

NATION BUILDING, ARAB STYLE

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This is the story of pact between two men in the eighteenth century which was to have horrendous long-term consequences in the twenty-first century -- consequences which neither man could possibly have foreseen. It is also the story of a descendant of one of those men with the incredibly long name of 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Faisal Al Sa'ud -- better known in the West as Ibn Sa'ud, the founder of the kingdom of Sa'udi Arabia. That name, incidentally, is the full genealogical pedigree which connected Ibn Sa'ud with his famous ancestor -- one of the two men who signed the pact. But I get ahead of myself.

Prologue: Holy War, Part I

For centuries the Arabian peninsular had been the home of fiercely independent warring tribes, and by the early eighteenth century the Ottoman Turks controlled only the eastern and western rims; no one had been able to unify the interior. But in 1744 year the two men made a pact between their families which was to have profound long-term consequences. One was a tribal leader -- Muhammed ibn Sa'ud -- whose domain was restricted to the town of al-Dir'iyah, in a wadi just north of al-Riyad, the present capital of Saudi Arabia. Through the influence of his wife, ibn Sa'ud had become a convert to the puritanical teachings of Muhammed ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, who adhered to the rigid Hanbal school of Islamic legal interpretation. Islam in the Arabian peninsular had grown exceedingly lax, and al-Wahhab preached a return to what he understood to be the original, absolutely pure doctrines of the Prophet. All who disagreed with his views were deemed to be "infidels." The two men agreed to bind their two families into a solemn pact by which ibn Sa'ud's family would provide physical security for al-Wahhab, and al-Wahhab's family would provide the teachings to create a highly effective fighting force of holy warriors. It worked -- at least for a while.

This requires a bit of explanation, starting with some observations about Islam. Muslims and Christians worship the same God -- "Allah" is simply the Arabic word for "God" -- and the moral teachings of both are quite similar. But the emphasis of their teaching is very different. Christians tend to focus on what one believes and Muslims tend to focus on what one does. Belief versus practice. And practice is dictated by Muslim law, or the Sharia, based on the Qur'an and the Hadith, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammed. The catch is that the Qur'an and Hadith deal with problems faced by Muhammed in seventh century Mecca and Medina, where Muhammed served as religious guide, political leader, and military commander during the last twenty years of his life. The Qur'an is a record of what the Prophet understood to be the literal words of God, revealed to him through the angel Gabriel as guidance on all aspects of life in Mecca and Medina. The core message was that there is only one God, all-powerful, good, and loving, and that God gave humans a sense of moral responsibility for themselves and others. Pure individuals will go to Heaven if they worship God, appeal for forgiveness, live chaste lives, forego the worship of money, treat others justly, and surrender themselves to God. In the context of seventh century Arabia, this was a call for radical social reform in a lawless land, but it covered a great deal more than personal behavior. It also dealt with the conduct of business, political and military affairs.

That was Arabia in the seventh century. As time went on, new situations arose, and new understandings were required. Over the centuries, four major schools of Islamic legal interpretation evolved -- each dominant in a different part of the Islamic world. By far the strictest was that of the Hanbal school flow, which became dominant in the Arabian peninsular. This school flow was adhered to by Muhammed ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, and this was the starting point for his extremely conservative teachings.

The variance between moderate and conservative interpretations of the Qur'an is well illustrated in the teaching about the dress code for women. The actual text of the Qur'an (in English) reads like this:

"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity: this will be most conducive to their purity -- [and] verily, God is aware of all that they do.

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity, and not to display their charms [in public] beyond what may [decently] be apparent thereof; hence *let them draw their head coverings over their bosoms*. And let them not display [more of] their charms to any but their husbands, or their fathers, or their husband's fathers, or their sons..."[1] -- and then a long list of male relatives and immediate family to whom they may display more of themselves.

