Society in Saudi Arabia*, 9.

³⁰ Lippman, *Inside the Mirage*, 32.

³¹ "Memorandum from the Department of State executive Secretary (Battle) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security (Bundy)," July 10, 1961, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter-*FRUS*), 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, Document 82, pp.182.

were 1,332 airmen and 10 transport planes still stationed at the base, certainly not an insignificant presence.³² This airfield was at the center of a debate that kicked off a greater conversation about the role of American aid, and the role that Congress had in overseeing the activities of the State Department and presidential foreign policy programs.

The Foreign Affairs Committee rose to prominence in the early 1960s.³³ Throughout the 1940s and 1950s aid going to foreign countries was not well regulated. Republicans dominated Congress and generally believed in Eisenhower's more militaristic and NATO centric mindedness when it came to how to influence the nations of the world.³⁴ When Kennedy assumed office in 1961 there was a real sense that the policies of the State Department and the president would begin to change. Warren Bass claims in *Support Any Friend* that this is in large part due to the fact that the Middle East of the early 1960s was looking relatively calm in comparison to the Middle East of the 1950s.³⁵ However, other scholars who have written on the topic like Steven Spiegel in *The Other Arab Israeli Conflict* argue the opposite. He states that the tumultuous 1950s was one of the reasons why Kennedy began to court the favor of a wide variety of Middle Eastern countries, like Saudi Arabia and Egypt.³⁶ Regardless, Kennedy viewed the Middle East as a place of opportunity for American diplomats and his foreign policy goals.

³² "Memorandum From the Department of State executive Secretary (Battle) to the President's Special Assistant (Dugan)," March 21, 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Doc. 24, pp.53.

³³ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 71.

³⁴ Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 151.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 63

³⁶ Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 95.

When looking at the congressional role in advocating for a more strict regulation of the State Department, there existed groups that had different reasons for wanting to limit aid programs. Amongst these members of Congress, those that supported Israel favored stricter financial controls and a morally linked aid program. They saw the Middle East as a dangerous place and a potential flash point for a greater Cold War struggle particularly over the future of Israel. Which is why in the early 1960s, they began signaling opposition to key Kennedy foreign aid programs that they believed had a destructive impact on American relationships across the world, and amongst these nations Saudi Arabia was a part of this movement.

The 1961 Foreign Assistance Act Debates

By 1961, the debates on the International Development and Security Act (also known as the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961) signaled a shift in how Congress approached aid legislation over the next decade. The non-renewal of the Dhahran airfield agreement was a facet of a movement in Congress that began to openly oppose presidential aid policies. Robert Johnson argues in his book that by the early 1960s Congress was beginning to challenge the president's aid policies due to changing party politics and domestic concerns. The amount of Democrats and Republicans, who had previously constituted a tenuous coalition that supported presidential action, began to slowly change. These changes within Congress culminated in 1963, in what Johnson describes as a 'Great Revolt.'³⁷ This 'revolt' was predicated on three general movements

³⁷ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 95.

within Congress. The first was a general opposition and hostility directed towards foreign aid coming from conservatives within the Congress. The second was, liberal opposition to aid going to fund dictatorships. Finally and more generally, a collapse of a coalition of legislators who had generally supported aid programs in the past.³⁸ While Johnson argues that these movements culminated in 1963, the hearings of the Foreign Assistance act revealed that these processes actually started in 1961 and Dhahran was part of this shift.

Johnson's argument that congressional ire towards the president was focused around liberal opposition of aid going to fund dictators was confirmed by the hearings over the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act. The closure of Dhahran to the American military mission, forced the issue of Saudi Arabia's discriminatory policies (as directed by the king) directed against people of the Jewish faith to front and center within some pro-Israel representatives and Jewish members of Congress. For many of these representatives who were from a variety of parties, they found Democratic allies in their mission to try to legally limit President Kennedy's aid program. Effectively this movement aimed to move a key piece of executive branch power, the ability to conduct foreign diplomacy out of the State Department and place the aid programs more firmly within the oversight of Congress.

Saudi Arabia played an important role in the fight directed at Kennedy not simply because of their discriminatory policies, but also because the Saudis represented a potential threat to the continued existence of Israel. These debates were coming at a time

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

when American support for Israel was becoming more and more clear.³⁹ The hands off and sometimes-oppositional approach of the Eisenhower administration towards Israel began to erode as legislators began to see Israel as an important ally in the region. This is largely because Israel was at the least, nominally committed to Western democratic values and a shared opposition to the spread of the Soviet Union into region.⁴⁰ The visit to the United States by Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion and the approval of the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Israel in the early 1960s showed that the American government, both the executive branch and Congress were beginning to shift their thinking on how to approach Israel, both domestically and within the foreign policy environment.⁴¹ This is why lobbying groups and supporters of Israel successfully used the Foreign Assistance Act committee hearings to rail against Saudi Arabia (a nation who failed to recognize the existence of Israel) and to strike a victory religious freedom and legislative power.

When hearings related to the bill were working their way through the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the concerns Representative Seymour Halpern (R-NY), were brought to the debate on the bill via invitation to testify in front of the committee on July 6, 1961. He sought language that legally restricted the State Department's ability to conduct aid operations with countries that discriminated against Jewish citizens or more specifically, Saudi Arabia. What brought the discriminatory policies of Saudi Arabia to light was his exclusion from entering Saudi territory. Halpern was getting ready to take a

³⁹ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and American Foreign Policy*, (New York; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 25.

⁴⁰ Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 22.

⁴¹ Spiegel, *Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 96.

long summer vacation and he decided to stop over at Dhahran airfield to inspect the American military mission that was housed at the strip.⁴² He was told by the airline that he would be, in fact denied a visa because he was Jewish and because of an official Saudi policy denying visas to any person of the Jewish faith.⁴³ During his long testimony, he used the difficulty he experienced in his travels to rail against the Saudi government, their policies towards Jews and the status of service members at Dhahran field.

These debates were predicated on two concerns from two different groups on the committee: maintaining the moral high ground against the Soviets, and allowing the president to be able to exercise some freedom in his foreign policy program. The moral argument was based on this issue of Saudi discrimination, and Halpern believed that there needed to be some sort of legislative mechanism that provided oversight of the State Department.⁴⁴ While a law that essentially limited the president's ability to conduct foreign policy would have been problematic for the president, individuals like Halpern represented a fringe element within Congress, and their goal of legally restricting the president did not have much support within the Foreign Affairs Committee. However, these debates illuminated something that is central to Johnson's argument: A Congress willing to openly challenge a president of their own party over issues related to foreign policy.⁴⁵

⁴² "Letter Submitted By Representative Halpern Re: Visas," U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *International Development and Security Act*, 1493.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ The AJC is an American civic organization whose agenda included working to benefit Israel, in many cases by influencing foreign policy. See Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and American Foreign Policy*, 116.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 94.

The treatment of Jewish citizens in Saudi Arabia was once again brought before the Foreign Affairs Committee when James Marshall, Vice President of the American Jewish Committee was invited to give testimony and answer questions from the committee. Much like Halpern, Marshall railed against the treatment of Jews in the Arab world. Both Halpern and Marshall acknowledged that provisions already existed in both the 1957 and 1960 Mutual Security Appropriation's Act that attempted to address these problems. However the legislation simply did not go far enough to legally restrict the president's ability to utilize aid as a tool of foreign policy.

Language within the bill stated that, "it is the sense of Congress that any attempt by foreign nations to create dissensions because of their race or religion among American citizens in the granting of personal or commercial access or any other rights otherwise available to US citizens generally is repugnant to our principles."⁴⁶

Marshall praised this language but lamented the inclusion of an amendment that offered the president discretion in administering aid to foreign countries, which states, "...in all negotiations between the United States and any foreign state arising as a result of funds appropriated under this act these principles shall be applied as the president may determine."⁴⁷

Marshall along with other members of Congress who supported his fight wanted greater, more legal restrictions on how the President dispensed aid. While one aspect of

⁴⁶ "Testimony of John Marshall," U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *International Development and Security Act*, 711. (June 21, 1961), 712.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

this debate was started by the closure of Dhahran airfield, it was sustained by the situation surrounding the Saudi refusal to issue visas to Jewish citizens. On the surface, this may seem like an issue that was directed at civil rights, in reality, this movement served a few purposes. First, it aimed to move the domestic politics of Saudi Arabia and other countries more towards the policies and morals of the United States. Secondly, the greater coverage that this issue received in Congress and therefore in the public eye, forced the executive branch to utilize discretion when dispensing aid. Finally, it aimed to maintain the façade of American moral dominance within the greater Cold War in the face of the godless Soviet-Communists whose atheistic style was perceived as being completely devoid of any morality.⁴⁸ The subsequent hearings before the Foreign Affairs Committees revealed that Congress came to use aid as a way target the Kennedy administration's Middle Eastern plans.

The debates present within the International Development and Security Act illuminated where the official executive branch position on this issue fell. A series of letters between Rep. Halpern and Kennedy's Secretary of State, Dean Rusk revealed the official American policy regarding the status of Jewish airmen at the airfield.⁴⁹ The American State Department under Kennedy was forced to work with Saud in order protect American interests in the area. Additionally, the internal politics of the Saudi state demanded Saud make no concessions regarding Israel or Jewish citizens because this might disturb nationalist elements within his kingdom. However, the Cold War and the precious oil resources that Saudi Arabia offered were greater than any policy that

⁴⁸ Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 23.

⁴⁹ "Letters submitted by Rep. Halpern," U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *International Development and Security Act*, 1495.

excluded certain individuals. Rusk laid the blame at the feet of the Saudi government. He wrote that it was a misconception that American policy precluded Jewish citizens from the airfield. Rusk acknowledged that Saudi policy did in fact preclude Jews from entering Saudi Arabia. He wrote, “Persons unacceptable to the Saudi Arabian Government are excluded from the U.S. Military Mission in Saudi Arabia.”⁵⁰

Secretary Rusk was careful to not accept responsibility for the policy. He squarely blamed the Saudi government and stated, “The determination of any such persons is a matter for Saudi Arabia to make in exercise of their sovereignty.”⁵¹ The letter provided by Representative Halpern revealed the State Department’s sentiments on this issue, but Rusk’s assurances and finger pointing did little to satiate Congress, and many legislators continued to press this issue within the 1961 debates and beyond. Certainly, the State Department was trying to keep this practice from escaping into the public record, and this issue only became a problem for the American government once the testimony of Halpern revealed the practices of the Saudi government to the world.

Throughout the hearings on the International Development and Security Act, there is at the heart of the debate a desire to maintain the “moral position” of the United States in regards to how and where aid money was being spent.⁵² While this moral position as related to religious freedom did in fact garner some support, the desire to enact some sort of legal framework did not have the same effect. Most representatives on the Foreign Affairs Committee agreed that there needed to be some sort of legislation that

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 1491.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² “Testimony of Representative Halpern and Judd, “ U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *International Development and Security Act*, 1487. (July 6, 1961).

ensured aid was not going to support dictators. However, the disagreement at the heart of the debate was that supporters of the president believed that legally binding legislation did more harm than good.

Congressional pressure was designed to ensure that the United States was mindful of where aid money for internal and military development was going and to try to ensure that American taxpayer dollars were working to promote religious equality throughout the world. Some members of Congress lamented the fact that the final law did not go so far as to include the “vivid” language that Rep. Halpern and James Marshall had hoped would find its way into the legislation. The final language of the International Security and Defense Act read:

The Congress declares that it is the policy of the United States to support the principles of increased economic cooperation and trade among countries, freedom of the press, information, and religion, freedom of navigation in international waterways, and recognition of the right of all private persons to travel and pursue their lawful activities without discrimination as to race or religion.⁵³

While this language provided lip service as to the need to better regulate the aid system, it was important because it was the first time that a foreign aid bill was designed to bring attention to the oppression that some nations promoted with American aid. This can be understood as part of a broader movement towards a Congress that was trying to force

⁵³ *An Act to Promote the Foreign Policy, Security and General Welfare of the United States by Assisting Peoples of the World in their Efforts Towards Economic Development and Internal and External Security, and for Other Purposes*, Public Law 87-195, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 75 (1961), 425.

foreign policy more and more out of the hands of the executive branch. While this amendment did not legally restrict the president, it did however, show the power of some lobbying groups that supported the state of Israel. Warren Bass directly addresses these issues within his work. His book focuses on American foreign aid to Israel, and the legislative actions that supported or worked against Kennedy's foreign aid program to Israel. Bass indicates that pro-Israel groups lobby held little sway or power over the domestic affairs of the country.⁵⁴ However, the inclusion of this amendment and the staying power of the debate surrounding this issue stand in stark contrast to his claims. While his argument is more generally true about domestic legislation, foreign aid was one area in which some Democrats, and even some Republicans began to utilize support of Israel as a way of courting votes among constituents.⁵⁵

The passage of this law represented the first step of many towards greater regulation of lethal and non-lethal military aid going to the Near East. 1961 was the beginning of a larger movement within Congress to address what some believed was an aid program gone off the rails. Aid dollars to American allies, specifically Saudi Arabia and the policies of the Saudi government, made some members of Congress anxious to appeal to their supporters and strike an easy victory against a far-flung dictator. Additionally, the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act debates showed that the American relationship with Saudi Arabia was under more and more pressure and oversight. These factors forced the State Department to react to ensure that the Dhahran airfield closure did not stop Kennedy's Near East program.

⁵⁴ Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 6.

⁵⁵ Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, 26-28.

The State Department, Dhahran and Congressional Pressure

The closure of the military mission at Dhahran airfield and the reaction it garnered in Congress forced the Department of State to move quickly and efficiently in order to maintain their influence within the government of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's place in the greater Middle East was considered to be what Cold War strategists called a "second-tier nation."⁵⁶ This meant that while Saudi Arabia was not considered to be a nation that was going to be directly invaded by the Soviet Union, its strategic importance was known to all those involved in managing this relationship. Saudi geography and the location of Dhahran airfield made it a valuable transition point for material and even a possible forward strike location for American jets targeting potential Soviet invasion routes through the Caucasus or Iran.⁵⁷ The airfield was not only important because of its location, but also because of its proximity to the important Aramco oilfields that were fueling the post-War recovery efforts and allies in Asia and Europe.⁵⁸

The time between the start of the American relationship with Saudi Arabia through the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and 1962 saw Saudi infrastructure and development rapidly increase and thus changed the demands placed upon the State Department during the early 1960s. While the United States was phasing out direct grant aid to the kingdom, Aramco and a host of other pro-Western, non-governmental organizations like the Ford Foundation were willing to provide experts and help foot the

⁵⁶ Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 64.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ According to Rachel Bronson, Aramco was a subsidiary of two companies, Soconal's California Arabian Standard Oil Company and International Petroleum Corporation. This company was formed in 1944, and is almost solely responsible for the development of the Saudi oil industry. Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 18.

bill for Saudi development. Thomas Lippmann in his work *Inside the Mirage*, stresses the importance of these Western efforts to ‘modernize’ the Saudi economy. By receiving aid from these American private enterprises, the Saudi-American relationship could be largely kept off American books, hiding the true cost of the American commitment in the region.

These improvements included roads, desalination plants, power plants, and shipping facilities.⁵⁹ By the time that the Foreign Affairs Committee began the process of crafting and changing foreign policy legislation, the direct aid relationship between the two countries was already shifting, but the congressional attention changed the process by which the State Department tried to bolster the Saudi government.

A chief concern for the State Department once the non-renewal of the airfield agreement was announced was the internal stability of Saudi Arabia.⁶⁰ Sarah Yizraeli in her book covers at length the internal relationship between three emerging factions within Saudi Arabia during the early 1960s. Within these factions there were the Conservatives, who backed the reigning king, Saud. The second group was the Progressives, or those that supported Crown Prince Faisal, and finally the desert dwellers, who were supportive of Nasser and his nationalist policies.⁶¹ These three competing groups and the fragile and seemingly negotiated nature of Saudi civil society made the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia not only critical, but also essential to protecting American

⁵⁹ Lippmann, *Inside the Mirage*, 76, 140.

⁶⁰ Memo From the Department of State executive Secretary (Battle) to The President’s Special Assistant (Dugan), *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, Doc. 24, pp. 51.

⁶¹ Yizraeli, *Politics and Society in Saudi Arabia*, 22-23.

interests abroad, especially when the Saudi internal power struggle is taken into account.⁶² This proved particularly true in the middle to later half of the decade.

For the State Department the non-renewal was emblematic of the shaky internal position of Saud's government.⁶³ Saud's ascension to the throne did not necessarily secure his place as king. Competing factions, foreign influence and other domestic pressures put the ruler on uneven ground.⁶⁴ This meant that it fell upon the United States to ensure the continuance of the Saudi royal family's power in Saudi Arabia regardless of their human rights record, or the pressure that their aid programs received in Congress.

