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About the Author

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Introduction

Modern Saudi Arabia exists because the ruling Al Sa`ud family forged together enduring tribal alliances that withstood the test of time. While ruling family politics in the Kingdom share many characteristics with other hereditary monarchies, Saudi Arabia stands alone in a number of aspects. First, the family’s sheer size and complexity, in terms of both its internal structure and composition as well as its connections to Saudi society, make the Saudi political system markedly different from other past and present monarchies. In addition, family politics have developed in the context of vast wealth and profound transformations that have altered the face of Saudi Arabia, perhaps permanently. Thus, it is on such premises that family politics must be analysed with an emphasis on determining the interplay between politics and policy on the one hand, and the balance between cohesive and disintegrative forces within the family on the other. These implications for Saudi behavior have a direct bearing on Saudi power and succession.

Remarkably, these factors came into play once again in March 2009, when King `Abdallah bin `Abdul `Aziz appointed his half-brother, Prince Nayif, as his second deputy prime minister. Both the appointment, as well as the candidate, came as something of a surprise, as few observers anticipated such a critical elevation for the Minister of Interior. In fact, even if a pessimistic observer concluded that Nayif was bidding for the Saudi throne, most feared that the interior minister’s updated status could potentially limit the many reforms introduced by the monarch since 2005. Although few anticipated permanent schisms within the establishment, Nayif harboured a reputation for toughness, which may ironically facilitate King `Abdallah’s task with more conservative voices. Still, even that was pure speculation, since no outsider could authoritatively predict any particular outcome. What may be possible to anticipate, however, is the fact that Saudi Arabia is very much embarked on an accelerated pace for economic and social transformations, which will introduce epochal changes over the course of the next few years. As the country adapts to new domestic and regional dynamics, what are the most likely scenarios for succession in Saudi Arabia, and how will Nayif’s appointment affect family stability? Is this latest selection a further `Abdallah refinement of the system and will it add value to the Al Sa`ud?


`Abdallah bin `Abdul `Aziz Al Sa’ud and the 1992 Edict

`Abdallah bin `Abdul `Aziz became Heir Apparent in 1982 when Fahd bin `Abdul `Aziz acceded to the Saudi rulership. True to traditional arrangements, the two men were accepted by the majority, as `Abdallah pledged his bay’ah (oath of allegiance) by declaring: “God has compensated [Saudi Arabia] well in His Majesty the great King Fahd,” and called on Saudis to “unite [their] efforts and grow together, government and people, behind my lord, His Majesty King Fahd”. For the remaining of the 1980s, Fahd and `Abdallah shared governing responsibilities, the former concentrating primarily on international concerns and the latter on regional, especially Arab, affairs. Several internal disagreements notwithstanding, Fahd and `Abdallah saw things differently. His most important and lasting decree came on 1 March 1992, when the monarch issued several key documents, including the Basic Law of Government, the statutes governing the newly created Majlis al-Shurah [Consultative Council], and the Law of the Provinces.

This was a momentous step forward because an institutionalisation process was clearly established. Even if the monarch’s decision was propelled by the rising tide of internal opposition, as well as the repercussions of the War for Kuwait, significant and permanent changes were under way, especially the second section of the Basic Law “that was of greatest interest and proved to be a bombshell both within and outside the Al Saud.” In fact, just two sub-sections of the second chapter contained the most controversial, and undefined, lines. Article 5 section b stated that “rulers of the country shall be from amongst the sons of the founder, King `Abdul `Aziz bin `Abdul Rahman Al Sa`ud, and their descendants,” and that “the most upright among them shall receive allegiance according to the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (Peace be upon him).” The last line, imposing a qualification—“the most upright”—was telling. One interpretation was that seniority was no longer the primary qualification for succession and that other considerations, including being upstanding, strengthened a candidate’s eligibility. Another interpretation alluded to the fact that all direct descendants of the founder, that is grandsons as well as sons, were now eligible to rule the Kingdom. Just as enigmatic, Article 5, section c, further stated “the King shall choose the Heir Apparent and relieve him by a Royal Decree”. Without a doubt, this last line threatened the entire balance of power that existed in the Kingdom, foreshadowing the authority of then Heir Apparent `Abdallah bin `Abdul `Aziz.