The reference to head covering is derived from the fact that in seventh century Mecca and Medina it was the custom for women to wear a kind of head scarf, but their clothes were so low cut that their bosoms were frequently displayed -- especially when they leaned forward. This was obviously a call for modesty in keeping with a chaste life. For most of today's devout Muslim women -- from Malaysia to the United States -- a head scarf, plus clothes reaching down to the wrist and ankle, is more than adequate. But in extremely conservative countries such as Saudi Arabia, this has been extended to almost complete covering, plus not going out in public without escort by a male relative. Before being too critical, don't forget that in both Christianity and Judaism there have been similar variations between liberal and conservative interpretations of the same holy writ.

More serious have been interpretations of the references to warfare in the Qur'an. One reference may serve to illustrate the point. Here is a passage from the second Sura, or chapter, of the Qur'an:

"And fight in God's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression -- for, verily, God does not love aggressors. And slay them wherever you come upon them, and drive them away from wherever they drove you away -- for oppression is even worse than killing ... But if they desist -- behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace."[2] This is clearly granting permission for defensive warfare, but as we shall see later in this paper, Hamas and bin Laden both claim their actions to be in defense of Islamic land against incursions by the West. Again, before being too critical, recall that St. Augustine espoused a theory of "just war" in the Christian tradition.

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Return now to the pact between Muhammed ibn Sa'ud and Muhammed in "Abd al- Wahhab. What al-Wahhab's teachings provided was a doctrine which created a cohesive bond among holy warriors that transcended the tribal loyalties which had kept them apart for so long. To the degree that the teachings sank in, they made a glorious

rallying cry for a highly effective fighting force. "We are doing God's will by extending the rule of His laws."

The next 150 years saw a continuous expansion and contraction of the area controlled by Muhammed ibn Sa'ud and his descendants. In 1881, their forces attacked and sacked the Shiite holy city of Karbala (in today's Iraq). In 1802 they took the city of Mecca, and conducted a cleansing operation by destroying all the stringed instruments they could find and all shrines dedicated to the worship of saints rather than God. (They considered it sacrilege to duplicate the work of God by creating an image of a living form.) By 1804 they had added Medina to their fiefdom. This aroused the ire of the Ottoman rulers, and in 1811 an Egyptian force was sent to turn back the fanatic warriors. The Egyptians succeeded in retaking the eastern coast, and for most of the rest of the century different factions within Wahhabi ranks fought among themselves for control of territory. Finally, in 1891, the direct descendants of Muhammed ibn Sa'ud were roundly defeated, and they fled into exile in Kuwait. The family's fortunes were at their lowest ebb in two centuries.

Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Faisal Al Sa'ud

The really correct short version of that name is Abd al-'Aziz, but most American documents from the mid-twentieth century refer to him as Ibn Sa'ud, so we will use that version throughout. Ibn Sa'ud had absorbed strict Wahhabi beliefs from his father, a thorough knowledge of Bedouin ways from his family's flight through the southern part of Arabia, Qatar, and Bahrain, and respect for survival through manipulation of great power rivalry from almost a decade of exile in the tiny sheikdom of Kuwait.[3] He was a man of immense physical strength, vitality, and courage, and in 1902, at the age of twenty-one, he decided to focus his energy on restoration of the House of Sa'ud. After several months of unsuccessful attempts to rally southern tribes to his cause, he decided to strike directly at the stronghold his enemy-- the House of Rashid in the heavily defended city of al-Riyad. With a tiny band of fifty men, he slipped by night into al-Riyad, seized the inner fortress, killed the local governor, and announced the return of the House of Sa'ud. He brought his father, who still carried the title "Imam of the Wahhabites" home from exile in Kuwait, and with his father's blessing he took control of military and political affairs. It did, however, take another four years of heavy desert fighting to take control of the rest of central Arabia from the House of Rashid.

Ibn Sa'ud now faced the traditional Arab problem --how to weld the volatile Bedouin tribesmen into a reasonably cohesive force. After several years of internal and external conflict, he turned in 1912 to a system of religious-military-agricultural colonies called Ikhwan (Arabic for "Brotherhood"). Bedouins were recruited for the colonies by zealous missionaries, and their attention was focused on religious instruction and agricultural pursuits. In time, over a hundred of these Ikhwan colonies were established, and their members became intense in both their religious fervor and their military zeal. In effect, Ibn Sa'ud breathed new life into Wahhabism as a cohesive force among townsmen and Bedouin tribesmen. Ikhwan fighting men contributed immensely to the continuing campaign to reunify the Arabian Peninsula.