This is not to say that the American government was unconcerned with Saudi's policy towards American Jews. The State Department, and those who were overseeing the diplomatic relationship between the two governments were more concerned about maintaining access to Saudi oil, and given the precarious position of the Saudi government, the Department of State was willing to work the Saudi government to protect American interests in the region even if Saudi policy was less than palatable to legislators in Congress. However, it is important to note that the State Department also believed that the Saudi policy made their job more difficult, and that American officials attempted to work with the Saudis to change this position.⁶⁵

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Memo From the Department of State executive Secretary (Battle) to The President's Special Assistant (Dugan), *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, Doc. 24, pp. 51.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁵ "Memorandum from Harold H. Saudners of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)," June 27, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Doc. 311, pp. 758

King Saud needed to close American access to Dhahran airfield in order to placate his support base and preserve his reign in a country hostile to the presence of foreigners. Bronson in her work, *Thicker than Oil*, talks at length about the ideology of Nasser's supporters in neighboring Egypt. Their role as chief instigator of the Saudi regime was amplified by their ability to utilize the media, particularly Radio Cairo to broadcast anti-Saudi messages into the country of Saudi Arabia itself.⁶⁶ Central to the idea of Arab nationalism was the removal of foreign influences.⁶⁷ For King Saud, as long as the Americans were present at Dhahran, Nasser could instigate nationalist elements within the Arabian Peninsula and threaten his regime. Additionally, the American diplomatic corps acknowledged that the presence of large numbers of American troops unsettled the Arab nationalists in the region.⁶⁸ These troops were essential to the continued long-term development of the Saudi military. They also served an additional purpose of preventing Nasser's influence from spreading to the oil rich kingdom and other (mostly) conservative kingdoms within the Middle East. The continued growth of Saudi military capability (part of the American Cold War strategy), protection of American oil interests and the maintenance of American influence within Saudi Arabia through arms sales, training missions, grant aid and exchange programs were crucial parts of the American strategy to stop the spread of Communism and to contain Nasser's influence.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, 96.

⁶⁷ Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs*, (New York; Basic Books, 2009), 317.

⁶⁸ "Memorandum from Harold H. Saudners of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)," June 27, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Doc. 311, pp. 758.

⁶⁹ Lipmann, *Inside the Mirage*, 281.

While the debates played out in the Foreign Affairs Committee, the American government continued its policy of supporting the Saudi royal family and their anti-Communist mission. One of the reasons why the United States and Saudi Arabia held such a close relationship was their shared interest in combating the spread of Marx's ideology to the greater Arab world.⁷⁰ Sarah Yizraeli rightly points out that Saudi civic society was greatly affected by the religious sect that helped Ibn Saud unite the peninsula, the Wahabis. Wahabi Islam, a sect of Sunni Islam, controlled many Saudi cultural programs including education, politics and public life.⁷¹ Much like how the Zionist government of Israel was an easy ally of the Americans because of their moral opposition to the 'godless' Communists, so too did the Soviet Union represent an existential threat to the Wahabi movement within Saudi Arabia.⁷²

If Saudi Arabia, and its close relationship with the United States were to continue, the State Department had to act with care due to both Congress and the internal demands of Saudi religious leaders. Propping up the regime became important to officials like Phillips Talbot, Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and South Asian Affairs, who advocated providing arms and training as a way of creating a Saudi military capable of protecting itself and American interests at a low cost, or even profit to the American government.⁷³

The American military presence that went along with the movement of arms and aid programs to the Middle East served the American government well during the early

⁷⁰ Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 97.

⁷¹ Yizraeli, *Politics and Society in Saudi Arabia*, 68-69.

⁷² Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 23.

⁷³ "Testimony of Phillips Talbot," U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1962*, 168.

1960s. First, arms sales and aid aimed to create a security infrastructure that was capable of maintaining internal stability.⁷⁴ This was among the chief concerns for American policy makers since the start of the weapons sale program to Saudi Arabia in 1957. According to the 1957 Mutual Defense Agreement (the same agreement that saw the five year extension on the American military mission at Dhahran) the American government was due to deliver military material in accordance with the agreement made under the Eisenhower administration. Expediting these arms sales was of considerable interest to the United States and Saudi Arabia especially within the context of the potential of greater congressional oversight.⁷⁵

The State Department was keen to ensure that Saudi Arabia got its weapons, and got them quickly to begin the arduous process of modernizing and building a modern defense force from scratch. American support did not simply end with supplying arms. Throughout the 1960s, American advisors trained regular Saudi forces.⁷⁶ The modernization of the Saudi military was an essential piece of the American Cold War strategy in the region. The ability to continue this kind of modernizing mission was thrown into question by both the non-extension of the Dhahran airfield agreement, but also because of the greater meddling from the legislature.

Cables from 1961 and 1962 show just how committed the United States remained to assisting the development of the Saudi military, the consolidation of the House Saud and the resources that were so crucial to American allies in Europe and Asia. The first step towards mending the relationship between the two countries was to invite King Saud

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ "Editorial Note," *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, Doc. 99, pp. 230.

⁷⁶ Lippmann, *Inside the Mirage*, 285.

to Washington in order to meet President Kennedy.⁷⁷ This was not the first time that a Saudi king and an American president met each other. A meeting between President Franklin Roosevelt and then king, Ibn Saud was emblematic of the close-knit bonds that were to follow in the coming decades.⁷⁸ The visit of his son, Al Saud to the United States was remarkable in the course of American-Saudi relations. It was the first time that a Saudi king visited Washington and the White House. This provided the president with an opportunity to appeal directly to the Saudi leader.

The meeting between Saud and Kennedy provided critical insight into how the president was responding to the crisis surrounding the non-renewal of the airfield agreement. The closure of Dhahran, arms credits, weapons sales, and the discriminatory policies of the Saudi government were amongst the topics to be covered when the two leaders met.⁷⁹ The most important conversation between the two men focused on how to manage Dhahran airfield in the wake of the closure of the American military mission. Both the Saudis and the Americans understood that the Saudis would not be able to operate the airfield on their own without Western guidance.⁸⁰ Saudi Arabia was simply too young a country to have a widespread knowledgeable force of engineers or trained airfield personnel. Civilian flights between Dhahran and other major cities within Saudi

⁷⁷ “Memorandum from the Secretary of State (Rusk) to President Kennedy,” December 23, 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, Doc. 152, pp. 369.

⁷⁸ Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 40.

⁷⁹ “Memorandum From the Department of State Secretary (Battle) to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), April 11, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, Doc. 241, pp. 585.

⁸⁰ Parker T. Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 1998), 87-88.

Arabia began in the early 1950s, and only then with Western support.⁸¹ The continued operation at Dhahran was imperative to modernizing and training the air force, but also developing the technical knowhow that grew the Saudi economy, better connect the country to the world, and provide stability for the Saudi regime.

The closure of the airfield also represented an opportunity for the State Department to handle both the issue of Jewish personnel and the continued training mission. The American government put the Saudis in touch with a private American firm to help manage the civilian air operations.⁸² By moving the operation into the hands of an American company, the State Department was hoping to move the attention over the airfield from the public eye and quell congressional worries. Not only did the Americans help the Saudis attain technical knowledge, they also left behind a variety of equipment (after much diplomatic wrangling), which helped the Saudis continue on with their modernization mission.⁸³

It is interesting to note that while the lease was not renewed, the Saudi government was still eager to have an American training mission remain at Dhahran. Much like the how the American State Department moved the issue outside the public sphere by utilizing a private firm, Saud hoped to quell nationalist criticism by removing the agitating American presence. He did this by negotiating a much less public agreement that allowed the Americans to return at a future date, without so much attention.

⁸¹ TWA actually started operations in the 1930s, however, service quality began to increase in the early 1960s. See: Lippmann, *Inside the Mirage*, 129.

⁸² “Memorandum From the Department of State Secretary (Battle) to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), April 11, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, Doc. 241, pp. 586.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 585.

The continued operation of Dhahran airfield was important to help diplomatic relations between the countries improve. Equally important was the discussion about how and when to provide Saudi Arabia with a new round of weapon sales within a hostile foreign aid environment. During the meeting between the two leaders a credit worth sixteen million dollars on arms sales was discussed.⁸⁴ The reaction from the State Department was tepid, no doubt because of the increased scrutiny with which Congress was looking at aid going to Saudi Arabia. In the wake of the non-renewal of the airfield agreement, any sort of economic credit or aid was dangerous to the future of relations between the two countries because of the public nature of the diplomatic split over the airfield.

It is also interesting to note that the Saudi government was looking for credits at a time when their oil revenues were increasing, but with no assurance of future growth. No doubt the Aramco and the Ford Foundation's infrastructure projects and the American diplomatic programs paid dividends for the Saudi government. However, as Bronson points out, current Saudi oil revenues were not stable especially as the production of oil ramped up and prices plummeted. Between February 1959 and August of 1960 the price of oil per barrel dropped 27 cents and the American companies that pumped the oil planned to cut the prices further.⁸⁵ Not only was oil revenue not reliable, the spendthrift nature of Saudi government put real strains on royal coffers.⁸⁶ It is equally important to reflect on the reason why these credits were being sought. They were not simply a matter

⁸⁴ "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Saudi Arabia," February 24, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, Doc. 196, pp. 490.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Lippman, *Inside the Mirage*, 142.

of economics. Credits and loans were a way for the American government show their support to the Saudi state and ensure the royal family's continued rule of the oil rich kingdom.

One group was able to walk away from the 1961 Dhahran airfield closure and the Foreign Assistance Act debates satisfied with the end result. The Saudi government had secured American technical knowledge and money, without having to address the issue of their discriminatory policies. This not only made the American diplomatic corps' job increasingly difficult, but also left them vulnerable to more and more vocal attacks coming from members of Congress.

Equally important, after the 1961 debates many within Congress were disappointed with the fact that there was no legal framework for restricting Kennedy and his aid program. The State Department was also still unwilling or unable to forcefully bring up the issue of Jewish servicemen and visas with the Saudi government. No doubt this was because the king certainly did not wish to discuss it, and because of the difficulty American diplomats had navigating the treacherous domestic politics of not only the United States but also Saudi Arabia. As the Foreign Affairs Committee began to debate a new Foreign Assistance Act in 1962, Dhahran was once again a part of the movement towards a stricter aid program.

1962 Foreign Assistance Act Debates

The 1961 Foreign Assistance Act debates failed to create the legal framework that some members of Congress felt was necessary to address the Saudi government's discriminatory policies. The issue was not settled a year later when the House Foreign Affairs Committee reconvened in order to discuss a new foreign assistance bill. The characters remained largely the same from 1961. Halpern once again made an appearance but this time, he had the ardent support of James Roosevelt (D-CA). During the hearings on the Foreign Assistance Act of 1962, he was amongst the most vocal in calling for the Congress to better regulate how the executive branch spent money on foreign aid to the Saudi government.

Roosevelt was leading the charge against the Saudi Arabian government because of Representative Halpern's experience with obtaining a visa to travel to Saudi Arabia. The treatment of Jews inside of Saudi Arabia and the financing of discrimination against Americans were among the chief concerns of Roosevelt during his testimony. Of additional concern was presidential inaction. Provisions had been made in the previous iteration of this act that sought to limit the aid going to countries that discriminated against Americans. However, presidential discretion frustrated Roosevelt and it was his belief as well as that of Representative Halpern and a smattering of Democratic and Republican lawmakers that the president needed to be compelled to better scrutinize the destination of American taxpayer dollars.⁸⁷ The main line of reasoning during the debate from individuals like James Roosevelt was the same moral argument that resonated so

⁸⁷ "Testimony of Representative Halpern," U.S. Congress, House of Representatives; Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1962: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, 87th Cong., 2nd sess., 1078.

well during the 1961 debates. These moral values are never really defined, and other members of the Committee, particularly Representative Walter Judd (R-MN), realized this problem and saw the potential implications of not having these morals explicitly laid out within the law.⁸⁸

Additionally, this debate occurring during the height of the Civil Rights movement was certainly ironic for at least one representative who sat on the Foreign Affairs Committee. Representative Robert Barry (R-NY) reflected this irony when during the testimony of Roosevelt he stated, “We have civil rights in our legislation but we in practice, have not practiced our civil rights as a nation.”⁸⁹ While American civil rights are only mentioned briefly, individuals saw aid to Saudi Arabia and American civil rights linked, while others like Barry believed that it was a fool’s errand to try to legislate morality, when the American government could not complete the task in their own country.

This argument based in religious freedom was once again brought to light by Rep. Halpern and his testimony within the hearings in 1962 was largely similar to the testimony he delivered during the 1961 debate. What is clear from these arguments was that the House Foreign Affairs Committee was not concerned about the greater Cold War implications that airing out the Saudi kingdom’s policies had on American foreign affairs (although there were some like Representative Walter Judd (R-MN) who advocated for a more tepid approach to this issue that would not legally restrict presidential authority in

⁸⁸ “Testimony of Representative Roosevelt and Representative Judd” ,U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1962*, 1063.

⁸⁹ “Testimony of Representative Barry,” U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1962*, 1068.

the area of foreign aid).⁹⁰ Much like the 1961 debates, 1962 saw only few members of the committee willing to commit to a legal framework to limit presidential aid programs. Further still, some agreed that it was important for Congress to make a statement on this issue, but also provide the president with some levity in how he handled foreign affairs, just like in 1961.

Halpern and Roosevelt, supported language that legally restricted the president's ability to dispense aid. Not everyone on the committee seemed willing to directly confront the president on this issue. Understanding the deeper Cold War implications of restricting the State Department from influencing countries like Saudi Arabia caused Representative Judd from being able to fully Roosevelt's initiative. He and other members of the committee were uncomfortable in cutting off aid, as many believed it to be the most effective tool to address this issue of discrimination within Saudi Arabia.⁹¹ The representatives who questioned the effectiveness of Roosevelt's amendment were doing so because of the fear of Soviet influence coming into the areas where the United States was unwilling to do business.⁹²

Not only did those who advocated for a stricter aid program testify during the hearings, but so too did a group of State Department and executive officials. Phillips Talbots, Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East offered just one example of how State Department officials presented this issue. In his statement, Talbot reassured members of Congress regarding the status and intentions of the State Department's Near

⁹⁰ "Testimony of Representative Roosevelt and Representative Judd," U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1962*, 1063.

⁹¹ "Testimony of Representative Judd," U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1962*, 1063.

⁹² *Ibid.*

East aid program. He stated, “We wish to see the nations in the Near East develop economically and politically so strong that they need not fear loss of independence from Communist subversion or invasion.”⁹³ Stopping Communism remained a chief concern of the Kennedy administration, regardless of the rights records of the countries that received American aid. These executive appeals did not satiate all within Congress, as some representatives did not believe that such a mission excused the blatant disregard for Jewish citizen’s rights.

The result of this testimony and legislative wrangling was a much more watered down version of what Roosevelt and Halpern were seeking. While not legally restricting the executive branch from concluding aid deals that they thought were beneficial, the language in the amendment made it known to the public and other government officials that Congress objected to the way in which American personnel and citizens were being treated within Saudi Arabia.

The language of the original 1961 act simply made mention of the fact that aid was not supposed to be going to countries that discriminate against Americans based on race or religion. However, the time between these two laws saw weapons and aid dollars (in the form of loans) moving from the United States to Saudi Arabia and other countries with questionable rights records like Israel and Egypt.⁹⁴ The new and amended language of the bill reflected the grave concerns expressed by both senators and representatives over the protection of Jewish peoples who desired to work and visit the kingdom. The new language added to the law read:

⁹³ “Testimony of Phillips Talbot,” U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1962*, 168.

⁹⁴ Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 102.

The Congress further declares that any distinction made by foreign nations between American citizens because of race, color, or religion in the granting of, or the exercise of, personal or other rights available to American citizens is repugnant to our principles.⁹⁵

The Dhahran airfield controversy within the Foreign Affairs Committee represented the first attempt of what was many to try to restrict the ability of the executive branch to conclude aid deals with whomever they pleased. While not all lawmakers were prepared to strip away the power of the president, there were some who were prepared to have that fight as early as 1961. The issues that surrounded Saudi Arabia and its aid relationship to the United States did not die out with passage of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1962. Unfortunately for Roosevelt and Halpern, their timing in the debate was coming after termination of the airfield agreement was commonly known amongst lawmakers and the general populace, diminishing the impact of their argument.

Their issues with Dhahran airfield and Saudi discrimination in particular, hampered their efforts to construct an effective opposition to the president's policy in Saudi Arabia. This was seen in Representative E. Ross Adair's (R-IN) testimony that dismissed Roosevelt's concerns due to the fact that these issues should not appear again, given the fact that the airfield would be closed.⁹⁶ As the decade rolled on, so too did the aid going to Saudi Arabia, however by 1962 State Department officials had already

⁹⁵ *An Act to Amend Further the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 as Amended, and For Other Purposes* Public Law 87-565, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 76 (1962), 255.

⁹⁶ "Testimony of Representative Adair," U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1962*, 1066.

begun the process of changing their aid program to be set more outside the prying eyes of Congress and the Dhahran issue slowly died out.

Conclusion

In 1962, the State Department decided for the first time to raise the issue of Saudi Arabia's discriminatory policies when King Saud visited the White House. The issue was brought up between Harold H. Saunders member of the National Security Council and Saudi diplomats.⁹⁷ The Saudi government's concern was that by not continuing the lease on the airfield the American reaction was to end aid programs within the kingdom. Mr. Saunders assured the Saudi delegation that the United States was interested in continuing the mission, but when Saunders brought up the idea of revisiting Saudi policy regarding the issuing of visas to Jewish citizens, Saunders states that the king "has not had the chance to take up with him the matter of visas for American Jewish travelers to Saudi Arabia and Saud has offered nothing."⁹⁸

While Jewish discrimination was a concern for the State Department and the president, the closing of Dhahran represented something much, much different to the State Department than it did to Congress. The closing of Dhahran represented the end of one of the most effective tools that the United States government had for influencing Saudi policy. This point was reiterated when Kennedy and King Saud met on April 11,

⁹⁷ "Memorandum from Harold H. Saunders of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)," June 27, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Doc. 311, pp. 758.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 757.