Fahd’s bold decree—which was the law—that a Saudi monarch could name and remove his heir apparent, and that the latter would not automatically succeed, established several new criteria for succession. First, the 1992 edict granted a ruler the prerogative to choose and withdraw approval of an heir apparent, as an entirely legal proposition. Second, it further acknowledged that the more than sixty grandsons of

4 For the text of Heir Apparent `Abdallah’s speech, see Foreign Broadcast Information Service—Middle East and Africa FBIS-MEA-V-82-115, 15 June 1982, pp. C2-C3.
5 Kéchichian-Succession, op. cit., pp. 71-73.
`Abdul `Aziz were now legitimate claimants to the throne. By declaring that successors could be chosen from the most suitable of `Abdul `Aziz’s progeny, Fahd implied that `Abdallah was not necessarily the presumed heir to the throne. Finally, the decision to include grandsons into the process proved that some senior members were indeed committed to the younger generation. This was the turning point in the succession issue for the decree clearly broke away from Al Sa`ud time-tested and tribally favoured traditions.

At the time these edicts were under preparation and about to be announced, `Abdallah “was said to have been ‘outraged,’ that his position … was defined as being at the whim of King Fahd, rather than as his right as the next in line.” Even if `Abdallah was advanced in age, he was in good health and certainly considered himself to be eminently qualified for the post. Aware that such a position might create a permanent wedge between him and his heir apparent, the monarch quickly issued another decree on 1 March 1992, confirming Heir Apparent `Abdallah’s safe position, including his command of the National Guard. Defence Minister Sultan, for his part, apparently was equally concerned. After several years as Second Deputy Prime Minister, and presumed heir to the Heir Apparent, Sultan was placed in a position that would require him to lobby much harder within the family to step-up the succession ladder. Moreover, he would have—at least theoretically—faced stiff competition from some of his younger brothers, sons and nephews. Indeed, after 1992 nothing prevented the ruling family to settle on a younger son or grandson of `Abdul `Aziz, to provide both continuity and change. Given that the succession line was not agreed to, and while it moved from brother to brother through the sons of the founder, the 1992 edict further ensured that fundamental political changes were indeed acceptable.

As fate would dictate, and debilitated by disease, Fahd entrusted the Al Sa`ud as well as the Kingdom’s public custodianship, to Heir Apparent `Abdallah in 1995 who husbanded all of the country’s needs with utmost care. Fahd bin `Abdul `Aziz passed away on 1 August 2005 at the age of 84 after a long illness. Senior family members held an immediate conclave and almost immediately appointed `Abdallah to succeed his brother. In turn, the new ruler appointed the second deputy prime minister Sultan, as his designated heir. As expected, the fifth Al Sa`ud succession since the country’s formal founding in 1932, was assured even if critics opined that “this tribal way of succession … no way to run a modern country, let alone one with the largest known reserves of oil”. Within hours, senior Al Sa`ud leaders, followed by thousands of Saudis, pledged their oath of allegiance to `Abdallah and Sultan. This bay`ah was not a foregone conclusion as many anticipated potential problems between the two senior most princes in the kingdom. In the event, it was duly delivered, probably because of the former ruler’s 1992 edict, as well as `Abdallah’s demonstrated skills during his regency after 1995. As discussed below, and though overtaken by a new deliberative body empowered to determine an Al Sa`ud successor, it would be a mistake to conclude that

8 Henderson, op. cit., p. 22.
9 Henderson, op. cit., p. 22, footnote 2.
10 Of 21 successions in Al Sa`ud reigns to date, a monarch’s rule went to a son seven times, and to a cousin four times. The total for brother-to-brother succession stood at ten.
the 1992 edict was now caduc. A more accurate assessment, developed below, may well be that this decree protected a specific royal authority even better than originally intended.

`Abdallah after 2005

As soon as `Abdallah assumed full powers, he embarked on a slew of changes, which pleased some and worried others. Surprising everyone, he quickly issued blanket pardons to several dissidents, including intellectuals who had the audacity to call for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. A State Court had earlier condemned the men to jail terms having found them guilty of “stirring up sedition and disobeying the ruler.”12 Yet, by issuing blanket pardons, `Abdallah reflected both magnanimity as well as a strength of character. The decision was as clear an expression of leadership as could be mustered especially after withholding his innermost sentiments for over a decade. As an absolute monarch, however, he was no longer constrained by Article 5 of the Basic Law, which limited the heir apparent to “duties delegated to him by the King.”13 `Abdallah could now do as he pleased. By acting the way he did, and as quickly as he did, he further set the tone for his preferences. The king was on the march to further strengthen Saudi society as he refined his policies.