Ibn Sa'ud made one other astute move. Recall that the Islamic tradition permits up to four wives; or, as it says in the Qur'an, "marry such women as seem good to you, two, three, four; but if you fear that you will not be equitable, then only one"[4] (I don't know about you, but I see treating four women equitably as an almost insurmountable obstacle. Incidentally, that provision in the Qur'an stems from the fact in the early days many men died in intertribal warfare; there was no social security; and this was a way of taking care of widows.) At any rate, Ibn Sa'ud took advantage of this provision, plus easy divorce, to marry three women on a permanent basis, take a daughter of a tribal chieftain as a fourth wife, have several children by her, divorce her, set her up well financially with someone else, and then move on to another bride. This created blood ties with many of the tribes in his kingdom-to-be, and this was one more source of cohesion. By the time he died, Ibn had sired thirty-two sons, and this is the origin of the present royal family of Saudi Arabia. (Someone has referred to Saudi Arabia as the only family business with a seat in the UN.)

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World War I was not a problem for Ibn Sa'ud. On advice from the British, he stayed out of it. The British Empire, it seems, was of two minds about opposition to the Turks. The Persian Gulf and eastern Arabia lay within the jurisdiction of the British India Office, and it was through this channel that Ibn Sa'ud began to receive small British subsidies. The India Office was worried that Arab support for the war on the Ottoman Empire would not sit well with Muslims in British India, and they advised a low profile.

On the other side of the peninsula, the Red Sea and the eastern Hijaz region lay within the jurisdiction of the War Office and its Arab Bureau in Cairo, the best known representative of which was T.E. Lawrence -- "Lawrence of Arabia." In the Hijaz, the dominant Arab figure was al-Husain ibn 'Ali, a bitter rival of Ibn Sa'ud for Arab loyalties. Husain was the Ottoman-appointed Sharif of Mecca and a descendant of the Prophet Muhammed's own family, the Hashemites. In 1916, in response to British subsidies and promises of postwar support, Husain raised a revolt against the Ottoman Empire -- a revolt in which Ibn Sa'ud refused to participate, despite his strong personal opposition to the Turks.

When the war was over, Husain was recognized by the British as king of the Hijaz, though he himself assumed the title of "King of the Arabs." Husain's son Faisal was first proclaimed king of an independent Syria, but his refusal to accept the French mandate of the region led him to be forced into exile, and he subsequently was made king of British-mandated Iraq. In the musical chairs which followed World War I, the British then installed Faisal's other son, Abdullah, as Emir of Transjordan, which the British Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill, carved out of the British Palestine mandate to accommodate him. If you followed this complicated set of maneuvers, you will realize that Ibn Sa'ud thus found himself surrounded on the west and north by the despised Hashemite family. In the years after the war Ibn Sa'ud and his Ikhwan fighting men steadily expanded control from central Arabia north to the borders of Iraq and Transjordan, and in the southwest to the shores of the Red Sea south of Mecca. But Mecca, Medina and the Hijaz remained under the control of Husain and the British-supported Hashemite family.

In 1924 the issue of the Hashemites came to a head. The new Republic of Turkey abolished the caliphate and Husain immediately declared himself caliph of all Islam. This, to the Wahhabies, was the final indignity in a long line of indignities, and Ibn Sa'ud finally unleashed the Ikhwan against the Hashemites. In a swift campaign they drove straight to Mecca; Husain abdicated in favor of his son 'Ali and fled into exile; and 'Ali surrendered after several months of siege in Jiddah. In 1926 Ibn Sa'ud had himself proclaimed King of Hijaz and the Hajd (the rest of Arabia). One more task remained. In 1928 several Ikhwan leaders defied orders and carried out raids in British mandated Iraq and Transjordan. (Fanatics, once fired up, are hard to contain.) Attempts to discipline them lead to fierce internal fighting, and the rebel leaders were not defeated until 1930. Then, on September 22, 1932, the country was renamed the "Kingdom of Sa'udi Arabia."