1962. Both the king and Kennedy were anxious to sign a new agreement for a military training mission.⁹⁹ Both leaders were pleased, when at the end of their meeting they had made substantial progress towards signing a new agreement to house an American training mission back at Dhahran airfield.

Some members of the Foreign Affairs Committee understood both the domestic and foreign policy implications of the closure of the airfield at Dhahran represented. Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee were able to capitalize on both the feelings of exploitation and discrimination to advance the conversation on aid control. The end result was some legislation, although mostly symbolic, that began the complicated process of creating congressional oversight over the foreign aid program. While Congress began to look at how to restrict aid, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations used aid as a diplomatic tool. However, the exposure that these issues were given by Congress forced the State Department to begin to consider new options for how they handled their relationship with Saudi Arabia.

In 1963, Congress once again brought Kennedy's foreign policy into the debates of the Foreign Assistance Act and the State Department began a shift in how they approached the Saudi kingdom. The real impact of this movement was felt in the same year when The North Yemen Civil War touched off a crisis that saw American fighter jets deployed to Dhahran airfield as part of Operation Hard Surface. Direct military assistance in the form of jets, training and American air patrols were provided to help

⁹⁹ "Memorandum from The Department of State executive Secretary (Battle) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)," *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, Doc. 241, pp. 586.

protect Saudi airspace from Egyptian incursions during the civil war.¹⁰⁰ When Crown Prince Faisal (now acting as prime minister, and engaged in a power struggle with his half-brother Saud) visited Kennedy in 1963 the president was determined to address the discrimination of Saudi policy head on.

The president laid out the benefits of Saudi Arabia reversing policy its on Jews entering their country he stated, “We are not asking you to do something that other Arab countries are not already doing.” The American State Department, believed that aid money and assistance to Saudi Arabia was easier without Congress on the State Department’s back over this issue.¹⁰¹ The response from Faisal reflected the delicate position of both Saudi Arabia and its new prime minister. The prince replied, “Should Saudi Arabia react favorably to this suggestion by the president, Nasser could create a lot of agitation and attribute to Saudi Arabia a change of attitude toward Israel.”¹⁰²

While a host of issues drove Congress to attempt to make changes to foreign aid legislation, the State Department’s chief concern was with winning the Cold War and protecting Saudi oil. The political demands of the early 1960s combined with the efforts of Congress, forced the State department to get creative with how and what kind of aid that they wanted to dispense. The answer for the State Department over the next decade was to shift their aid policy towards Saudi Arabia from one of aid, to one of weapons sales and direct military support.

¹⁰⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation,” *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, Near East, 1962-1963. Doc. 71, pp. 166

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 165.

CHAPTER 2-Operation Hard Surface and Saudi-American Aid-1963

Introduction

Shortly after the start of the North Yemen Civil War in 1963, the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee met to discuss a new round of aid legislation. The Foreign Assistance Act of 1963 represented the culmination of a movement towards greater congressional oversight of aid that began in 1961. The debates of 1963 were important because they not only signaled a shift towards greater oversight, but also because they represented a shift in the way that Congress viewed the Middle East and Saudi Arabia in particular.

The issue of Saudi Arabia's discrimination against American Jews largely subsided and Gamal Abdel Nasser and Egypt became the number one target for congressional critics of U.S. foreign aid. His adventures in North Yemen, as well as the threat that he represented to both Israel and Saudi Arabia had senators and representatives eager to end Kennedy's aid program to the Egyptian leader.

While all of this was going on in the United States, there was an internal power struggle that was in its final stages halfway around the world. Crown Prince Faisal and his half-brother, King Saud were engaged in a struggle over the future of the Saudi royal family. The internal politics of Saudi Arabia and the internal struggle between the executive branch and Congress collided when President Kennedy deployed Operation Hard Surface in order to support their long-term ally, Saudi Arabia.

When the congressional constraints and Saudi internal politics came together, Kennedy was forced to adapt his aid program. The issue of discrimination, the previous aid fights, Saudi domestic politics and Nasser's foreign policy ambitions forced Kennedy to change the way that he and his State Department handled Saudi aid. Not only did these pressures influence the State Department, but they also forced Congress to view Saudi Arabia as more of a partner, rather than an adversary due to their role opposing Nasser.

1963 saw major political changes on the Arabian Peninsula. Throughout the year the low-level conflict simmering in North Yemen seemed as though it might boil over and become a more global problem. Thousands of Egyptian troops were deployed to Yemen and American policy makers in the State Department were eager to show support for their Saudi allies and protect their investments in the region.¹⁰³ Aid remained a key piece of this equation; however, 1963 saw the impact of the Foreign Assistance Act debates of 1961 and 1962 on the president and the State Department. While the members of Congress who were fighting against the president and his foreign policy changed, the precedent of opposing the president was already well established. By the time that the 1963 Foreign Assistance Act was discussed by the Foreign Relations and Foreign Affairs Committees, the American government had already begun the process of phasing out direct, grant aid to the Saudi government. This oversight coming from Congress made

¹⁰³ Parker T. Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership*, (Bloomington; Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 117.

Kennedy's job increasingly difficult given that aid was his favorite tool with which to influence the nations of the world.¹⁰⁴

Operation Hard Surface was emblematic of the type of aid that the United States began to supply to Saudi Arabia after 1962. Within Congress and elsewhere in the American government the perceptions of Saudi wealth far outmatched the economic reality in which King Saud found his kingdom. While there was not much money available to the Saudi King as Robert Vitalis points out in *America's Kingdom*, American policy makers believed that Saudi oil money precluded it from receiving direct American aid dollars.¹⁰⁵ However, the Saudis could not be assured that their oil revenue would continue to flow and that their economic system could support the spend thrift ways of King Saud. The perception of Saudi wealth and the belief that the Saudi government could shoulder the burden of their own development, factored into the American decision to begin phasing out direct American grant-based aid. While the American government believed that Saudi Arabia no longer needed American aid dollars, they were still in desperate need of American technical expertise and equipment.

The power struggle between King Saud and Crown Prince Faisal changed not only the way in which the United States attempted to court the Saudi government, but also the direction of the Saudi royal family and domestic politics for years to come. Sarah Yizraeli points out that for the Saudis, development did not necessarily mean the adoption of capitalism, communism or foreign political ideologies.¹⁰⁶ This meant that Saudi Arabia was not easily influenced and the demands placed upon its rulers by

¹⁰⁴ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 91.

¹⁰⁵ Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 218-219.

¹⁰⁶ Yizraeli, *Politics and Society In Saudi Arabia*, 119.

competing domestic groups changed the way in which Saudi Arabia interacted with the rest of the world, in particular the United States. The demands imposed upon Saudi society by development, both financed and overseen by the American government, put a strain on the Saudi royal family and thus the entirety of the Saudi political system.

To better understand this story, it is a useful exercise to evaluate how the internal pressures of Saudi Arabia factored into this time in American and Saudi relations. Yizraeli, Bronson and a host of other historians of Saudi Arabia emphasize the importance of this struggle not only for the time period in which it occurred, but also the long-term ramifications of what essentially was a coup under which Faisal assumed power. The two rulers were in fact half-brothers, and both descendants of the unifier of the Saudi state, Ibn Saud.¹⁰⁷ While the first-born Saud was favored by his father, there were some amongst the Saudi retinue that believed his old age, and ruling style were unfit for the pressures being applied to the country, in particular the threat that Nasser represented. Historian Rosie Bsheer in her article “A Counter-Revolutionary State: Popular Movements and the Making of Saudi Arabia” argues that Saud was certainly not as inept as he has been portrayed by historians and that he actually surrounded himself with skillful advisors, whom she believes represented a departure from the consolidating efforts of Faisal.¹⁰⁸

The royal family did not all support Saud or the modernizing efforts of his half-brother, Faisal. The family split into two distinct groups around both the crown prince

¹⁰⁷ Viatlis, *America's Kingdom*, 214.

¹⁰⁸ Bsheer, “A Counter-Revolutionary State,” 21.

and the reigning king.¹⁰⁹ Historians like Rachel Bronson, Robert Vitalis and Sarah Yizraeli have different takes on the series of events that took place during the early 1960s. What is clear is that the illness of the King Saud and his old age made some in Saudi Arabia, most importantly his half-brother believe that he was unfit to rule. It is also clear that Faisal attempted to leverage his support base, and by 1962 he had himself appointed as prime minister, effectively taking power out of the hands of his older half-brother.

Bsheer argues that Faisal was interested in consolidating royal power, at the expense of democratizing institutions and advisors.¹¹⁰ She points to the dismissal and exile of ministers and the crackdown on leftist political groups in the early 1960s as evidence of this consolidation.¹¹¹ Historians like Vitalis and other more critical members of Faisal and his government, like Bsheer back up this point in large. For this particular work, why or how Faisal ascended to power is not particularly important, however, the fact that the Saudi political situation was tenuous going into 1962 and 1963 was important in shaping Saudi-American relations for the rest of the decade.

The North Yemen Civil War was an important event that helped to change the course of the American relationship with the Middle East and the Saudi relationship with the rest of the world. The internal struggles of the Saudi royal family made them more susceptible to the provocations of Nasser and his campaign against the Saudi monarchy. The civil war threatened to undermine the Saudi regime and their support for the son of

¹⁰⁹ Yizraeli, *Politics and Society in Saudi Arabia*, 21-22.

¹¹⁰ Bsheer, "A Counter-Revolutionary State," 5.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

the deposed Imam Ahmed, Muhammad Al-Badr.¹¹² Failed coups against his father in 1955 and 1958 forced the new Imam to be open to modernizing influences within Yemen in order to better placate more radical elements within North Yemen.¹¹³ Dubbed the Red Prince, Al-Badr, opened his country up to both Soviet and Egyptian influence but tried to maintain an officially neutral position.

The Soviets helped to fund the expansion of ports, roads and general infrastructure in a place that Asher Orkaby in his work *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, describes as similar to Afghanistan, and a graveyard of empires.¹¹⁴ While an official position of neutrality was recognized by the nations of the world, Badr still maintained a close relationship with Nasser in Egypt. Officers he sent to Egypt to receive military training risked falling under the influence of Nasser's nationalism. This was exactly what happened and in 1962 Al-Badr was overthrown in a coup undertaken by his officers at a time when Egyptian teachers, and radio messages were widely received by the North Yemen populace and when many were sympathetic to Nasser's ideals. Led by Abdullah al-Salall, the nationalists quickly took control of the capital Sana'a, and forced the Imam into Saudi territory and the embrace of his tribal allies.¹¹⁵ The situation in North Yemen quickly devolved into a full-blown civil war as the new nationalist government allied itself with the United Arab Republic and the Soviet Union.

¹¹² The Imam within the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen, functioned much along the same lines as the King in Saudi Arabia. The title was hereditary and held an almost absolute role in Yemeni society.

¹¹³ Asher Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War, 1962-68*, (Cambridge; New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 18, 23.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27, 41.

The early stages of the North Yemen Civil War had a dramatic impact on the Saudi government and its position in the world. Saudi Arabia viewed itself as a counter-balance to Egypt, even though its military was no match for Nasser and the Egyptian army, the Arab world's biggest military force.¹¹⁶ The Saudis saw North Yemen in much the same light in which they viewed themselves. Saudi Arabia and Yemen were both conservative kingdoms in an ocean of nationalist nations that threatened the regimes in Jordan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Gulf states. The coup that ejected Al-Badr was a threat to what had already revealed itself to be an internally weak Saudi Arabia. It was an open challenge from Nasser and his supporters from around the region directed at Crown Prince Faisal.¹¹⁷ Those nationalists that found themselves within Saudi Arabia might have found new hope for an eventual overthrow of the ruling family, based largely on the activities of Nasser within the Peninsula and North Yemen in particular.

No doubt Nasser hoped that by injecting himself into the conflict that he could further threaten the internal stability of Crown Prince Faisal and put the Saudi regime in a difficult situation. In order to maintain a perception of respectability within the greater Arab world, the Saudis felt compelled to support the royalist (those loyal to the opposed Imam) cause directly and help to prove that they could police their own backyard.

The start of North Yemen Civil War came at a time when the Kennedy administration began sending economic aid to Saudi Arabia's belligerent, the United Arab Republic.¹¹⁸ Any aid to Egypt was of particular interest to the Congress, and the

¹¹⁶ Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 77.

¹¹⁷ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 98.

¹¹⁸ United Arab Republic or (UAR) and Egypt are used interchangeably during this period as Syria, member of the UAR had already separated from Egypt.

debates of 1963 showed that the entirety of the administration's Near East policy was of great interest to Congress. The Kennedy aid program to Egypt was largely economic in nature and fell under the PL-480 program of providing food aid.¹¹⁹ This support, much like Dhahran Airfield was the subject of intensive scrutiny under a Congress who had already tried to limit the Kennedy administration's foreign aid program.

For Kennedy, these programs served as a potential incentive with which Nasser could be influenced, and used to change his provocations in the region.¹²⁰ Johnson and Bass both agree that Kennedy and many within the State Department did not perceive Nasser to be the ardent supporter of communism that many within the legislative branch perceived him to be.¹²¹ However, the activities of Nasser in Yemen and Israel were well known to members of Congress on the Foreign Relations and Foreign Affairs Committees. Most of those individuals who had issue with the president's aid program to Egypt were concerned about Nasser's ability to wage war against American interests.¹²² For them, it was bad policy to offer support to a country that threatened such an ardent anti-Soviet, pro-American country like Israel or Saudi Arabia.

The North Yemen Civil War and the State Department

One man was in charge of managing the relationship between the American government and the situation in the Kingdom of Yemen during those first important years

¹¹⁹ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 87.

¹²⁰ Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 65.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 66.

of the civil war, Robert Komer, member of Kennedy and Johnsons National Security Council. Komer viewed this war much differently than many of his counterparts. He understood that this conflict was not going to overthrow the Saudi monarchy through an invasion into Saudi Arabia. Rather, Komer's concern was the escalation of the war into a global war between superpowers and the risks that the conflict posed to American oil extraction in Saudi Arabia.¹²³ This one individual had such a center role for providing updates, organizing diplomatic responses and communicating with other staff members that the conflict was dubbed within the State Department as, "Komer's War."¹²⁴ His cables provided a great deal of insight into how the president and his advisors viewed the region and the American role within the greater context of the civil war.

The State Department viewed the events of the Yemen Civil War with great attention to detail. Their long-term partner in the region was now at risk of being part of an escalated and violent war directly against Nasser's forces. The financial, military and civilian investments that were made in Saudi Arabia from American oil companies and government entities risked being swept up in the fighting if the conflict grew in size and scope. These economic considerations gave the North Yemen War a high level of importance in the American government and helped to place Saudi Arabia as a centerpiece of the American Middle East strategy.

The early part of the North Yemen Civil War saw thousands of Egyptian forces opposing British mercenaries, Saudi supported tribes and those loyal to the al-Badr now

¹²⁴ Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 128.

exiled within Saudi Arabia.¹²⁵ The conflict was growing more and more deadly and costly as the months, weeks and years began to plunge the region into greater destruction and chaos. The war risked escalation in large part because the Saudi government continued to support the royalists with money and material. The chief concern of the State Department was the Soviet Union capitalizing on the chaos in order to make further inroads into the region.¹²⁶

As early as 1962, the State Department was notified about the potential issues in North Yemen. An intelligence report from September 13th, 1962 made some prophetic assessments of the situation unfolding within Yemen. The author of the report and intelligence officer, Arthur Hilsman predicted that if the coup was successful, “The new regime may be unable for sometime to extend control over the entire country.”¹²⁷ Hilsman’s concerns over the protracted nature of this war reverberated throughout the Department. In 1963, McGeorge Bundy corroborated the intelligence official’s assessment with a quite sarcastic, “This peanut war will be with us for a long time.”¹²⁸

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States was strained ever since the non-renewal of the Dhahran airfield agreement. The American government needed to both mend the relationship and protect their interests in the region. To do this, Kennedy employed his aid relationship with Saudi Arabia and Egypt in an effort to try to

¹²⁵ Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 33.

¹²⁶ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 72.

¹²⁷ “Memorandum from the Director of Intelligence and Research (Hilsman) to Secretary of State (Rusk).” September 13, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1962-1963, Doc. 38, pp. 92.

¹²⁸ “Memorandum from Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to Secretary of State.” February 7, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1962-1963, Doc. 151, pp. 339.

bring the conflict to an end. To accomplish this goal, Kennedy and Crown Prince Faisal needed to sit down and discuss the how to tackle these pressing interests together.