`Abdallah bin `Abdul `Aziz and Succession

In the few years since his accession, `Abdallah made dramatic alterations to the way a future monarch would be chosen for Saudi Arabia, and which potentially threatened to upset the family’s well-earned reputation for internal balance. In October 2006, he decreed that a committee of Princes will vote on the eligibility of future generations of kings and heirs, to better formalise the succession process. Although the contemplated system was not stated to come into effect until the current heir apparent—Sultan bin `Abdul `Aziz—acceded to rulership, the mere fact that a formal committee was envisioned for the process was telling. It was King `Abdallah’s first major decision regarding succession and it spoke volumes.

With a new committee named *Hay’at al-Bay`ah* [Allegiance Commission], `Abdallah underscored the necessity to pledge allegiance to the Al Sa`ud, as the name clearly implied.14 Although this new mechanism inspired observers to conclude that this was vintage `Abdallah—that is seeking allegiance to the Al Sa`ud—in reality the new law was nothing more than a new Succession Law.15 In fact, the confusion arose because one pledged allegiance to something or someone, whereas this new law introduced his long anticipated reforms to the kingdom’s succession mechanism.

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15 Though the literal translation for *Hay’at al-Bay’ah* is indeed “Allegiance Commission,” a more accurate transliteration may be “Allegiance Law of Succession.”
With 25 articles defining its purposes, the “Allegiance Law of Succession” replaced the informal family gathering that selected and approved successors, though secret deliberations were not excluded.\(^{16}\) The Commission, whose size was not initially announced, would be chaired by the oldest surviving son of the founder and include sons and grandsons of `Abdul ‘Aziz bin `Abdul Rahman. This development was an innovation because it now included specific members of the second generation even if their names were not made public. Not surprisingly, the committee was called to follow strict regulations contained in the Basic Law, which the new decree amended without cancelling it.

Under the previous system, the monarch enjoyed a full prerogative to name and dismiss his heir apparent, although such decisions were almost always debated within the inner family circle. Though the key provisions in the 1992 decree were not abolished, in the new structure, members of the Commission were empowered to have a say in the appointment of an heir, even when recommended (or suggested) by the monarch. Though few appreciated its repercussions at the time, Prince Nayif’s appointment as Second Deputy Prime Minister in March 2009, clarified what role(s) this commission may be called to play. If members rejected a nominated heir, or called for an alternative vote for one of three leaders designated by the ruler, all bets were off as far as an enthronement was concerned. Moreover, the appointment of a new heir was further placed within a strict timetable—within 30 days of the accession of a new monarch—even if few anticipated lengthy deliberations given the secret nature of all decision-making mechanisms.\(^{17}\)

To prevent nasty surprises, `Abdallah foresaw the need for a Transitory Ruling Council composed of five members of the institution, who would assume responsibilities for state affairs for a maximum period of one week, if neither the monarch nor his heir were fit to rule. This idea was amply relevant given the advanced ages of the current leadership and the potential for disagreements within the Al Sa’ud. Importantly, the Transitory Ruling Council would not enjoy prerogatives affecting state institutions, such as dissolving the government or the country’s self-styled Consultative Council (parliament), the Majlis al-Shurah, nor would it be allowed to amend the Basic Law or any “laws that [we]re linked to the rule.” In other words, `Abdallah ensured that no one outside the family would contemplate recommending non-Al Sa’ud names for the post. In fact, by institutionalising the process, he etched in stone what was also largely guaranteed, namely that only sons and grandsons of `Abdul ‘Aziz would accede to the Saudi throne. Not only was this a turning point for Riyadh but, equally revelatory, it placed `Abdallah’s cachet on succession matters by strengthening the ruling family.

With this majestic imprimatur, `Abdallah reaffirmed his will to power on 8 October 2007 when an 18-article decree provided by-laws to the 2006 Succession Edict. Although the 25-article “Allegiance Law of Succession” replaced the informal family gathering that selected and approved successors, it lacked critical operational features, which was probably intentional. In fact, while secret deliberations were not excluded in this vision, the Commission was now equipped with lucid regulations to rationalise the

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\(^{17}\) “Saudi Arabia Sets Up Panel to Formalise succession,” *Reuters*, 20 October 2006.
procedure. Interestingly, the King retained his 1992-granted right to dismiss his heir, but gently sidelined the family council that was amalgamated in the new commission.