In the thirty years since his raid on al-Riyad, Ibn Sa'ud had forged a desert kingdom of townsmen and tribesmen, and he had established himself as keeper of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. He was now both "malik" (king in the modern sense of the word) and "imam" (religious leader). As in the days of Muhammed, there was no separation of church and state. And even though the Ikhwan had been subdued, the country remained staunchly Wahhabi.

Fully knowledgeable of tribal ways, he added one more measure of control. He provided liberal financial subsidies to prevent the Bedouins from raiding one another and keep them loyal to himself. But, as one Western observer commented, he was always short of money because his income never matched "his generous conception of his functions and obligations as a ruler:"[5] This presented a real problem. The country was an impoverished desert, dependent in large part on the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and on customs duties for income. The worldwide depression had affected Muslims, too, and revenue from those sources had seriously declined in the early 1930s. It was at this juncture that news of the discovery of oil in the adjacent sheikdom of Bahrain by a subsidiary of the Standard Oil Company of California reached Ibn Sa'ud. Oil was to completely transform the Kingdom of Sa'udi Arabia from an impoverished desert backwater to a major player in the economy of the world. It did not happen overnight, however.

Black Gold

The complexity of the battles between petroleum companies and nations for access to Middle Eastern oil following World War I utterly defies concise description, but it has a bearing on why a relatively small California company was the first to enter Sa'udi Arabia. If you will bear with me, I will try to describe where the battle for oil stood in 1932. In 1928 a group of major Western companies had joined to form the Turkish Petroleum Company, a consortium designed to exploit Iraqi oil, and they had agreed not to operate independently of one another inside an area defined by a red line drawn on a French map. As it turned out, this "Red Line Agreement" precluded independent operations in Sa'udi Arabia. The Turkish Petroleum Company was owned 23.75% by the D'Arcy Exploration Company, a subsidiary of Anglo-Persian, in which the British government had a 51 % stake; 23.75% by Anglo-Saxon Petroleum, a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell, which was owned 60% by Royal Dutch and 40% by Shell Transport and Trading (a British company); 23.75% by Compagnie Francaise des Petroles, owned 35% by the French Government; and 23.75% by the Near East Development Corporation, which was itself owned 25% by Standard Oil of New Jersey, 25% Standard Oil of New York, 16.66% Gulf Oil, 16.66% Atlantic Refining, and 16.66% Pan American Petroleum and Transport, a subsidiary of Standard Oil of Indiana. A 5% interest in the whole thing was retained by C. S. Gulbenkian, the entrepreneur who had engineered the concession for Iraqi oil. (I hope that you took notes on all that. It will be on the exam next week.)

With most of their competitors thus tied up, Standard of California (or "Socal") had a free hand to explore first Bahrain and subsequently Sa'udi Arabia. Ibn Sa'ud had originally rejected a request by Socal to explore his domain, but when the company

struck oil in Bahrain in June of 1932 he changed his mind. Because of his urgent need for money, it *was* actually Ibn Sa'ud who took the initiative to approach Socal -- through H. St. John Philby, a British Arabist who had begun to serve as advisor to the king. Philby arranged for Lloyd Hamilton of Socal's legal staff to come to in Jiddah in February, 1933, to negotiate with 'Abd Allah Al Sulaiman Al Harnden, the king's finance minister. The negotiations took a long time. The king's principal concern *was* the size of the cash advance he could receive against future royalties. Hamilton's original offer was \$50,000 (a sizable amount in those days) but the king asked for L100,000 (at \$3.30 to the pound). At this juncture, a British representative of the Turkish Petroleum Company (whose name had now been changed to Iraq Petroleum Company) arrived in Jiddah, but he would only go as high as L10,000 and his offer was rejected.

In a detailed and charmingly candid account written much later, Philby revealed that Ibn Sa'ud's insistence on a sizable cash advance stemmed from his belief that there *was* little or no oil in Sa'udi Arabia, and was quite willing to have the highest bidder pay for the privilege of confirming that fact. Ibn Sa'ud was also reported to have told both the British and the Americans that, all things being equal, their "company and nationality would...be the more acceptable" partner for development of any oil fields that might be discovered.[7] And in the years to come, Ibn Sa'ud often used a hint of British interest to bring pressure on the Americans for a little more money.