Before the president could sit down with Faisal, the crown prince passed along his concerns to Phillips Talbot (State Department Director of Near East Affairs) and Secretary of State Dean Rusk. The chief concern of the Saudi delegation was that Nasser seemed to be intent on destroying the Saudi regime at any cost. It is out of this concern that the crown prince justified his continued support for the royalist cause in Yemen.¹²⁹ While the situation on the southern Saudi border unraveled, the prince spoke about his support for the royalists, focusing his concerns on the role that Nasser was playing within the Middle East.¹³⁰ This conversation illustrated the diplomatic situation between the Saudi and American states before the full extent of Egyptian power was being deployed into the Arabian Peninsula. The sticking point between Nasser, Saudi Arabia and the United States was not the PL-480 aid going to Egypt. In fact, Faisal acknowledged the positive impact that aid could have on Nasser's foreign policy.¹³¹ However, Saudi claims that Nasser used the food aid to free up funds to amass troops in North Yemen was a more pressing matter to the Saudi royal.¹³²

The meeting between the president and Faisal was to take place on October 4, 1962. Before the meeting, Robert Komer provided a brief to the president that outlined the official American position in the Middle East. Komer wanted to make sure that president Kennedy emphasized to the prince that the United States supported his regime

¹²⁹ "Secretary's Delegation to the 17th Session of the United Nations General Assembly." September 27, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1962-1963, Doc. 58, pp. 137.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 139

¹³² Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 58.

and that support for Nasser was intended to turn him towards the American government.¹³³ Additionally, Komer stressed to the president the importance of what the United States had already done and was willing to do in the future to prop up Faisal's regime. This support included a 13.5 million dollar arms credit, three radio transmitters and an economic advisory team. Additionally, the American government was prepared to sell Faisal F-5A fighters and maintain the American training mission at Dhahran.¹³⁴

Komer was undoubtedly anxious to prove to the president and the prince that the United States was a firm ally of the regime especially considering the strain that the bilateral relationship suffered between 1961 and 1963. Komer's advice to the president did not stop at the economic programs that the American government was prepared to offer. He also prompted the president to press the prince on the issue of Jewish discrimination. He stated, "I think you should talk to Faisal on the discrimination issue, as one factor which puts a real strain on our ability to pursue a friendly policy." He further implored the president to impart upon the prince where this policy change was coming from. Komer stated, "This is not just a matter of a US pressure group influencing our policy, but of a fixed position of the US government."¹³⁵ The simple fact that Komer addressed this issue is evidence of the changing domestic landscape that Congress helped to create during the first two years of the Kennedy administration.

¹³³ "Memorandum from Robert Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy." October 4, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1962-1963, Doc. 68, pp. 158, 159.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹³⁵ Komer is referring in this cable to the lobbying group within Congress that generally supported Israel. While the American government wanted to impart this upon the prince, the fact remains that pressure groups were in fact having an impact on American foreign policy. *Ibid.*

When the president and the crown prince sat down to talk, they covered many of the issues that Komer put in front of the president. The first issue that the two leaders discussed was the purpose of the American aid program to Egypt. The president stressed the mitigating influence of the American aid program on Egyptian foreign policy. However, the prince did not believe that such aid served the intended purpose that the Americans had hoped it would. He stated that money that would otherwise be spent on food was instead being spent on subversive acts.¹³⁶ These included bombing runs on Saudi targets, inflammatory radio messages coming from Radio Cairo, and attempts to foment contempt in the prince's newly formed government.¹³⁷

The president for the first time was able to directly appeal to a Faisal in order to achieve some sort of common understanding regarding the Saudi policy directed towards Jews. The debates that raged through Congress and the public in 1961 and 1962, made such an impact on the president and his advisor that pressing Faisal on this issue became important to advancing the Saudi-American relationship. The president stated that it was necessary to find a solution to this problem so that the bi-lateral relationship between the two countries would not be subject to as much congressional scrutiny.

Faisal remained resistant to the idea of making any movement on the issue. He could not change this policy, because any concession on the issue of Jews or Israel, risked Faisal becoming a target for attacks by Radio Cairo. While Saudi policy as directed against both Jewish people and the state of Israel was publically inflammatory, privately the Saudi government was less hostile Israel, something that Bronson makes

¹³⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation." October 5, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1962-1963, Doc. 71, pp. 162, 163.

¹³⁷ *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, Doc. 24., pp. 51.

clear in her book. This is because both Saudi Arabia and Israel held the same concerns over Nasser and Egypt, and both wanted to stop the spread of Soviet influence.¹³⁸ However, the public perception of the Saudi regime being anti-Israel was important within the greater Arab world, and something Faisal continued publicly.

The impact of the Foreign Assistance Act debates were fully realized as the president and the prince sat down to talk. For the time ever, the issue of Jewish servicemen was addressed, and while the prince promised nothing, Saudi Arabia was more willingly than ever to have this conversation. The pressures coming from the United States and from the strain that Faisal faced in North Yemen made the prince open to a range of options for America to show its support. However, the prince was not wanting aid dollars, he wanted direct American military support.¹³⁹

American Aid and Congress, 1963

The Foreign Relations Committee targeted the PL-480 aid to Egypt that was a chief concern amongst Saudi diplomats and Crown Prince Faisal. It was well documented in the State Department papers that Saudi Arabia viewed the aid going to Egypt as a way in which the United States supported Egyptian aggression in the North Yemen Civil War. This had become such an issue for the Saudis that they worked with the deposed royalists to send an American business and oilman to lobby on their behalf

¹³⁸ Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 34-35.

¹³⁹ Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, 170.

within Congress.¹⁴⁰ Bushrod Howard Jr. was an American oil worker who worked eight years for the Iraqi Petroleum Company.¹⁴¹ What makes his inclusion on the Foreign Relations Committee agenda so intriguing was that it showed the concerns of Saudi Arabia as a regional ally really mattered. For the first time since the passing of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, there was someone present who actively lobbied for the advancement of Arab interests. Given how previous debates were extremely critical of the Arabs and their treatment of American Jews, a pro-Arab lobbyist's appearance was certainly noteworthy.¹⁴²

There were representatives who questioned the motives of Howard and his testimony. After he completed his statement, he was bombarded by questions from members of the Committee. They asked questions about how he was paid, and if he was officially registered as an agent of a foreign government.¹⁴³ These questions were really secondary to the contents of Howard's statement. First and most important were Howard's statements regarding American aid going to Egypt. According to Howard's testimony it was this aid that allowed Nasser and Egypt to pursue such aggressive policies in the Middle East.¹⁴⁴ This statement was essentially the same statement that Faisal gave to Kennedy during their meeting months before.

It is interesting to note that the testimony of Howard was carefully crafted to play on the concerns of the American Congress and the American public as a whole. The

¹⁴⁰ "Testimony of Bushrod Howard", U.S. Congress. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1963*.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 499.

¹⁴² See Chapter 1 for more information on this issue

¹⁴³ "Testimony of Bushrod Howard", U.S. Congress. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1963*, 499.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 494.

statement stressed the menace that Nasser's Egypt posed to the continued existence of Israel, an interesting argument coming from a pair of governments (Yemen and Saudi Arabia) that were generally hostile to the wishes and the needs of Israel and Jewish-American citizens. Additionally, Howard also played upon the fears of greater Soviet involvement in the region. He emphasized that the republicans who were supported by the Soviets and the Egyptians, created chaos in a region where chaos meant greater Communist influence.¹⁴⁵

The ultimate goal of Howard was not much different than that of James Marshall of the American Jewish Committee in 1961. Howard and his Yemeni (and nominally Saudi) patrons sought the inclusion of language into the Foreign Assistance Act that directly attempted to reign in the aid that Nasser and his regime received from the American government. The language read:

No assistance shall be provided to the United Arab Republic under this act, or under the Agricultural Development and Assistance Act of 1954, as amended, after October 1, 1963, unless the president determines that the United Arab Republic has complied with the agreement entered into by the United Arab Republic, Saudi Arabia, and the Secretary General of the United Nations on April 8, 1963.¹⁴⁶

The Saudi government like the Nasser regime employed every available means to try to gain the upper hand against their enemies. The favorite tool of the Egyptian government

¹⁴⁵ Testimony of Phillips Talbot," U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *International Development and Security Act*, 248. (June 14, 1961).

¹⁴⁶ "Testimony of Bushrod Howard" ,U.S. Congress. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1963.*,497.

was Radio Cairo, and the Saudi's favorite tool to help achieve their foreign policy goals was the American government.¹⁴⁷

Once again leading the charge to try to change the laws related to aid were members of both committees who were supporters of Israel. One particular issue for Congressman Leonard Faberstein, a Jewish member of the House of Representatives from New York was PL-480 aid going to Egypt.¹⁴⁸ While this food-aid was supposed to be a tool through which the American government could influence Egypt, the fact that this food was being furnished to the enemies of close allies like Saudi Arabia and Israel made members of Congress hesitant about how and why this was happening. Faberstein summarized his feelings about the subject perfectly during testimony given by David Bell, director of the AID program in the State Department. He asked, "How can we justify the use by Egypt of what must be substantial sums of money for the purpose of building up an armament industry...for outside adventure, whether it be against Jordan, Saudi Arabia or Israel?" He stated that he doubts that this line of questioning would stop aid from going to Egypt, but that he wanted to "make it as difficult as possible."¹⁴⁹

It was telling that Faberstein mentions Saudi Arabia in the same context as Israel. It would certainly be difficult to imagine the same happening during the 1961 and 1962 debates given the vitriol with which many Jewish members of Congress spoke of Saudi Arabia. For Faberstein, any aid going to support Nasser, in particular at a time when the

¹⁴⁷ "Memorandum From the Department of State executive Secretary (Battle) to the President's Special Assistant (Dugan)," March 21, 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Doc. 24, pp.51.

¹⁴⁸ "Testimony of Bushrod Howard" ,U.S. Congress. House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1963*, 225.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Egyptian ruler railed against the supporters of the royalist cause represented a threat to American interests in the Middle East.¹⁵⁰ Those that supported the state of Israel in Congress would be maligned to their constituents if any aid dollar being sent to Egypt would be used against Israel in any forthcoming war.

The growing hostility to aid that was being expressed in Congress did not go unnoticed by news outlets like the *New York Times*. Most of the reporting done on the aid conflict in 1963 was focused on the debate covering the United Arab Republic. Between the start of the North Yemen Civil War and the Foreign Assistance Act debates of 1963 and 1964, much of the *Times* reporting on the situation in Yemen was focused on the restriction of foreign aid going to Nasser. On May 1st, Warren Weaver Jr. of the *New York Times*, penned an article entitled, “Aid to UAR Stirs Fight in Congress.” The article covers how liberals in Congress were beginning to signal a revolt against a president of their own party, over foreign aid.¹⁵¹ Much like how Robert David Johnson’s work talks about how the political support for the president had begun to shift within Congress, the *Times* reporting showed that the gradual movement towards more and more restrictive aid bills were building to a breaking point in 1963.¹⁵²

The importance of Israel within the aid debate in 1963 cannot be understated and certainly helps to support both Bass and Johnson’s theses. Additionally, it helped to show a shift in American attitudes from a passive support of Israel, to a broad based

¹⁵⁰ Of which was actually the state of Israel itself.

¹⁵¹ Warren Weaver Jr., “Aid to UAR Stirs Fight In Congress,” *New York Times*, May 1, 1963. Proquest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁵² Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 95.

support for the nation throughout Congress.¹⁵³ The solutions to the problem as proposed by Republicans like Jacob Javits and Democrats like Hubert Humphrey were extreme in nature. There were calls for both a wholesale embargo on all weapons going to the Middle East, as well as a three-way alliance with Great Britain and France to guarantee the independence of Israel.¹⁵⁴

It was understandable that Congress began moving towards greater aid control in 1963. Within the context of the North Yemen Civil War and the greater fight for influence in the Middle East, 1963 was the logical time for a showdown over aid to occur between Congress and the president. Aid was a staple of the president's foreign policy, and when his goals did not align with the objectives of some senators and representatives, they pounced at the chance to check the president's power.¹⁵⁵ The successes of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1963 along with new military requests from the Saudi government left the executive branch scrambling to react to both of these new demands.

The 1963 Aid Revolt

Success for the Eighty-Eight Congress, looked different in 1963 than it did in 1961 and 1962. The 1963 bill succeeded in building a legislative framework that actively sought to place real restrictions aimed at curbing executive power. Kennedy, and individuals within the diplomatic corps viewed Egypt as neutral, and Congress stepping into the realm of foreign policy represented a new movement towards what some in the

¹⁵³ Spiegel, *The Other Arab Israeli Conflict*, 95.

¹⁵⁴ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 95.

¹⁵⁵ Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 101.

Foreign Relations Committee envisioned during the first two years of the Kennedy administration, more oversight over the executive branch.

The final language of the bill took aim at Egypt specifically. Introduced by Senator Ernest Gruening (D-AK), the Gruening Amendment would see its way into the final version of the bill.¹⁵⁶ It was argued that economic, mainly agricultural aid supported the Egyptian war effort and put Saudi Arabia and Israel at risk. The amendment states:

No assistance shall be provided under this or any other Act, and no sales shall be made... to any country which the president determines is engaging in or preparing for aggressive military efforts directed against The United States, any country receiving assistance under this or any other Act, or any country to which sales are made under the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954, until the president determines that such military efforts or preparations have ceased.¹⁵⁷

This amendment had broad support and easily passed through Congress.¹⁵⁸ This speaks to the degree with which members of Congress felt confident in their ability to challenge the State Department on these aid-related issues. However, something that Robert David Johnson fails to mention is the fact that these restrictive measures almost always had a way for the president to essentially, “opt-out” of the restriction. The amendment’s language leaves the discretion to execute this provision of the Foreign Assistance Act in the hands of the president. It was up to the executive branch to determine what “hostile”

¹⁵⁶ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 100.

¹⁵⁷ *An Act to Amend Further the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961*, Public Law 88-205, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 77 (1963), 387.

¹⁵⁸ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 101.

action meant and to apply the law. This showed that many within Congress believed that the president should still have the final say in foreign policy decisions.

While this presidential discretion offered the executive branch a degree of freedom, there was still a great deal of concern within president's office over the potential implications of this legislation. This concern was brought to light when Talbot and the Ambassador to the United Arab Republic, John S. Badeau, exchanged a letter over the potential impact that the Gruening Amendment might have on American Near East policy. Talbot stated that there was no precise picture of how the Gruening Amendment played out in the future, and that no one person has been able to define what aggression within the context of his law means. Additionally, Talbot points out that it was important to stress the importance of the president's judgment in determining whether aggression in fact exists.¹⁵⁹ Regardless of the intended impact of these types of amendments in the Foreign Assistance Acts, the executive branch was in fact being forced to evaluate its policies as they related to foreign aid because of the increased pressure being applied from Congress. Often the State Department continued business as usual, but at other times the legislative attention that foreign aid policy drew, forced a reevaluation of current practices. A perfect example of the latter in action was centered on the planning and execution of Operation Hard Surface.

While this new amendment aimed to make presidential foreign policy more difficult, the president either did not care, or did not allow the congressional pressure to deviate him from his course. The president still used aid, and he pressed the boundaries

¹⁵⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation." December 4, 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1962-1963, Doc. 379, pp. 823.

of what was allowed under the Foreign Assistance Acts in order to achieve fruitful foreign policy goals. The North Yemen Civil War and Kennedy's aid program to Egypt allowed lawmakers to throw to the side the issue of Saudi discrimination. The pressures being faced by Israel, and the dangers that Nasser represented in the eyes of American lawmakers, put Saudi Arabia into a different category of nations than it found itself in previously. The new perceptions of Saudi Arabia as a regional partner helped the president to advance his policies in the Arabian Peninsula.

Operation Hard Surface

In order to help save the diplomatic situation on the Peninsula, the American government had to stand side by side with their regional partners Saudi Arabia to deter Egyptian aggression.¹⁶⁰ The operation to protect Saudi Arabia from Egyptian incursions and instigations was the result of conversations at various levels of government concerning the Egyptian intervention in Yemen.

Egyptian agitation in Saudi Arabia was not limited to the bombing of potential supply routes and training camps that the royalists used within Faisal's country. The Egyptian air force actually dropped small packages of weapons and arms in the desert in order to try to mobilize sympathetic, mostly nationalist opponents to the royal family.¹⁶¹ Additionally, on multiple occasions Egyptian long-range bombers provided by the Soviet

¹⁶⁰ Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, 157.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

Union (and in some cases allegedly piloted by Soviet pilots) conducted sorties against targets in Saudi Arabia, not simply along the coast or isolated desert positions.¹⁶²

The escalation of the conflict threatened to push Saudi Arabia from a mere supporter of the royalist cause, to a co-belligerent in a land or air war against Nasser's Egypt. Because of the threat that this war posed and at the behest of the Saudi government the United States commenced what became known as Operation Hard Surface. The operation involved sending eight F-100 combat aircraft to be stationed at Dhahran airfield to help and deter the Egyptian aggression within Saudi borders. These aircraft were responsible for serving as a deterrent to Egyptian bombers and fighter aircraft operating over the western sections of the Arabian Peninsula.

The carefully managed diplomatic and military operation had a dramatic impact on the conversation about aid and the role of American diplomacy in the Middle East. The first obstacle for the planners of Operation Hard Surface was that they needed to conduct this mission in a difficult Saudi domestic situation and a skeptical Congress both of which were hostile to the deployment of American troops to the region.

. In order to achieve this goal, the president used the direct military assistance requested by the Saudi government as a way of forcing the kingdom to abide by the UN sanctioned ceasefire that was being negotiated between Faisal and Nasser. Negotiations for this ceasefire were already underway while the planning for Hard Surface was being conducted. Not only was the domestic scene in Saudi Arabia becoming more and more hostile to the presence of Americans in the Middle East, so too were the international

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 142.

pressures on the American government. Nasser's anti-colonial message found willing ears in Saudi Arabia and the instability of the Saudi regime made the war in Yemen about more than just protecting oil interests.¹⁶³ The operation was about ensuring the continued existence of the Saudi regime and limiting the impact that Nasser had on the Saudi state and other Western allied kingdoms in the region.