Agreement was finally reached and a concession granted on May 29, 1933, for essentially the eastern half of Sa'udi Arabia. The agreement provided for an initial cash advance of L50,000, an annual "rental" of L5,000 until oil was discovered, a further cash advance of L100,000 after discovery, and royalties at the rate of 4 shillings per ton. The government agreed to forego the right to tax the company, and the company agreed to refrain from interference in the internal affairs of the country. Note that the American government played no role in the original concession; there was not even an American consul assigned to the country until 1942. *But for the paltry sum of L50, 000, or \$165,000, the United States had obtained exclusive rights to the development of Sa'udi oil.*

A concession is not a producing well, and it took until 1938 for geologists and field personnel to locate and tap into a truly productive field. The initial find was 20 miles west of Bahrain and 275 miles northeast of al-Riyad, near the town of Dharan. Work began on living facilities, a refinery and a deep-water port. In the meantime, in order to improve its marketing capability for Bahrain and Sa'udi oil, Socal had joined with the Texaco Company to create a joint subsidiary originally named the California Arabian Standard Oil Company (Casoc), but changed in 1944 to Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) in deference to Arab sensibilities. By 1941 the three structures which had been tapped were estimated to have reserves of 750 million barrels, and the existence of numerous similar untapped structures clearly indicated that potential reserves were much greater. Ibn Sa'ud began to recognize the value of his undeveloped resource, and at long last he began to see a possible end to unrelenting financial woes.

However, this was 1941, and the outbreak of war had radically curtailed revenue from the annual pilgrimage and customs duties. All this, coupled with crop failures and

the increasing cost of imported supplies, had brought the government to the edge of bankruptcy. Most critical was the lack of funds for the tribal subsidies, distributed in the form of food, clothing, and money, to retain the allegiance of the Bedouins. So what did Ibn Sa'ud do? He turned, of course, to the oil companies for cash. But Socal and Texaco had already sunk a considerable amount of money into the concession, and they were fearful that if aid could not be found, they might lose the concession. So what did they do? They turned, of course, to the United States government for help. Their proposal went all the way up the ranks to Roosevelt, with a request for an advance of \$6,000,000 a year to Ibn Sa'ud in return for that value in products eventually provided to the American government at a quite favorable price. But in 1941, Roosevelt considered aid to Sa'udi Arabia "a little far afield" for the United States, and he said "no." So what did the government do? It turned, of course, to the British. The United States was already providing Britain with a fair amount of Lend-Lease aid, and the request was for the British to come to the aid of Ibn Sa'ud. They did. The British increased and continued its annual subsidy to the king, and the oil companies, worried that the British might receive too much credit, made every effort to convince Ibn Sa'ud that they had engineered all of this. The real significance of this episode was the fact that in 1941 the United States government did not yet see significant strategic value in the Sa'udi connection. *In 1941, the United States was still a net exporter of oil.*

The war years greatly restricted operations in Sa'udi Arabia, mainly due the difficulty of shipping petroleum products out of the Middle East, and the on-site staff was greatly reduced. But Aramco personnel used the time well, by trying hard to learn how to operate in a culture very different from the United States. And they were met more than half way by an astute Ibn Sa'ud, who had a strong interest in modernizing his country within the cultural constraints of Islam. Aramco began a wide variety of educational, medical, and technical programs that were greatly expanded during the postwar years.

One of these was the al-Khatj agricultural project southeast of al-Riyad. Early Arab efforts to create a model farm there had not been very successful, and Ibn Sa'ud turned to the Americans for help. The American government sent out a couple of agricultural experts to lay out a plan, and oil company personnel aided with a geological survey and construction of an irrigation system. But the king came under intense criticism from an unreconstructed Wahhabi leader for "selling land" to unbelievers. He knew this because he had seen Americans "take over ... land at al-Khatj ... employ and discharge Arab workmen...build canals and use the precious water as they please[d]." Ibn Sa'ud summoned his critic to al-Riyad, sent a car to bring him there, and arranged a convocation of notables and Ulema (authorities on Islamic law) to sit in judgment. When the critic repeated his full accusation to the king's face, Ibn Sa'ud left his place, stood beside him as a fellow Muslim and presented his case with great eloquence. Demonstrating a thorough knowledge of the life of Muhammed, he argued that he was merely following in the Prophet's footsteps by employing foreign experts to benefit the people of Allah. After due deliberation, the judges decided in favor of the king. Ibn Sa'ud resumed his place, but the critic accepted the decision in poor grace. The king gave him twenty-four hours to apologize for his irreligious attitude or risk severe punishment, and had him led off "to meditate on his immediate future." Later that day the king met

him in private, quietly explained that his attitude had "brought discredit to their common religion," and won him over. The repentant critic was given presents and escorted in honor to his home, where he resumed his role as a loyal subject.

Meanwhile, back in the United States, the government was slowly becoming aware of the importance of Saudi Arabia. Concern about acquiring foreign reserves began in 1941 with reports circulating in the bureaucracy that the ratio of petroleum reserves to domestic consumption was steadily declining, and that before long America was going to require resources outside of the United States. (That prediction was correct. In 1948 the United States shifted from net exporter to net importer, and dependence on foreign oil continued to grow thereafter.) Aramco's attempt to obtain financial assistance from the government in 1941 called attention to the fact that there were extensive reserves in Saudi Arabia, and that an American company held the concession there. And then, in 1943, the Army-Navy Petroleum Board, worried about wartime supplies, recommended that refinery capacity be increased in Saudi Arabia. All of this came together in the fertile brain of Harold Ickes, in his role as Petroleum Administrator for War, and he developed a scheme to create a Petroleum Reserves Corporation and buy the entire concession from Standard of California and Texaco. This was resoundingly blocked by the other major American oil companies, who did not relish competing with the United States government. Arguments around the issue were long and bitter, but the outcome set the framework for the relationship between Aramco, the American government, and Ibn Sa'ud in the immediate postwar years. Aramco kept the concession and built production as fast as it could to satisfy the Ibn Sa'ud's voracious appetite for cash. The government quietly backed Aramco in every way it could, but with minimum public fanfare. In effect, Aramco became the instrument of the American government to keep Ibn Sa'ud happy and the concession securely in American hands.

Recognition of the growing importance of Saudi Arabia to the United States led to a meeting between Franklin Roosevelt, on his way home from the Yalta conference in 1945, and Ibn Sa'ud -- aboard the U.S.S. *Quincy* anchored in the Great Bitter Lake north of the city of Suez. It was a rather colorful meeting. The King brought his whole retinue aboard, including a small herd of lambs to be slaughtered for the state dinner that he planned. And he had his royal tent pitched on the deck rather than retire to more modern quarters below. The American sailors didn't quite know what to do with all of this, but cross-cultural diplomacy prevailed, and the meeting between the two heads of state went smoothly. The discussion centered on oil of special interest to Roosevelt, and the possibility of a Jewish state in Palestine, which Ibn Sa'ud adamantly opposed. Roosevelt assured Ibn Sa'ud that he would not help the Jews against the Arabs and would consult on the Palestine problem before making any decisions.

The beginning of the Cold War considerably increased the value of Saudi Arabia in the minds of American military planners. It is standard military procedure to undertake staff studies based on the most likely opponent in a possible conflict, in order to plan for force requirements and military procurement. As early as 1945, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had determined that the most obvious opponent in any future war was the Soviet Union, and planning had started against that possibility. In this context, a Joint Logistics

Committee determined that a major weakness in any future war would be lack of petroleum to fuel the military. As a consequence, *it recommended that emphasis be placed on utilizing Middle East resources and conserving Western hemisphere reserves as much as possible for use in a for future war.* This, in turn, led the State Department to quietly encourage Aramco to hold on to its concession and increase production in Sa'udi Arabia -- which fit well with Ibn Sa'ud's continuous desire for more money.