Additionally, the decision of the American government to recognize the government of the YAR in late 1962 was acknowledgement of the fact that Sallal and his forces were essentially controlling the country with support from the UAR.¹⁶⁴ For historians like Spiegel, the recognition of the YAR meant that Kennedy could begin the process of utilizing aid to try to court the Yemenis, and he did as much, sending aid to the country as early as 1963, while the civil war was still raging.¹⁶⁵ American diplomats believed that by recognizing the YAR, they could impart some control over the situation in the Southern Peninsula. The recognition came as a slap in the face to Saudi Arabia and the proposed solutions by the Joint Chiefs made it clear that the backlash against the American policy coming out of the Arabian Peninsula needed to be mitigated.¹⁶⁶ In order to do this, the Joint Chiefs presented a variety of options for the president to consider in order to try to maintain the relationship with Saudi Arabia and to show the kingdom that America was serious about protecting its territorial integrity.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 23.

¹⁶⁴ Yemen Arab Republic, the nationalist regime changed the name from The Kingdom of Yemen when they took power

¹⁶⁵ Spiegel, *Other Arab Israeli Conflict*, 103.

¹⁶⁶ "Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara." March 6, 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1962-1963, Doc. 177., 394.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Urgent steps were needed to try to stop Nasser and protect American interests in the region. The actual planning of the mission and the movement of material was a task for the Joint Chiefs to undertake. A cable from the Joints Chief reveals how much material was on hand to offer support to the Saudi government during the escalation of the conflict with the United Arab Republic. Options included: destroyer patrols, visits by US aircraft to Dhahran and a loan to the Saudi Arabian government of 11 F-86 aircraft.¹⁶⁸ The kingdom appreciated these short-term measures. However, they did not adequately stop the UAR raids on Saudi villages and other Egyptian destabilizing measures in Saudi Arabia.

The decision from the Saudi government to request American aid revealed how weak the Saudi government actually was. At the center of planning for Operation Hard Surface was the issue of Jews being allowed to serve within the operation itself. Certainly Kennedy and Faisal were aware of the difficulty that this issue represented, in particular given the opposition to Kennedy's policies and Saudi Arabian domestic policies within Congress in 1961 and 1962. This work was made more difficult when in June, 1963 Emmanuel Celler (D-NY), revealed in a radio interview that Jewish servicemen were amongst those taking place in the 'training mission' being conducted on Saudi soil.¹⁶⁹ The information, whose veracity was confirmed by the *New York Times*, marked a reversal in a long held Saudi policy that has already been extensively covered in the first chapter of this work. If the Saudi government was able to ignore the fact that Jews

¹⁶⁸ "Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Saudi Arabia." November 7, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1962-1963, Doc. 91, pp. 203.

¹⁶⁹ Special to the *New York Times*, "Saudi Arabia Lets Jews in U.S. Units Serve on Her Soil," *New York Times*, June 10, 1963. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

were going to be a part of this mission, it showed how desperate Faisal was for American recognition and support.

Celler was not the only member of Congress to celebrate the inclusion of Jewish servicemen in the training exercises. This issue was important enough for Hubert Humphrey to reveal to the rest of Congress that this issue had been settled. Citing the article that was written about Celler's announcement, he expressed his satisfaction that this issue had reached a conclusion. In fact, within his statement he mentioned the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and 1962. He refers to the language prohibiting discrimination and praises the work of Congress in settling the issue and bringing Saudi Arabia into 'modern' times.¹⁷⁰

Saudi Arabia and Crown Prince Faisal were not in a strong position to negotiate with the president. They badly needed Egypt to respect their territorial integrity and it seemed that the only way to make this happen was through an American military deployment. A country that was unable to protect its own sovereignty brought with it implications that without Western support, the country would falter, playing right into the hands of the messages that came from Radio Cairo.¹⁷¹ Thus, Hard Surface posed a serious problem for Faisal. By utilizing Western support for protecting its air space, Faisal could not break the perception that he was being propped up by the West. However, the military weakness of the Saudi state, forced Faisal to ask for American support to stop Nasser's air raids.

¹⁷⁰ Congressional Record 109, 88th Congress, 1st Session, 10994 (June 17, 1963).

¹⁷¹ Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, 96.

Operation Hard Surface became an essential part of providing security for the Saudi government and the presence of American personnel was a useful bargaining tool for an American government that desperately tried to defuse the violence in North Yemen. In order to adequately prevent more Egyptian incursions and the possible risk of escalation the Saudis needed something they did not have: an adequate air defense infrastructure.¹⁷²

Most of the Saudi Air Force was comprised of American-made transonic F-86 Sabers just given to the country by the American government as part of the rushed aid package given to the Saudis in the wake of the Egyptian threat in the early 1960s.¹⁷³ The F-86 jets that the Saudi Air Force received were not top of the line, and their short range limited their ability to conduct adequate air defense operations over a country as large as Saudi Arabia. Even if jets were pre-placed in areas closer to the incursion point of the Egyptian long-range bombers and their shorter-range escorts, Saudi pilots were not nearly as well trained or experienced as their Egyptian counterparts, leaving the country virtually defenseless against Egyptian airpower.

The deployment of the American F-100 Super Sabre to Dhahran was carefully managed and represented a clear win for the State Department. First, the State Department was able to keep the operation largely out of the press. Throughout the deployment of American jets to Dhahran, the *New York Times* and Congress referred to their operation as ‘maneuvers’ or ‘training missions,’ effectively hiding its true purpose

¹⁷² Dana Adams Schmidt, “Saudis Threaten Cairo on Yemen,” *The New York Times*, June 1, 1963. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁷³ “Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Saudi Arabia.” November 7, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1962-1963, Doc. 91, pp. 203.

from the American people and lawmakers.¹⁷⁴ By hiding the true purpose of the operation, the president avoided the prying eyes of both the Congress and the American public. Additionally, the State Department was happy that they won a concession from the Saudi government and that Jewish-Americans were able to serve in the deployment. However, the Saudi government had no problem denying the presence of Jews within their country. *The New York Times* reported on June 14th, 1963 that Radio Mecca was denying the reports of Jewish servicemen arriving for maneuvers.¹⁷⁵ The ability of both sides to claim victory without having to produce any hard proof as to either of the exclusion or inclusion of Jewish service members represented a win-win for both sides. The Americans were able to gain some traction on a three-year-old issue, while the Saudis could maintain their public hardline stance against Israel, appeasing radical elements within Saudi society.

Attached to the memo that laid out the planning for Operation Hard Surface were the revised rules of engagement. They stated, “No references will be made officially or unofficially, formally or informally, to the effect that a ‘U.S. show of force’ was an essential element of this unit’s mission.”¹⁷⁶ This was because Operation Hard Surface ran the risk of being perceived as a dangerous aid mission that put American lives at risk. This is certainly how Bass in *Support Any Friend* felt when he covered the topic in his work. He explicitly states that this mission put American lives at risk.¹⁷⁷ However, Bass

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Special to the *New York Times*, “U.S. Says Jews Serve in Arabia, Despite a Denial From Mecca,” *The New York Times*, June 14, 1963. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁷⁶ “Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy.” June 12, 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1962-1963, Doc. 268, pp. 578.

¹⁷⁷ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 133.

likely overestimated the risks to Americans in this deployment considering how carefully the American generals were managing this deployment. In reality, the rules of engagement of Operation Hard Surface made the possibility of American casualties extremely low. They made it clear that unless American pilots directly observed a hostile act, targets were not to be engaged. Rather, as soon as an airspace violation was made clear the aircraft were simply be escorted out of Saudi airspace by American jets.¹⁷⁸

Stability in the Middle East was a key feature of the Kennedy administration's effort to prevent the spread of Soviet influence into the region. Military aid proved to be the way in which the State Department achieved its goals within Operation Hard Surface. It had two major objectives: first, quiet the concerns of Faisal by helping to protect the territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia and securing Faisal as leader of the Saudis. Secondly it was necessary to deescalate a situation that threatened the stability of the whole region. While both of these goals were not achieved until the late 1960s and the official end of the conflict, Kennedy believed that Operation Hard Surface provided an opportunity to make immediate gains.¹⁷⁹

The American mission was in real danger of falling apart, due to pressures coming from all sides. The United Nations peacekeeping mission that was deployed to the North Yemen and the Saudi border to ensure that the Saudi-Egyptian disengagement agreement was being upheld had financial and logistical problems.¹⁸⁰ They experienced difficulty in both maintaining peace and ensuring the UAR and Saudi government were

¹⁷⁸ "Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Kennedy." June 12, 1963, *FRUS*, Doc. 268, pp. 578.

¹⁷⁹ Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 23

¹⁸⁰ Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, 204.

abiding by the agreement that they had signed.¹⁸¹ Both the Saudis and the Egyptians were so entwined in this conflict that neither could move without alienating their support base. The United Arab Republic could not pull out due to the military situation and the Saudis were complaining about the continued presence of Nasser's troops.¹⁸² This created a very tense situation in the region. The Kennedy response was to try to maintain that the United States keep this non-war damped down, or as Komer puts it, "we risk another flare up with our planes out there." Because of all these pressures, the eight F-100 jets were to be used as a bargaining tool, to stay in the country only if Faisal "plays ball."¹⁸³

For the first time since 1961 the Saudi government needed the United States more than the United States needed Faisal. The crisis in Yemen afforded the Kennedy State Department the chance to exploit the crisis in order to score some easy points with Congress and to create stability in the Middle East. The president and his cabinet never planned on the operation being a permanent feature in the region. Hard Surface was only supposed to last approximately eighteen weeks, and President Johnson wrapped up the mission in early 1964.¹⁸⁴ Unfortunately the president's assassination in late 1963 left the long-term status of American economic and military support to Saudi Arabia up in the air. The full extent and potential of the Kennedy aid policy in the Middle East would never be fully realized.

¹⁸¹ "Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy." October 7, 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1962-1963, Doc. 268, pp. 578.

¹⁸² "Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy." October 7, 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1962-1963, Doc. 334, pp. 725.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 726.

¹⁸⁴ Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 137,

Conclusion

A memo from Talbot to Rusk after the president's assassination outlined the prospective challenges and opportunities for the United States, as Johnson was getting ready to become president. The Saudi government was expected to take a harder line on getting the UAR to withdraw from Yemen. Of additional concern regarding Saudi Arabia was an expected push from Israel to stop arms shipments from making their way to Arab countries. Finally, and also directly related to Saudi Arabia, was the need of the Johnson administration to make a personal overture to Faisal to try to smooth over the relationship and to reassure the normally nervous Faisal on America's commitment to their protection.¹⁸⁵

Certainly the transition from the Kennedy to the Johnson administration put a strain on many of the existing relationships throughout the Middle East. However, the United States remained a critical partner of the Saudi regime. Even after the Hard Surface jets left in early 1964, American carriers in the Mediterranean took up the job of helping to protect the sovereignty of Saudi air space, removing the possibility of stressing the Saudi-American relationship through the simple presence of American personnel in the Holy Land.¹⁸⁶

1963 was a watershed moment in the American aid battles of the early 1960s. Congress seemed poised to directly stand up to the president over the issue of aid going

¹⁸⁵ "Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and Asian Affairs (Talbot)." November, 18 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1962-1963, Doc. 364, pp. 792, 793.

¹⁸⁶ "Memorandum from Harold H. Saunders of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)," June 27, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Doc. 311, pp. 758.

to Egypt. For the first time, any member of Congress interested in making a foreign policy statement found the medium through which they could attain their goal: foreign aid legislation.¹⁸⁷ That is not to say that the 1961 and 1962 debates did not impact the Kennedy administration and the way it approached both aid money and direct military aid. While it may seem that the waves being made by Congress forced the State Department to recoil and reevaluate their aid relationship with Saudi Arabia, in fact, the attention that the aid programs were receiving simply forced the American government to get more creative with how they approached the topic in the Middle East.

With the assassination of Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson inherited an executive and State Department that was interwoven in the region through economic and military aid to the varying nations within the Middle East. Saudi Arabia remained a focal point of the administration as their role in stabilizing the Middle East proved to be crucial during the difficult years of the early 1960s. Johnson differed from Kennedy in many regards. *Congress and the Cold War* covers this issue well. He talks at great length about how Johnson's focus became more on the domestic issues as well as the escalation of the war in Vietnam and many of the foreign policy decisions focused on aid were left to the State Department. Kennedy on the other hand, a deep personal interest in international affairs, which explained why he believed that aid represented the best tool in the American war chest, which could help the nation to defeat the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁸ These different approaches undertaken by Johnson would fully play out in the years to come, as the aid relationship with Saudi Arabia began to evolve.

¹⁸⁷ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 101.

¹⁸⁸ Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 118-125.

Increasing oil revenues allowed Faisal to work with the Americans to find a mutually beneficial aid partnership. Faisal no longer needed direct economic support for infrastructure, however, the prime minister and future king sought credits on weapons sales. He looked at weapons as a way of improving not only his position as leader of Saudi Arabia, but also as a way of improving his prestige in the Arab world. These weapons sales started well before the North Yemen Civil War. However, the negotiations over weapons sales as dictated by the Saudi Air Defense Review (part of Operation Hard Surface's aid mission) marked a shift in American Near East policy.

The once-hesitant State Department was now willing (however not eager) to transfer modern weapons and technologies, as a way of both showing support and protecting American interests in Saudi Arabia. These new and modern jets and anti-aircraft missiles were a signal to Nasser and the rest of the Arab world that Faisal had the support of the United States and the weaponry to effectively deter any potential threat that Nasser posed. The sales directed under President Johnson dictated the diplomatic relationship between the Saudis and the Americans into the new millennium.

Chapter 3-A New Kind of Aid Relationship

Introduction

Robert David Johnson states in his book *Congress and the Cold War* that 1963 was a turning point for congressional policy dealing with foreign aid and assistance. Democrats and Republicans came together to oppose spending on development, aid and other issues dealing with foreign affairs. The culmination of this movement in 1963 was the Gruening Amendment, which threatened to undo the hard work that Kennedy and his State Department were conducting in Egypt. The full implications of this policy were not realized as Kennedy's assassination shifted focus from the Middle East to the pressing matters occurring in Indochina.¹⁸⁹

President Johnson was much less interested in the Middle East than his predecessor.¹⁹⁰ Not only did activity and diplomatic action in the region create issues amongst constituents and allies, it also aroused suspicion and attention within Congress. This lack of interest in Middle Eastern affairs was made up for by the experience of his State Department staff. The Johnson State Department contained many of the same characters as the Kennedy administration and their past experiences with managing both the North Yemen Civil War and the aid relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia shaped the way that they created new connections between the two countries in the decade to come. Many within the department like Robert Komer, and Phillips Talbot

¹⁸⁹ Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 127.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

viewed weapons sales as a useful tool to develop in order to spread American influence and protect American interests in the Middle East.

John F. Kennedy tried to stem the tide of weapons to the Arabian Peninsula. The North Yemen Civil War still raged on and he believed that adding offensive weapons to the region increased the likelihood of an escalated conflict. While on the surface diplomatic concerns appeared to dominate Kennedy's handling of the civil war in Yemen, the domestic situation in Saudi Arabia also affected how the Kennedy and Johnson administration approached arms deals in the Middle East.

Crown Prince Faisal's power grab was still not entirely complete in 1964 and the Saudi leader sought American support to help and consolidate his grasp on the country.¹⁹¹ Faisal needed weapons for a variety of reasons. First, grant aid was no longer needed for development projects, because the Saudis could finance those projects on their own. This meant that American support for Faisal's regime needed to change. Weapons provided the perfect avenue for the American government to both support the regime and make large amounts of cash at the same time.

Cash was badly needed due to a growing balance of payments issue and weapons represented a potential windfall for the American government and economic planners.¹⁹² Saudi Arabia was a huge potential market for American arms because of their tenuous political situation and their burgeoning oil revenues. The Saudi government held large amounts of American and European currency, meaning that in order to try to address

¹⁹¹ Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 92.

¹⁹² "Testimony of Brigadier General Fellers," U.S. Congress. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1966*,

these balance of payments issues, a long-term, high value weapons sale program was a step in the right direction.

The State Department set the stage for this program with the Saudi Air Defense Survey. The American Air Force conducted the study with their Saudi counterparts. This study was part of the assistance package extended to the country during Operation Hard Surface. The report aimed to address gaps in the Saudi air defenses that were so publicly exposed by Nasser's actions on the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁹³ The negotiations of this deal stretched over several years and signaled the start of a changing relationship between Americans and Saudi officials.

Many historians write about this air force modernization effort like Rachel Bronson, and Parker Hart. Most works mark the 1970s as a time during which the American government struck large military sales and began the process of modernizing the armed forces of the kingdom. However, this chapter will argue that this process started much earlier, almost fifteen years earlier than it is traditionally argued. It is important to mention that while Bronson dedicates a few paragraphs to the 1964 deal, she does not connect it to either the internal politics of Saudi Arabia or the greater American relationship with the Saudi state.¹⁹⁴ Likely this lack of comprehensive understanding of this process is due to more prolific arms deals to countries like Israel, which feature prominently within Warren Bass' *Support Any Friend*.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Memorandum of Conversation," May 15, 1964, (*FRUS*), 1964-1968 Volume XVII, Near East,, Document 226, pp.434.

¹⁹⁴ Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 94-96.

¹⁹⁵ Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 4.

Certainly, the Israeli sales had more importance to historians like Steven Spiegel and Warren Bass because of its immediate impact of the 1967 Six Day War. However, the Saudi arms deal covered within this chapter are also important. This is especially true within the context of a growing arms market and the greater geopolitical implications that the introduction of advanced, Western made weaponry had on the region. By looking at the establishment of an arms sale relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, critical insight can be gained into how these deals formed the bi-lateral relationship and Faisal's consolidation of power.