But Ibn Sa'ud's appetite for revenue was insatiable. He and his finance minister kept "nickel and dimeing" Aramco for one thing after another, until, in 1950, they reached agreement on a 50-50 split of all revenue from Sa'udi production. This was only the beginning, because as years went by, the Sa'udi government gradually negotiated full control of Aramco production unto itself: leaving the skeleton of a company in only a technical support capacity. But the close ties with the United States continued, including heavy Sa'udi purchases of military equipment from the United States. The United States thus acquired a critical strategic ally in the Cold War, and the Sa'udis "gained unprecedented wealth and a powerful protector." [II] The only obvious point of friction was American support for the State of Israel and Sa'udi quiet, but equally strong support for the Palestinian cause. But both parties considered their relationship too important to let the Palestinian issue undercut their ties. Also overlooked at the time was the influence of the extremely conservative Wahhabi religious establishment in Sa'udi society. That did not become a critical factor in the strategic equation until years later. And this is where matters stood when Ibn Sa'ud died in 1953. He had come a long way from his days as a youthful tribal warrior to his role as an astute monarch of a wealthy nation sitting astride a quarter of the world's oil reserves. Quite an achievement.

Epilogue: Holy War, Part II

Fast forward now to the year 2001. There had been a long and bitter war between Iraq and Iran; Saadam Husein had invaded Kuwait, and the United States had assembled a massive coalition to drive him out; an American military base had been established in Sa'udi Arabia from which to fly patrols over parts of Iraq; and a long and bitter intefada had broken out in Palestine, with mounting casualties on both sides. The region was tense.

Another development had gone largely unnoticed. About 1930 a devout young man named Mohammed bin Awad bin Laden emigrated from a tiny village in Yemen to the country soon to be renamed Sa'udi Arabia. [12] Starting as a porter assisting pilgrims coming to Mecca for the Hajj, he moved into the construction business when oil money began to pour into country, and he was extraordinarily successful. So successful, in fact, that he was asked by the royal family to refurbish the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem after a fire, and to build mosques in both Mecca and Medina. He was also highly successful in the marriage bed. He sired some fifty sons and daughters by a number of wives before he died in a plane crash in 1967.

One of those sons was Osama bin Laden. (The name means "young lion" in Arabic.) He was born February 10, 1957, and grew up with a strict religious education.

Unlike the rest of his family, he became a zealot on the subject of Wahabbi puritanism, and left his thriving family business to go to Afghanistan to defend Islam against the Soviet invaders. In that capacity he was funded by multiple sources, including the American CIA. When that war was over, he moved briefly to Sudan, and then back to Afghanistan to support the equally puritan Taliban. He invested much of his own money in the cause, but also received substantial funding from other wealthy Sa'udis, under the guise of charity for the Afghan people. His thinking grew more and more intense, especially over the growing worldliness of the Sa'udi royal family. They simply did not live up to his understanding of the pure teachings of the Prophet. And he was incensed by the presence of "infidel" American troops on the sacred land of the Arabian peninsula.

In the latter half of the twentieth century a general malaise had settled over much of the Middle East, among both the poor and many of the educated middle class. It had many interrelated causes. There was still bitterness over memory of the Crusades. (Historical memory is much longer in the Middle East than in this country.) There was bitterness over years of subjection by the colonial powers of Britain and France, especially in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan and Bangladesh. There was relative poverty compared with Western riches. Modernity posed a threat to the values of traditional Muslim societies. And there were corrupt, authoritarian regimes seen as linked to the morally decadent West. (Much of the Middle Eastern view of Western society is colored by how it is depicted in Western movies and TV.) Anger over all of this had tended to be channeled toward their own governments and toward the United States for supporting some of those governments.

This milieu provided fertile ground for zealots like Osama bin Laden. In 1998 he joined with an Egyptian doctor -- Ayman al-Zawahiri, leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad -- and others from Pakistan and Bangladesh, to issue a manifesto for the movement they were founding. Bin Laden's real issue was with the Sa'udi royal family, and Zawahiri's real issue was with the Egyptian government for not instituting a full Islamic regime and for attempting to suppress Islamic Jihad. Both were angry with the United States for supporting those governments, and the manifesto added the plight of the Palestinian people and the people of Iraq in order to gain more support on "the Arab street." It is worth quoting excerpts from the manifesto to show the extremes to which fanatics can go.

The document is titled, "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders by the World Islamic Front." [13] After a long preface, it argues that, "for over seven years the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim people ... Despite the great devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people by the crusader-Zionist alliance ... Americans are once again trying to repeat the horrific massacres, as though they were not content with the protracted blockade imposed after the ferocious war ... If the American's aims are religious and economic, the aim also is to serve the Jews' petty state and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and murder of Muslims there." The manifesto -- termed a fatwa by bin Laden -- then calls for

action, with these chilling words: "The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies - civilian and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible ... in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [in Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam."

Despite all of this rhetoric, the fatwa is completely contrary to the explicit teachings of Islam. The Qur'an itself says, "Fight in God's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression -- for, verily, God does not love aggressors." [14] And the Prophet himself is quoted as saying that, in time of war, those not directly connected with fighting must be spared. "Do not kill a woman, a child, an elderly person, those in retreat, or those employed to cultivate the land, and do not destroy buildings or destroy the land." [15] How much clearer can you get?

As you well know, Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri created an incredibly sophisticated network of terrorists, with training camps in Afghanistan, to carry out the "holy war" which they envisioned. After a number of attacks on American facilities and interests in the Middle East, they launched the one which exceeded all others -- the horrific destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City. If bin Laden and al-Zawahiri sought to galvanize the Islamic world into action against the United States, they grossly miscalculated. Instead they galvanized the United States into its most forceful response since Pearl Harbor, and radically changed the national priorities. In first place now, is an international war on terrorism in all of its manifestations.

There are many causes for the rise of terrorism in this form, but one contributing factor has been the influence of the puritanical version of Islam dominant in Sa'udi Arabia - Wahhabism. Osama bin Laden clearly came out of this crucible, and it illustrates the danger that strict theological thinking, if not moderated, can be transformed into extremism by religious zealots. In this case, the original pact between Muhammed ibn Sa'ud and Muhammed ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, and the doctrine they espoused, was used by the later Ibn Sa'ud to weld desert tribesmen into an oil-rich nation, with Wahhabism as its cohesive core. And then Wahhabism contributed to Osama bin Laden turning against that nation and its supporters, with terrible consequences for the United States.

To paraphrase the book of Hosea, Muhammed ibn Sa'ud and Muhammed ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab sowed the wind in 1744, and America reaped the whirlwind in the year 2001. [16]

NOTES

[1] Qur'an, 24:30-38.

[2] Qur'an, 2: 190-92.

[3] Except as noted below, the following discussion of Ibn Sa'ud and Sa'ud Arabia is an abbreviated version of the account in my book on Aramco. the United States and Saudi Arabia (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 6-10. That account, in turn, is based on the sources cited therein.

- [4] Qur'an, 2:4.
- [5] H. St. John Philby, Saudi Arabia (London: Ernest Benn, 1955), p. 333.
- [6] For a complete description of how this came about, see Anderson, pp. 10-21.
- [7] Philby, Arabian Oil Ventures (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute, 1964), p. 133.
- [8] Memorandum, Roosevelt to Jesse Jones, Federal Loan Administrator, July 18, 1941, Foreign Relations of the United States (1941), vol. III, p. 643.
- [9] Letter, William A. Eddy (at Jiddah) to Secretary of State, December 4, 1944, Item 890F.001 Abdul Aziz/12-444, Record Group 59, U.S. National Archives.
- [10] William B. Quandt, Saudi Arabia in the 1980s: Foreign Policy, Security and Oil (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1981), pp. 47-48.
- [11] Ibid., p. 49.
- [12] This account of Osama bin Laden and his family is based on Peter I. Bergen, Holy War. Inc.: the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden (New York: The Free Press, 2001), pp. 41-62 and onward.
- [13] "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders," published in Arabic in the London newspaper al-Quds al-Arabi; English translation obtained from the web-site of the World Islamic Front.
- [14] Qur'an, 2:190.
- [15] From a typescript provided by Dr. Salem Foad, on the Board of the Islamic Education Association of Cincinnati.
- [16] The Bible. Hosea, 4:9.
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