This chapter will heavily utilize a work by Andrew Pierre entitled, *The Global Politics of Arms Sales*. This work, like so many others covering the sale of weapons, picks up on trends that started in the 1970s, after the period of which this chapter is concerned. However, his foundational arguments about the purpose, timing, and politics of arms sales are applicable to the 1960s, just as much as they are to the 1970s. American scholars of Saudi Arabia generally ignore the fact that during the previous decade, the Americans, British, French, Swiss and Swedes all viewed Saudi Arabia as a solution to their potential economic woes, particularly within the defense industry. His work touches on the political, social and economic reasoning behind the sale of arms and this chapter will utilize his work to provide critical background information and a theoretical framework to the American-British-Saudi weapons program of the mid-1960s in Saudi Arabia.

Taking Pierre's assessment of the political purposes of arms sales and applying them to the American government in the 1960s is a useful exercise because of the nature of the arms arrangement between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Politically

speaking, weapons sales to Saudi Arabia were intended assist the Saudi royal family and their ability to maintain control of their country. By training regular army and national guard troops (the White Army), the United States was trying to build a relationship between the two nations. These new sales were intended to build on the existing military relationship between the two countries since the signing of the Mutual Defense Agreement in 1957.¹⁹⁶ These military connections were just as important for the government as they were for the companies that were selling weapons to the Saudis. The sale of weaponry had a stimulating effect on the economies of the countries that provided arms. American and British companies like Lockheed and British Electric needed the Saudi contracts to be competitive within the global market place and to help address growing economic and financial problems that many aircraft producing companies were facing in the mid-1960s.¹⁹⁷

That is not to say that security relationships were a simple one-way transaction where the United States and its companies imposed terms on their Saudi counterparts. These arms deals were reflective in nature.¹⁹⁸ This means that the United States could use the sale of weapons to try to influence Saudi domestic and foreign politics, so too, could the Saudis play on American fears of growing Soviet influence in the region to either achieve better financing terms or the weapons that they desired.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Memorandum from the Department of State executive Secretary (Battle) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security (Bundy), July 10, 1961, (*FRUS*), 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, Document 82, pp.182.

¹⁹⁷ "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Saudi Arabia," January 4, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 237, pp.461.

¹⁹⁸ Andrew Pierre, *The Global Politics of Arms Sales*, (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1982), 4-5.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

The two-way nature of the arms sales was demonstrated in the Saudi Air Defense Survey. Between 1963 and 1968 when the deal was being negotiated and weapons delivered, the Saudi government pressed for modern, advanced weaponry against the wishes of the American government. The Saudi government, in particular Prince Sultan (brother of Faisal and Minister of the Armed Forces) played nation against nation, threatening that the Saudis would seek suppliers in Europe if the Americans were unwilling to deal with the Saudis on their own terms.²⁰⁰

The diplomatic record revealed the complicated process of moving arms to Saudi Arabia during this time. Discussions started shortly after the transition from the Kennedy to the Johnson administration. High-level talks between Saudi and American diplomatic officials centered on the Saudi Air Defense Survey. The survey set out broad goals for the development of the Saudi Air Force. This measure saved the American government money, but it also prevented Americans from being deployed to the region in order to ensure the safety of the Saudi regime from the dangerous effects of having American troops stationed in the Holy Land.²⁰¹

This is also a time when Congress continued to challenge the President and his State Department. Of particular importance to Congress during this time period was the increasing weapon sales to the region. Some within Congress, in particular supporters of Israel, viewed the increasing volume and value of weapons ending up in the Middle East with great concern, especially given the conflict in Yemen and the agitations of Nasser.

²⁰⁰ “Telegram from the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to the Department of State,” February 5, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 223, pp.429.

²⁰¹ “Memorandum from Harold H. Saudners of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy),” June 27, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962. Doc. 311, pp. 758.

They continued on the spirit of the 1961, 1962, and 1963 debates and built a coalition of partners who worked to a legislative crescendo in 1968 when the first law that regulated the sale of arms around the world was passed with bi-partisan support.

Changing Landscape of Weapons Sales

1964 was a sea-change year for the American aid program with Saudi Arabia. By 1964, the discrimination that was Saudi policy was largely just a memory, as Saudi Arabia was becoming an accepted member of the American plan to combat the Soviet Union during the Cold War. As oil became more and more important and as Nasser continued to threaten the existence of Israel, Saudi Arabia's place in the Cold War strategy was crucial. Because of this, and because of the lessons learned from the 1961-1963 Foreign Assistance Acts, the executive branch began changing how they planned to aid the Near Eastern country.

Weapons became an important piece of this general Cold War strategy. At the start of the decade most of the weapons that the Americans were selling across the world were outdated, and generally left over World War II and Korean War stock.²⁰² The American government approached the sale of weapons to the Middle East with great trepidation. This is because the inexperienced and young air force recruits of Saudi Arabia made the injection of modern weaponry not only difficult, but also pointless given that training and equipping Saudi pilots could take years.

²⁰² Pierre, *The Global Politics of Arms Sales*, 10.

While the Saudis were among the nations that the American government courted to establish weapons sales, the relationship between the two countries had recently been strained by the transition from the Kennedy to the Johnson administration. Weapons sales were a way to try to mend this relationship and bring the two countries closer. For the State Department, Saudi Arabia was amongst the nations that were of principal interest in increasing sales because of their large stockpiles of currency and gold. Not only could Saudi Arabia afford to purchase the weapons due to the increase in oil revenues that the Saudis were experiencing in the mid 1960s, but the Saudis were also eager buyers. The Saudis were also the chief targets for the Americans because they no longer needed to receive grant aid. With a lack of American influence through the development of Saudi infrastructure and economy, weapons sales and training were the way in which the Americans influenced the Saudi government.

In an oral history given by Robert Komer after the end of the Johnson administration, he talked about the importance of continuing the relationship with Saudi Arabia and the importance that the Department of State had in ensuring that the collaboration between the two nations continued unimpeded. Komer stated, that he had “many problems” with President Johnson and the correspondence between the president and Faisal. He stated, "We had to do a lot of handholding at the presidential (Johnson) level with the Saudis."²⁰³ Komer’s point is corroborated by historians like Spiegel who generally viewed the Johnson administration’s approach to foreign policy as being dramatically different than that of President Kennedy. This disengagement and

²⁰³ Robert Komer, Interview 2, 8/18/1970, Joe Frantz, LBJ Oral Histories, LBJ Presidential Library, 8.

disinterest from Johnson in the face of the greater domestic pressures and the increasing importance of Vietnam, forced the State Department to take the lead in maintaining the Saudi-American relationship.²⁰⁴

This handholding left the State Department to work to maintain the foreign policy initiatives started under Kennedy. Among these efforts was the Air Defense Survey. The report was designed in collaboration with the Saudi defense agencies to try to mend the deficits in the Saudi air defense infrastructure that the United States addressed through the deployment of American jets in Operation Hard Surface.²⁰⁵ Continued Egyptian air penetration into Saudi territory made the job of addressing these deficits more and more pertinent, especially given the fact that the Saudis were completely unable to manage the protection of their own air space in 1963.²⁰⁶

However, there remains another element of the arms deal to the Saudi government during this era. Chapter one and two of this work cover some elements of the Saudi internal political strife that ended up with Crown Prince Faisal effectively usurping power from his older half-brother Saud. The demands of both the internal political struggle and the weaknesses exposed by the Egyptian air force made American support for Faisal important. It is particularly interesting that Faisal courted American support. This is because Nasser's particular brand of nationalism railed against the American presence in the region and portrayed Faisal as a collaborator with imperialist forces in the region.

²⁰⁴ Speigel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 118-125.

²⁰⁵ Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 96.

²⁰⁶ "Telegram from the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to the Department of State," January 30, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 222, pp.428.

Nasser used Radio Cairo to rail against the Saudi regime, and the attacks showed no sign of stopping.

Faisal did not have support from every corner of Saudi society. His power rested in the hands of the royal family and the supporters who propped him up during his ascension to power. While Faisal was king, he did not exercise ultimate authority and he still remained beholden to his power family members who still occupied important positions of power in the military and government. Basher, Yizraeli and Vitalis all dedicate large portions of their works to talking about how Faisal navigated this tumultuous time through the dismissal and exile of ministers.²⁰⁷

American weapons, support and training helped Faisal to consolidate power against potential foreign and domestic threats. The political situation in Saudi Arabia must have been difficult for Faisal if he was willing to accept American assistance in light of the Nasserist attacks. There are many possible explanations for this. Chief among them is that Faisal could satisfy his supporters through the dispensation of weapons to powerful leaders in both the army and the air force. Secondly, Faisal needed to be able to protect his air space and be a viable counterbalance to Nasser in the region.

The Air Defense Survey as laid out by the diplomatic cables reflected the changing attitudes that the United States was taking towards arms sales in the Middle East.²⁰⁸ These changing attitudes can be seen in the decision of the Kennedy administration to sell Hawk missiles to Israel. The decision to sell these advanced anti-aircraft missiles to the Israelis was undertaken to deter Egypt from taking an aggressive

²⁰⁷ Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 256-258.

²⁰⁸ Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 94.

stance against Israel. However, as Bass suggests, the Hawk missile became a symbol of American support, and soon after the sale to Israel, Saudi Arabia requested the weapon system for their own air defense purposes.²⁰⁹ However, any weapon making into the Middle East still risked contributing to a flare up between the competing groups region. American equipment had already begun its slow drip into the region, and within the next ten years, millions of dollars worth of advanced weaponry fell into the hands of American allies like Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia.²¹⁰

Officials testifying before Congress from 1961 through 1963 stressed the importance of self-reliance and internal security for many emerging countries in the world.²¹¹ The weapons that were to be sold to Saudi Arabia and the findings of the Air Defense Survey reinforced that strategy. The needs of the Saudi air defense system were great. In 1963 there was virtually no air defense coverage over the kingdom and the largest geographic country in the area. At the forefront of the study was the acquisition of aircraft. On the surface it appeared as though the kingdom need not worry about the price of acquiring these weapons. In the early stages of negotiations, the Saudi Air Force minister and son of Ibn Saud, Prince Sultan stressed that Saudi Arabia was interested in obtaining the most advanced weaponry available regardless of price.²¹² Oil revenues were up and the unstable oil prices of the early 1960s began to give way to what would become a boom in oil prices by the mid-1970s.²¹³ This at the least gave the perception

²⁰⁹ Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 185.

²¹⁰ Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 90.

²¹¹ "Testimony of Phillips Talbot," U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1962*, 168.

²¹² "Telegram from the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to the Department of State," January 30, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 222, pp.428.

²¹³ Lippman, *Inside the Mirage*, 159.

amongst governments seeking to sell weapons that Saudi Arabia was flush with cash and represented an untapped market for their arms industries.

Saudi Air Defense Survey

On January 30th 1964 the Saudi minister of defense, Prince Sultan and a team of State Department and Department of Defense officials sat down to discuss the findings of the Air Defense Survey. The Saudi government wanted the most advanced technology possible.²¹⁴ Saudi Arabia wanted to acquire this modern technology for many reasons. The first of which was the Saudi internal security situation at the start of 1964. Emerging from the internal power struggle between Faisal and his older brother Saud, Faisal was eager to protect his kingdom from the destabilizing effects of Saud's supporters within his own country.²¹⁵ Secondly, the North Yemen Civil war exposed the Saudi military as weak, and feeble, especially when compared to the powerful, technologically advanced, Soviet supplied Egyptian military.²¹⁶

While the Saudi government wanted the most advanced technology on the market, the American government was not interested in selling the Saudis the latest and greatest that they held in their inventory. There were many reasons for this, but two dominate the cables: cost and technology.²¹⁷ Another interesting request made by the Saudi

²¹⁴ "Telegram from the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to the Department of State," January 30, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 222, pp.427.

²¹⁵ Yizraeli, *Politics and Society in Saudi Arabia*, 24.

²¹⁶ Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 102.

²¹⁷ "Telegram from the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to the Department of State," January 30, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 222, pp.427

government during this meeting was for the acquisition of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles. The fifty-four twin 40mm M-42 Dusters that were proposed by the Department of Defense for the Saudi air defenses were of no interest to the Saudi government.²¹⁸ This is because these weapons were widely distributed, and that the Saudis wanted the prestige that went with having top of the line American equipment. The Hawk was manufactured by the Raytheon Corporation and was considered to be top-of-the-line in terms of anti-aircraft missiles available at the time. The technology that went along with these missiles was top-secret and only America's closest allies had access to this technology.

The sale of these missiles to Israel in 1962 no doubt attracted the attention of the Saudi government. The sale went through to the Israelis because of a growing concern over what was dubbed "a missile gap" between Israel and its Egyptian counterpart.²¹⁹ There were reports that Egyptian leaders brought in German scientists to help develop a domestic, offensive missile program, and perhaps even a nuclear weapons program as well.²²⁰ This represented a real threat to the region, in particular the nation of Israel, whose supporters had been growing in Congress and government since 1961. From the Saudi point of view, if Israel was important enough to be granted the sales of Hawk missiles, then Saudi Arabia was important enough to receive the missiles as well.

The sale of these missiles to Israel in 1962 piqued the Saudis' interest enough for Sultan to inquire about how many batteries it took to protect the four major cities of

²¹⁸ The M-42 Dusters are mobile double barreled anti-aircraft platforms designed for engaging aircraft at close ranges. *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 145-146.

²²⁰ Congressional Record 111, 89th Congress, 1st Session, 3884-85 (March 1, 1965).

Saudi Arabia.²²¹ These batteries would cost an estimated 25 million dollars each, and took years of training, installation, and the ability to work out other logistical issues before they could be deployed in combat situations. The assessment from the State Department was that the Saudi delegation was thinking in seconds, not minutes in terms of modernizing their air force and military as a whole and the sale of these missiles did not fit the Saudi defense needs.²²² Because of this, expensive modern equipment was not a good fit for the Saudis and the Americans resisted selling them these platforms. However eager the Saudi government was for the best, most recent military equipment, the American government was hesitant to put those types of items forward for sale in the early 1960s.

The State Department was well aware that the arms markets were expanding and that competition for Middle Eastern oil money in the form of weapons sales was growing. American diplomats realized that if they were unable or unwilling to help Saudi Arabia on these deals, the Saudi government would turn to the British, Swedes, Swiss or French.²²³ These concerns were put forth by telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Saudi Arabia on February of 1964.²²⁴ The State Department had recently learned of British efforts to court the Saudis in order to sell British-made weapons to the desert kingdom. The introduction of the British into the equation was concerning for the Americans. If the Saudis used American weapons, or bought from the Americans, then

²²¹ Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 178.

²²² "Telegram from the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to the Department of State," October 7, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 232, pp.450.

²²³ Pierre, *Global Politics of Arms Sales*, 48.

²²⁴ "Telegram from the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to the Department of State," February 5, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 223, pp.429.

the government could control the scope and purpose of the weapons being moved to Saudi Arabia. Those same guarantees and protections were not assured if the Saudis were to buy from European sources.

The diplomatic challenges and geopolitical consequences of being associated with moving arms to the Middle East changed since 1961. It is important to note that the United States in the early 1960s and before the British left the Aden Protectorate and everything “East of Suez” that American diplomats were happy to share the load and cost of influence in region with the British.²²⁵ For the Americans, it was better to have multiple Western allies protecting the region from the Soviets to help and preserve the kingdoms and emirates that were sympathetic to the Western cause.

While there was a degree of trepidation in regards to the perception of being overly-“imperial” in the Middle East, the U.S. approach to arm dealing in Saudi Arabia was predicated on two main things: maintaining Saudi free-world allegiance and ensuring stability in the region by limiting Saudi capabilities.²²⁶ The introduction of the British into the equation meant that Americans might be unable to control the purpose and use of offensive weapons in Saudi Arabia that might end up being used in Yemen. These concerns are reflected in another important document within the State Department, the Saudi Internal Defense Plan.

²²⁵ Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 146.

²²⁶ “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Saudi Arabia,” April 3, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 224, pp.432.

The Saudi Internal Defense Plan

Important to understanding the debates and negotiations between both Saudi Arabia and the American State Department between 1963 and 1967 is a document published in May of 1964 and disseminated from Phillips Talbot to the Counterinsurgency Special Group. The Special Group was comprised of experts in the field of counterinsurgency, which outlined the domestic threats and possible executive reactions to the instabilities within Saudi Arabia.²²⁷ The greatest threat to Saudi internal security was to be addressed through what the State Department called “stabilizing forces.” The American government deemed stabilizing forces because they stabilized the regime and their ability to maintain a grasp on power. However, the presence of American stabilizing influences actually upset nationalist elements that did not like the presence of Americans in the region. These stabilizing forces were the American presence of troops, the infrastructure that went along with it, and the American oil workers, roads, rails and televisions that were coming into the region.²²⁸

The modernizing forces of the Western countries, in particular the United States left countries and leaders like Faisal susceptible to the hard-liner, nationalist elements that were active throughout the region due to perceptions of imperialism. Additionally, in 1964 Faisal was still holding a tenuous hold on power in the country. Although he was just crowned king, there remained large sections of the populace unhappy with his rule.

²²⁷ “Memo from the Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to the Special Group (Counterinsurgency),” May 18, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 227.

²²⁸ “Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State For Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to the Special Group (Counterinsurgency),” May 18, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 227, pp.438.

Religious clerics, family members, poor economic conditions for average Saudi citizens and hangovers from the power struggle between Faisal and Saud were a risk to the prime minister, now king.²²⁹

The Saudi domestic political scene had an impact on the perception of the Saudi security situation within the State Department, and on the negotiations for a comprehensive weapons package that pleased all of the high powered, connected royal family members that supported King Faisal. These weapons gave Faisal prestige, especially given the disengagement with Egypt and the apparent loss in Yemen (particularly after America recognized the Yemen Republic in 1963).

State Department officials hoped that American equipment would find its way into Saudi Arabia to the estimated tune of 450 million dollars (two-billion riyals) between 1963 and 1968 under the Saudi Air Defense Survey in order to minimize the impact of Nasser and his strikes against Saudi targets and to maximize the effectiveness of the Saudi Air Force.²³⁰ The goals outlined in this plan were both long-term and short-term in nature. The conflict in Yemen still featured prominently, as it explicitly stated the desire to minimize the impact the activities of the United Arab Republic in the region. In order to achieve this, the same cables recommended America maintain its dominant military and economic position in the country.²³¹

²²⁹ Yizraeli, *Politics and Society in Saudi Arabia*, 85-86.

²³⁰ Memo from the Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to the Special Group (Counterinsurgency),” May 18, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 227, pp.438.

²³¹ *Ibid*, 437.

Other more long-term solutions are interesting as well. They reflected the changing nature of the American aid relationship with Saudi Arabia during the mid-1960s. These programs represented a shift from the direct dollar and grant aid that programs like Dhahran airfield to programs that aimed to improve the image of the United States amongst the citizens of Saudi Arabia. These included urging the Saudi government to go through with political, social and economic reforms. Additionally, the American government was prepared to assist in improving its image among the populace by helping the government establish a TV industry and by creating language and educational programs.²³² These aid programs while not as flashy or as elaborate as the arms sale regime but they still helped the American government to influence Saudi domestic politics and helped Faisal to grow his influence and power within Saudi Arabia.

There were many factors that influenced the decision to undertake these programs. The internal political and social positions of the Saudi state, and the attention that these large spending programs received in Congress during the early 1960s drove American aid initiatives to be low-cost and profit maximizing. Ensuring that Saudi Arabia pay for these new weapons and help finance their own development became part of the State Department's official stance towards not only the weapons negotiations, but also in how they approached Saudi Arabia as a whole.²³³ This is likely why the Saudi Internal Defense Plan recommended that any assistance should be on a reimbursable basis, so that American taxpayers are not stuck footing the bill like after the Saudi

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ Memo from the Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to the Special Group (Counterinsurgency),” May 18, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 227, pp.438.

Arabian government refused to extend the lease to the American government at Dhahran airfield.²³⁴

Any weapon sale during the 1960s meant that American policy makers had to extend some sort of credit to the Saudis in order to maintain their interest in American products. Pierre expresses the impact that the growth of weapons suppliers and consumers had on weapons sales.²³⁵ His argument is that buyers held a large degree of power in determining the terms of weapons sales because if one country will not sell or give credits to Saudi Arabia, the growing arms production market within France, Great Britain, Switzerland and Sweden offered greater competition and willing credit. The geopolitical nature of weapon sales had changed dramatically since the 1957 Mutual Security and Defense Act was signed between the two countries. No doubt the Saudi government realized this changing dynamic and pushed the Americans for good credit terms. The State Department recognized that foreign competition was strong and the Internal Defense Plan authorized 20 million dollars' worth of credits for the Saudi government in order for the American government to remain competitive with other foreign suppliers of weapons.²³⁶

There were many things that helped to drive this change in the weapons markets. The rapid decolonization of the world saw new nations spring up across the globe. These new nations had internal and external defense needs. The retreat of the Europeans from all over the world drove demand from producers like China, the United States, Europe and the Soviet Union. Decolonization not only created incentive to produce more

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 437.

²³⁵ Pierre, *Global Politics of Arms Sales*, 28.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

weapons for export, there were also economic pressures that helped to drive weapon sales.

A New Offer

On September 21 1964, the Department of State sent a telegram to the embassy in the United Kingdom informing them of the British intention to sell Thunderbird surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) to the Saudi Government.²³⁷ This rift in the American-British relationship came as a great surprise to the American government. They were concerned more about stability in the region, and the unmitigated and seemingly unregulated nature of the British offer risked wasting Saudi resources on material that may be of no use to the country.²³⁸ In the face of growing nationalist opposition within Saudi Arabia, SAMs made no logical sense to the military advisors and they were actually rejected by the Saudi Air Defense Survey.²³⁹ Once again, it is Pierre's argument on the free market of weapons sales had an actual real-life impact on the American government. The cable stated that if the British were prepared to provide the Thunderbird missiles, then the American government should be prepared to provide the

²³⁷ "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom," September 21, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 231, pp.449.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ "Telegram from the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to the Department of State," January 30, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 222.

Hawk missiles, because in a growing market when one nation will not supply you, there are other nations who will.²⁴⁰

The British were interested in working with the Saudis for many reasons. There was a concerted effort from the British to recover prestige and influence in the region where the situation in North Yemen put the still occupied Aden in great danger. Economic conditions also played a role in the British desire to sell weapons to Faisal. Balance of payments issues hit the British economy hard by 1965 and the aircraft industry was one of the hardest hit.²⁴¹ Because of this, the British government and corporations began shopping around their services. As negotiations continued into early 1965, American diplomats were frustrated with the British meddling in Saudi strategic defense planning. The Saudi Defense Plan, developed by the American government in 1964 stated the desire to maintain a dominant military presence in regards to the training of Saudi troops and the development of the Saudi military.²⁴² That is why in 1965 a cable reflected the annoyance of the Americans who acknowledged that the British saw the importance of the Americans in the region, at the same time they were offering Thunderbird missiles, Lightning aircraft and radar facilities in order to undermine the American efforts.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom,” September 21, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 231, pp.449.

²⁴¹ “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Saudi Arabia,” January 4, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 237, pp.461.

²⁴² “Memo from the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs to the Special Group (Counterinsurgency),” May 18, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 227, pp 441.

²⁴³ Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 95.

Many of the discussions that took place in the State Department pertaining to this sale reflected the American effort to have the Saudis purchase American equipment, but also that the Saudi government be directed to weapons platforms that did not represent a threat to Israel or contribute to the conflict in Yemen.²⁴⁴ By March 1965, the Saudi government completed its review of aircraft to be considered as part of the Air Defense Review. The discussion between the Saudi delegates and the Defense Representative for the North Atlantic Mediterranean Area revealed that the Saudis were not to be simply a passive participant in the negotiations over its own defense program. The Saudi desire to purchase expensive, overly technical aircraft and equipment was a source of major consternation for State Department officials. This was particularly true when Prince Sultan revealed his preferred aircraft to the American government. The top two aircraft were the Lockheed 104k-G and the British Lightning Mark II and III.²⁴⁵ The Saudi government reiterated that these aircraft were for purely defensive purposes, but the inclusion of the F-104-G, which offered low-level, ground-attack capabilities, reflected a different sentiment than the one that the Saudis presented to the Americans.²⁴⁶

The Saudi pushback against the American government shows Pierre's argument at work. The Saudis were not satisfied with the American offer. They believed the Americans to be dishonest in their approach, however the State Department and Defense officials believed that there was little point for Saudi Arabia to invest critical time and

²⁴⁴ "Memorandum from the Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs," March 23, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 240, pp 464.

²⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that the the Northrop F-5, the State Department's preferred winner, finished 4th with the Lockheed F-104 H finishing last.

²⁴⁶ "Memorandum from the Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs," March 23, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 240, pp 464.

money into aircraft that were of little actual use. Additionally, Johnson and his advisors wanted to limit the ground attack capabilities of the Saudi air force and the Saudi evaluators knew that the Americans were trying to limit their offensive strike abilities. The Saudi government and the leaders who evaluated the deal pushed back against the American government and fought for what they believed was best for their country, much to the surprise of the State Department.²⁴⁷

Saudi Pushback

A memo from Phillips Talbots to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs summed up the State Department's reaction to the Saudi review of the recommended aircraft. Unsurprisingly, the memo was less than enthusiastic about the Saudi kingdom's assessment. The Saudis were clearly interested in some multi-role aircraft that could be used in a ground attack role. However, these planes contained technology that was well beyond Saudi operational capabilities.²⁴⁸ The State Department believed it knew why the Saudi government was pushing for all this equipment. The power struggle of the previous three years made appealing to both the air force and the army essential for Faisal to maintain his hold on power. With the Hawk anti-aircraft missiles and the acquisition of new aircraft Faisal could placate both groups.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ "Memo from Robert Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson," June 16, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 248, pp.481.

²⁴⁸ "Telegram from the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to the Department of State," March 2, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 238, pp 462.

²⁴⁹ Memo from the Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs," March 23, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 240, pp 465.

However, the situation in Yemen was still simmering and by potentially including long-range, ground attack capable aircraft the American government was adding fuel to an already big fire in the region, something the State Department wanted to avoid at all costs.

The Saudi persistence in the face of the American firmness eventually paid off. The ability of the Saudi government to stand up to the United States reflected the changing nature of the relationship between the two sides. The Saudis now had an important place in the American diplomatic and military strategy in the Middle East. Because of this, Faisal knew that the Americans needed to court him and that they needed to provide him with what he wanted if the United States were to continue to have access to Saudi bases and resources. Saudi persistence and general mistrust of the American report forced the hand of the State Department. The president and his staff were prepared to acquiesce and give the Saudis both the air-air missiles as well as the Hawk anti-aircraft missiles they requested, provided that the Americans supply the spare parts and, maintenance and that the technology remain under strict American legal controls.²⁵⁰ While not a total victory for the Saudis, this change in American decision-making showed how much the relationship between the two countries had changed over the course of five years. The relationship, which at the start of the decade was strained by congressional oversight, became a more reciprocal type of arrangement where both parties benefitted.

²⁵⁰ “Memorandum from the Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs,” March 23, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 240

Saudi Arabia was able to play on the fears of the Americans by looking to other countries for lethal aid at a time when the transfer of this equipment made a large impact on the economic situation of both countries and corporations. It was not just other countries that were complicating the American effort to court the Saudis. With corporations and governments looking to get the best deals for themselves, the American diplomats were forced to navigate a tough diplomatic and political battlefield to make this deal happen. The State Department papers revealed that American companies were also complicating the issue. Robert Komer stated that in 1965, he had to have a sit-down talk with representatives of Lockheed. The aircraft company was accused of pushing the F-104 onto countries that lacked the ability to handle the advanced, supersonic fighter, particularly Saudi Arabia. The cable states that the United States government contracted out over 1.6 billion dollars in sales, representing 44.4 percent of all sales, so Komer expressed his frustration with Lockheed being unable to help itself from making a few extra dollars by pushing the 104.²⁵¹

The Saudi delegation was having an impact on the course of discussions and what started as a 400 million dollar exclusively American package began to change. Komer's assessment presented to Johnson on June 16, 1965 outlined the reaction that took place regarding the Saudi arms deal. This deal was clear of the problems that might have raised concerns amongst some pro-Israel politicians.²⁵² The Saudi military bases, and

²⁵¹ "Memorandum from Robert Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)," April 19, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 243, pp 471.

²⁵² "Memorandum from Robert Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson," June 16, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 248, pp 480-481.

general geography meant that any equipment sent to the Saudis would likely never see use against Israel in any sort of conflict. Not only was Saudi Arabia geographically separated from Israel, but also the capabilities of both the Lightning aircraft and Hawk missiles were limited enough for the American government to be sure that Israel was safe from potential Saudi provocations. Because of these factors, the Americans felt confident that they could make the deal happen, but that the deal may also have to change in order to ensure that all parties felt satisfied.

The Saudis fighting for their own path towards development of their air force, created ruptures in the relationship between the State Department and their Saudi counterparts. An interesting note from the presentation given to the president was Komer stating that since the offer from the United States in 1963 that tried to help modernize the Saudi air defense structure, the Saudis have been “hemming and hawing in typical Arab style.”²⁵³ This quote showed how misconceptions about the Middle East, its people and their states were present within Western nations and explains why the American government believed that they could force a deal upon the Saudis, as many within the government viewed the Saudis as backwards and undeveloped, even as the country grew in prominence amongst Cold War planners.

While the jets and missiles got most of the coverage, the Americans were getting something out of the agreement as well. Komer estimated the value of the new package to be at 110-220 million dollars, and that the United States offered 100 million dollars in credits to facilitate airbase improvements and to retain air basing rights, as well as the

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 481. For more information on the issue of Orientalism in the United States, see either *American Orientalism* by Douglas Litte or *Orientalism* by Edward Said.

preparedness of the American government to extend credit to the Saudi government to facilitate these sales.

The Saudis took great pride in the modernization of their air force and the creation of a new kind of relationship with the American government. The ability of Faisal to pushback against American demands not only helped to establish himself as an independent actor in the eyes of the Americans, but also helped him to grow his support base within Saudi Arabia. Another interesting note was that as the American government ran up against more and more Saudi opposition, it drove the State Department to bring the British in on the deal to get it to the finish line. The final deal was a joint U.S.-British package that saw Lightning aircraft and American SAMs go to Saudi Arabia, increasing the capabilities of the Saudi Air Force and air defense infrastructure.

Congress, Saudi Arabia and Weapon Sales 1964-1968

Congress was not a passive participant amongst all of this executive activity. Their opposition to the State Department, the president and his aid program in 1961-1963 shaped the tenor and the nature of Congress' relationship with the president.²⁵⁴ These movements continued through the rest of the 1960s. While the issue of Saudi discrimination as directed against America Jews was generally resolved by the time Operation Hard Surface commenced, there was still a great deal of concern for the nation of Israel and how weapon sales might impact their position in the world.²⁵⁵ There was a

²⁵⁴ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 104.

²⁵⁵ Congressional Record 109, 88th Congress, 1st Session, 10994 (June 17, 1963).

sense that both American and Soviet weapons programs in the Middle East put Israel at risk and potentially created conflict where there had not been any before. These political considerations were at the forefront on the members of Congress' minds, however, the growing balance of payments issue in the United States developed into a point of consideration when Congress and the Foreign Affairs and Foreign Relations Committee considered American weapons sales.

From the start of the negotiations on the joint arms package, until the eventual delivery of the material in 1968, Congress remained actively involved in efforts to try to check the power of the executive branch, in particular its ability to sell arms. The moral issue that dominated the debates in 1961 and 1962 died out. There were two reasons why this issue moved out of Congress. The first was the inclusion of Jewish servicemen during Operation Hard Surface. The second was a change in how Congress perceived Saudi Arabia. The Saudi regime was seen as increasingly important in the eyes of members of Congress who remained concerned over the Nasserist threat to American interests in the region.

Nasser and Egypt remained a popular target for many in the house and senate throughout the 1960s. As early as 1963, Senator Jacob Javits (R-NY) was actively involve not only in Middle Eastern affairs, but also in the business of reigning in what he viewed as dangerous foreign policy in the Middle East. His objection to American aid support for Egypt was covered in the previous chapter and, he remained an ardent opponent to the Presidential aid program based largely on the risk that Nasser posed to

the state of Israel.²⁵⁶ However, what became of great interest to Javits and other members of Congress was the increasing frequency with which lethal aid was making appearances throughout the region.

In 1964 and 1965 the Foreign Relations and Foreign Affairs Committee took a critical look at the aid relationship between the Saudis and the Americans. The members of Congress who debated the Foreign Assistance Act of 1964 and 1965 in committee were growing increasingly concerned with a growing balance of payments problem within the American economic system. The stress that these currency deficits placed on the American economy were worrying, and many in both the State Department and in Congress viewed weapon sales as a way of making up some of these deficits.

These issues were well known by 1965 when Brigadier General Bonner Fellers spoke about gold as a national security issue in front of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. In plain terms he laid out the problem with the American system: In fiscal year 1966 the US government had a gold reserve worth less than 15 billion dollars and foreign claims on US gold equal to 29 billion dollars.²⁵⁷ These deficits had to be addressed and one way to try to make up these large deficits was by selling weapons. Robert McNamara summed up the executive branch's thoughts on the issue in 1967 when he stated that balance of payments problems could no longer be ignored. He finished by saying that military sales are a way in which this problem could be remedied.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Congressional Record 109, 88th Congress, 1st Session, 2113-2114 (February 11, 1963).

²⁵⁷ "Testimony of Gen. Heller." U.S. Congress. Senate, Foreign Relations Committee, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1965*, 504.

²⁵⁸ "Testimony of Secretary of Defense Macnamara," U.S. Congress. House, Foreign Relations Committee, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1967*, 119.

The debates of the Foreign Assistance Act were not the only place where interest in American weapon sales programs was growing. Citing a *New York Times* article, Representative William Fitts Ryan (D-NY) was becoming increasingly concerned with the rapidity with which American weapons were showing up in the arsenals of Middle Eastern countries and potentially threatening Israel.²⁵⁹ Ryan like other members of Congress believed that injecting lethality into the region was only going to bring about more conflict.²⁶⁰ Ryan did not believe the State Department line that the goal of American weapon sales was to stop conflict from breaking out. Rather, it was his belief that these transactions only put the Americans on a collision course with the nations of the region and the Soviet Union.

The solution for Ryan was legislative. He proposed legislation aimed to prevent the spread, development and sale of ballistic and nuclear weapon in the region. His proposal read:

That it is the sense of the Congress that the President of the United States use his good offices with the states of the area to negotiate with them either through the United Nations, or directly, an agreement that nuclear weapons will neither be produced in the area nor be introduced into the area; that missiles of a mass-destruction nature will neither be produced nor be introduced into the area.²⁶¹

Ryan's desire to prevent a nuclear war from breaking out in the Middle East may have been extreme, but given the continuing war in Yemen and the greater sophistication

²⁵⁹ CR 111, 89th Congress, 1st Session, 3884-85(March 1, 1965).

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 3885.

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, 3865.

and capabilities of weapons appearing in the region, the threat of nuclear war was perceived by some as a real risk. This was not the only effort to try to curb the proliferation of weapons, both conventional and nuclear. However, it is important to note that as early as 1965, in the midst of the negotiations of a large arms package between the United States and Saudi Arabia, that legislators were working to prevent an arms race in the area.

Ryan's motion did not get much traction, or consideration in the House. However he did raise questions about the existing and evolving aid relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, particularly the sale of F-86 and other weaponry to the kingdom. The next year, Senator Javits brought many of the same concerns to the Senate. The issue was the perceived excess and unnecessary arms sales to the region. For Javits, there was a definite arms race going on in the region. He feared the overrun of the conflict in Yemen engulfing the greater region.²⁶² He focused on the growing Soviet and Chinese influence in Egypt and the threat that they represented to both the nation of Israel and Saudi Arabia.²⁶³ Ease of access to credit and the vast availability of weapons risked throwing the American relationship with the allies in the Middle East into question. While he does not call for legislation, his statement is representational of some of the changing attitudes that Congress held towards arming the nations of the Middle East.

Javits' call for greater awareness of the growing threat to the allies of the United States in the Middle East did not stop in 1965. In 1967 he once again appeared on the floor of the Senate to raise concerns related to the proliferation of conventional weapons

²⁶² CR 111, 89th Congress, 2nd Session, 5552 (March 10, 1966).

²⁶³ *Ibid*, 5553.

in the Middle East.²⁶⁴ Again, Javits' chief concern was the state of Israel. While he (correctly) predicts that the Soviet weapons in the hands of the Syrians and the Egyptians could help and set off an all-out war between Egypt and Israel, he also talks of the greater threats that arms posed to the continuance of American-friendly regimes like Saudi Arabia. In order to ease tensions and maintain American relationships, Javits called for an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council. He wanted the Security Council to restrict the ability of the Soviet Union to sell arms to the U.A.R. and Syria.²⁶⁵ Finally, he requested that the Tri-Partite parties of the United States, France and Great Britain meet to reaffirm their commitment to the state of Israel. While Javits certainly represented a more extreme branch of Congress who, according to David Johnson, were looking to make statements on foreign policy for political gain, the increasing amount of attention that conventional arms sales garnered built to a final crescendo in 1967 and 1968.²⁶⁶

Those that opposed the movement of conventional arms to the Middle East had different reasons for opposing these transactions. Some were supporters of Israel who were concerned over the influence and the impact that Nasser could have with Soviet supplied weaponry. Others opposed American participation in the arms trade or the proliferation of missile and nuclear technology. Whatever the reason for opposing arms shipments to Arab and other developing countries, what is clear is that the spirit of oppositional, multi-party politics in Congress continued to not only make presidential

²⁶⁴ CR 112, 90th Congress, 1st Session, 13279 (May 19, 1967).

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 101.

programs more difficult to conduct, but it also began a movement towards legislation aimed at limiting America's participation in the weapons trade.

The 1967 Foreign Assistance Act and the 1968 Foreign Military Sales Act not only increased the amount of scrutiny under which the executive branch had to act, but it also helped to build on the earlier works of Congress and the Foreign Assistance acts of 1961, 1962, and 1963.

The debates of the 1967 Foreign Assistance Act are important for the scope of this thesis. They covered the growing concerns over conventional arms shipments, in particular the arms deals to Saudi Arabia discussed in this chapter. It also signaled the continuation of the challenges to the presidential aid policies that began in the early part of the decade. The Foreign Assistance Act of 1967 was emblematic of the greater movement within Congress to try to make sense of the complicated mechanisms of arms sales and how the State Department financed these programs. Senator Symington (D-MO) had an intense interest in how the State Department used the Import-Export Bank to help extend credit agreements to nations interested in purchasing weapons.²⁶⁷

The complicated process that the Export-Import Bank used to help make deals like the joint British-American offer to Saudi Arabia is laid out in a *New York Times* article written by Neil Sheehan. The Export-Import Bank functioned as a sort of private bank through which the State Department provided funding to nations seeking credit terms on arms deals. It stressed that so called "Country-X" loans that originated from the Export-Import Bank made procuring weapons easier. The article stated that nations were

²⁶⁷ "Testimony of Stuart Symington", U.S. Congress. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1967*, 273.

paying two-three percent less than what it cost the Treasury to borrow the money, effectively utilizing tax-payer money to subsidize the sale of American weapons.²⁶⁸ It used its MAP appropriations and other funding sources in order to provide what Secretary of Defense McNamara described as a, ‘blank check’ to countries interested in procuring weapons.²⁶⁹

There were numerous countries that used this funding source in order to procure weapons, but the confusing and almost secretive nature of these sales did not sit well with senators like Symington who only learned of the role of the Export Import Bank’s role in financing weapon sales in 1967.²⁷⁰ This meant that countries that were doing well, or that could afford to pay for weapons with cash, like Saudi Arabia were loaned up to 143 million dollars at rates cheaper than what it cost for the treasury to borrow the money.²⁷¹ These secretive and sometimes misplaced efforts to move weapons around the world grabbed the attention of Congress by 1967 and they crafted legislation to address the issue.

It was not simply members of the Foreign Relations and the Foreign Affairs Committees that called for greater regulation of this financial institution. Senator Javits in 1967 continued the call for greater oversight, and warned against the construction of the military industrial complex within the United States

²⁶⁸ Neil Sheenan “US subsidizes Interest Rates on Arms Sale Loans,” *New York Times*, July 31, 1967. Proquest Historical Newspapers.

²⁶⁹ “Testimony of Stuart Symington” ,U.S. Congress. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1967*, 273.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 275.

²⁷¹ Neil Sheenan “US subsidizes Interest Rates on Arms Sale Loans,” *New York Times*, July 31, 1967. Proquest Historical Newspapers.

Conclusion

The movement towards a more restrictive weapons sale regime was finalized in 1968 when the Foreign Military Sales Act passed Congress and was signed by President Johnson. This law was monumental in the fact that it not only limited executive authority, but that it was representational of a culmination of a movement that started in 1961. The law forbade the Export-Import Bank from utilizing any sort of appropriations in order to extend credit to countries seeking weapons.²⁷² Additionally, the law permitted cash for stock sales of low-cost equipment. It also put a cap of 296 million dollars on arms exports for the fiscal year of 1969. Finally and most importantly, the State Department was required to have the Secretary of State communicate to Congress via a report on all weapons exports during the last six months. This legislation made a huge impact on how weapons sales were being carried out.

This law changed the way in which the State Department approached the selling of weapons. It was the culmination of a growing opposition to presidential foreign policy and the American effort to sell large amounts of sophisticated weapons in the warzone that was the Southern Arabian Peninsula. It also brought the issue of weapons proliferation to the forefront of the foreign policy agendas in Congress. However, by no means did this law prevent future weapon sales.

The true end result was that Saudi internal politics, American Cold War politics and growing congressional interest in foreign policy created a situation in which weapons

²⁷² *An Act to Consolodate and Revise Foreign Assistance Legislations Relating to Reimbursable Military Exports*, Public Law 90-629, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 82 (1968), 1324-26.

became one of the if not the most effective tool to influence Saudi Arabia. The internal political situation, created an atmosphere in which King Faisal utilized arms to help and buy off his supporters in high level posts throughout the military and the government. Finally, a growing willingness from Congress to try to address the instability of the region and protect the nation of Israel meant that the Saudi weapons sale started in 1963 and finalized in 1968 was the last sale that would not face great amount of congressional opposition.

Conclusion

From the start of the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia in the early 1900s, the American government had been working to build inroads into what was commonly perceived as a backwards, undeveloped region of the world.²⁷³ While the perceptions of the Middle East only changed slightly over the course of the six or so decades that stretched between the start of the relationship and the time period covered by this work, the Saudi-American relationship changed greatly over that time period.

What started off as an association with strategic interest in the geographic positioning of Saudi Arabia as a potentially key transit point for oil to help in the Second World War, the construction of Dhahran airfield created a close military and diplomatic relationship between the two nations. While the military saw value in Saudi Arabia, it was not until the discovery of oil that the relationship rose to prominence.²⁷⁴

Aramco helped to extract millions of barrels of oil from under the Saudi soil, and the demands for oil in the post-war reconstruction of Europe made Saudi Arabia one of the wealthiest and fastest growing countries in the world. While Aramco was extracting oil, they were also helping to improve infrastructure, build roads, rail and develop the Saudi economy. This development served the purpose of making the resources easier to exploit and to build bridges between the Saudi and American governments.²⁷⁵

While the economy of the desert kingdom was growing and its wealth increasing, the social policies of the Saudi state were not progressing rapidly enough for many

²⁷³ Lippmann, *Inside the Mirage*, 75.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷⁵ Vitalist, *America's Kingdom*, 67-68.

members of Congress. The country's long-held practice of discriminating against people of the Jewish faith continued regardless of the American aid dollars, or military presence within the country. By the time that King Saud announced the non-renewal of the Dhahran airfield lease, the waves created by Nasser's revolution in 1956 were beginning to be felt across the region. Nasser, utilizing radio attacks, painted the King as a puppet of the American government and a collaborator of Western imperialism.²⁷⁶ This left Saud in a difficult position because of the nature of Saudi domestic politics and his decision to publicly put a stop to the American presence at the base was difficult for many American legislators to accept.²⁷⁷ The closure of the base to the Americans brought to light these discriminatory practices to the American people, press and legislators.

These revelations were coming at a time when there was growing support in Congress for the nation of Israel.²⁷⁸ This made the issue of Saudi discrimination that much more pressing for members of Congress. Additionally, this also came at a time when senators and representatives of both parties actively challenged President Kennedy's more active foreign aid program.

This movement culminated in the 1961 and 1962 Foreign Assistance Acts. These laws set about putting limits on presidential power and what many in Congress believed to be a policy of financing dictators. This argument against discrimination was at the forefront of many in Congress' mind when crafting the legislation. While there was

²⁷⁶ Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, 71-74.

²⁷⁷ "Testimony of Representative Adair," U.S. Congress. House, Committee, *Foreign Assistance Act of 1962*, 1066.

²⁷⁸ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and American Foreign Policy*, 25.

language that aimed to legally restrict the President and his ability to conduct foreign aid policy, there remained in these laws a clause, which allowed the president discretion in how to apply the Foreign Assistance Acts.

Saudi Arabia and their diplomatic and economic relationship with the United States began to change after 1962. An internal political struggle between King Saud and his half-brother Crown Prince Faisal was ramping up, and the pressures being placed on these rulers within their own country shaped American diplomatic activity in the Arabian Peninsula. In the midst of Nasserist radio attacks against the Saudi royal family, the North Yemen Civil War sparked a different kind of conflict between the Saudis and the Egyptians.

Nasser and his large, modern and well-armed military supported the nationalist cause in North Yemen after their coup ejected the Imam, in favor of a regime who more aggressively modernized the country.²⁷⁹ With this conflict happening in the backyard of Saudi Arabia, and with Saudi material and economic support being extended to the ousted regime, there was a sense in American diplomatic circles that the conflict could escalate and turn a regional war into a dangerous situation.

Nasser and his air force harassed Saudi border towns and military camps. At the same time Nasser used media to try to incite nationalist elements within Saudi Arabia.²⁸⁰ As the war dragged on and Nasser's attacks on Saudi territory continued, Faisal needed American military support to help and curb Nasser's attacks. American diplomats were

²⁷⁹ Asher Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War, 1962-68*, (Cambridge; New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 18.

²⁸⁰ Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, 96

not worried about Nasser invading Saudi Arabia, rather, these attacks made Faisal appear weak, and American support helped to shore up Faisal's hold on political power, regardless of the dangers that American troops in Saudi Arabia posed to Faisal's position within the region.

Operation Hard Surface helped to curb Nasser long enough for a tentative cease-fire to be reached and for an American carrier arrive to removing the agitating impact of American servicemen in the Holy Land. Additionally, Faisal's coup was complete and he was in firm control of his country. However, American members of Congress still remained concerned about the continuing relationship between the Americans and Saudi Arabia.

The inclusion of Jewish servicemen in the Operation quelled many worries regarding Saudi Arabia's exclusionary policy. This was also the time in which Congress began to perceive Saudi Arabia in a new light. Kennedy's PL-480 aid program to Egypt worried many in Congress. The issue was that Kennedy and his diplomats were providing aid to a country that not only was hostile to Israel, but also one that also conducted a war against American interests on the Arabian Peninsula.²⁸¹ The result was more legislative pressure on American aid activities. The Gruening Amendment threw the traditional aid system into question, and there was real concern in the State Department about how this law might impact their activities. However, like in 1961 and 1962 there remained a clause to allow the president to apply the law as he saw fit.

²⁸¹ Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 102.

The assassination of President Kennedy in late 1963 saw Lyndon Johnson take control of a State Department that was active around the world. Johnson was more concerned with the domestic affairs of civil rights and the war in Vietnam to pay much attention to Saudi Arabia. However, his staff remained engaged, and began the process of selling arms to Saudi Arabia under the Air Defense Survey.

The purpose of these arms sales was to address issues related to Saudi internal security.²⁸² While the ability to protect his own air space was important, Faisal needed the weapons to help pacify elements in his country that supported his seizure of power. The complicated process started in 1963 and only finished once the weapons were delivered in 1968. For the American diplomats who negotiated the deal, the previous decades aid battles meant that weapons sales were the way in which the Americans maintained influence in Saudi Arabia.

These sales happened during a time in which weapons markets were opening up to more and more competition from Western, Russian and Chinese sources. Faisal who, was still seeking legitimacy as an alternative to Nasser, was able to obtain the weapons and the credit terms that he desired to make the deal happen. For the first since the closure of Dhahran, Saudi Arabia was able to push back on the Americans and secure the planes and anti-aircraft missiles that they desired despite American opposition.²⁸³

²⁸² “Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State For Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to the Special Group (Counterinsurgency),” May 18, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 227, pp.438.

²⁸³ “Memorandum from the Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs,” March 23, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XI, Arabian Peninsula, Document 240

In the end, the British came in on the deal to see it through to the end. However, the deal did not escape the glare of some within Congress who began to question both the long-term and short-term efficacy of weapons sales. The aid battles of the early 1960s left its mark on many within Congress. Some in were willing to directly challenged President Johnson. They did so out of concern for both Saudi Arabia and Israel and the threat that they believed Nasser represented. Others questioned the way in which arms sales like the Saudi arms deal was conducted.

Some senators and representatives had concerns regarding the State Department's use of the Export-Import Bank for conducting arms deals. These concerns and the emboldened nature of Congress in the 1960s meant that real, binding legislation was possible. The Foreign Military Sales Act of 1968 was the culmination of Congressional attempts to better regulate the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia throughout the 1960s. Earlier attempts to check presidential authority were unpalatable to those in Congress who feared that the realities of the Cold War required presidential flexibility in his foreign policy.

The Foreign Military Sales act resulted in binding legislation that had a real world impact on the course of the American relationship with Saudi Arabia. Credit was now more difficult to obtain and Congress had achieved additional oversight over the confusing and difficult processes of arms sales. The 1963 deal would be the last that escaped a great deal of congressional scrutiny.

While the end of the 1960s saw almost a decade of Democratic control over the White House fade and the Vietnam War in full swing, the Americans continued to court

Saudi Arabia as a partner in the Middle East. The American government sent modern weapons systems like jets, anti-aircraft systems, ships, ground vehicles and the training that went along with them. While the scrutiny that these deals received grew rapidly, so too did the acceptability of weapons sales in general. Nations around the world sought weapons and all arms exporters nations of the world continued to find new markets for export.²⁸⁴

This weapons arrangement between American and Saudi Arabia only grew in importance in the decades after the 1960s, in particular after 1979. The Iranian Revolution removed the Americans' favorite counterbalance to the Soviets and the spread of Communism in the region. This moved Saudi Arabia from a country that was only important within the Arabian Peninsula to one that helped advance the geopolitical interests of the American government throughout the entirety of the Middle East.

There are numerous examples of how this closeness played out from the late 1980s all the way into the new millennium. During Desert Storm, American fighter jets launched sorties against Saddam Hussein and his Republican Guard from what used to be Dhahran airfield, then named King Abdul-Aziz Air Base.²⁸⁵ Throughout the 1990s the Americans continued to utilize the base as part of the no-fly zone of Operation Southern Watch. Finally, during Operation Iraqi Freedom, American jets once again used Saudi bases as a way of striking out at Saddam.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Pierre, *Global Politics of Arms Sales*, 48.

²⁸⁵ Steven Lee Myers, "Air Force Scrambles to Send More Warplanes to the Gulf," *The New York Times*, November 14, 1998, sec. U.S.

There have been many groups that have influenced the history of the Saudi and American aid relationship. Each piece of their puzzle was concerned with their own individual needs and goals, each influencing the relationship in their own way. The Saudi internal political and social situation forced Faisal to court the United States for military assistance and weapons. Congress and its commitments to upholding their moral obligations through American aid created and crafted legislation that forced the presidents to change the way in which they interacted with the Saudi government. Finally, the president and his State Department molded the relationship with Saudi Arabia to accomplish their own Cold War ends. They sought stability in one of the unstable areas of the world, and managed to navigate a complicated domestic situation within the United States and the difficult landscape of Saudi politics. In the end, the State Department determined that weapons sales were the most effective way of appeasing all parties and maintaining the hard-won influence of the world's largest oil producer into the new millennium.

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