**Presenting the New Law**

Al Sa`ud family members were astonished to hear `Abdallah address his brothers, sons, and nephews in a talk that centred on service to the nation and to Islam. He reiterated his belief that the Al Sa`ud ruling family was of the “nation and the people are from us, and we all share the honor of belonging to this country.” The discourse was spontaneous, as the ruler called on the Ulamah (religious scholars) “of wisdom, thought and creed” to rally around the throne since the Al Sa`ud respected them. He further urged his brothers, sons and nephews “to become God-fearing people and to enhance the pillars of justice, to close ranks, settle differences through discussion and dialogue, and never allow anyone to interfere in the family’s affairs.” Most in attendance were stunned at this level of attention in preliminary remarks and anticipated a major declaration. The King did not disappoint.

Speaking to all surviving sons of the country’s founder, ‘Abdul-`Aziz bin ‘Abdul-Rahman, who were led by Prince Mish‘al, Heir Apparent Sultan, as well as dozens of grandsons, the monarch issued a breathtaking order that identified the membership of his “Allegiance Commission.” The Commission encompassed every son of the founder or, in case of death, a single grandson chosen by the sub-branch. Remarkably, the royal decree placed 35 specific names around the decision-making table where the next ruler was to be chosen. Although the monarch and his heir apparent were naturally absent from this list, their respective eldest sons were part of the group, which was divided more or less evenly between sons (15) and grandsons (20).18 All vowed before the ruler, pledging to “God Almighty to remain loyal to Religion, King and Country, not to divulge any of the state’s secrets, to preserve its interests and systems, to work for the unity of the ruling family as well as the national unity, and to perform duties sincerely, honestly and justly.” The Saudi monarch named Mish‘al bin `Abdul-`Aziz, a former deputy Defence Minister and Governor of Makkah, chairman of the commission to select future kings and heirs apparent.19

Gone was the closed room conclave between a handful of senior men, and though it took more than a full year between the initial announcement on 7 October 2007 that such a body was in fact formed and the actual appointment of its members, it was nevertheless a major development. Interestingly, ’Abdallah first issued the institution’s bylaws, which explained how the process would actually work, before choosing its members, perhaps to allow for the idea to sink in. Yet, the reliance on a growing number of grandsons confirmed that an institutionalisation process was underway because members of this second generation lacked their predecessors’ necessary experience.

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18 In 2007, the balance was 16 sons and 19 grandsons. Fawwaz bin `Abdul `Aziz died on 22 July 2008 in Paris, France.
Thereafter, upon the death of a monarch, it would be the Commission that was expected to quickly gather and to confirm the heir apparent, who must be chosen within ten days of the ruler’s accession to the throne. Failure to do so would mean accepting the council’s alternative choice. Though the statute further confirmed that the King must approve council decisions, it was not clear what procedures would be followed if the monarch contested committee selections. This major stumbling block notwithstanding, by empowering a 35-member Council to make key decisions, ‘Abdallah permanently placed his own mark on the Saudi monarchy, even if internal struggles could not be ruled out. Although the powers of the monarch were not questioned in this law, they illustrated the ruler’s meticulous approach and his intrinsic preferences, which literally meant that even the appointment of a second Deputy Prime Minister would not prevent the mechanism from functioning to select the most upright.

The Second Deputy Prime Minister

Because ‘Abdallah left vacant the position of Second Deputy Prime Minister for almost five years, many concluded that the monarch was mulling over his various options, or that he was not ready to take the next step. He may have opted to defer that choice to his successor. For years, the non-choice fueled speculation that the ruler was ill at ease to tackle such a gargantuan topic, further illustrating existing family cleavages. In fact, ‘Abdallah opted for internal stability by quickly designating his brother Prince Sultan as heir apparent, and seldom contemplated to force a change to replace his heir with another Al Sa’ud, even if his predecessor’s 1992 edict was available to alter fundamental changes to the succession line. Nevertheless, Sultan’s medical conditions and long absences from home necessitated an appointment for Second Deputy Prime Minister in case both the ruler and his heir were taken ill or became incapacitated.20 Simply stated, ‘Abdallah took a technical decision in March 2009, as he was neither keen to propel his offspring to the forefront, or enter into specific new alliances to encourage internal family divisions. Moreover, his preferences focused on the careful re-arrangements of the succession process, through an institutional mechanism. Yet, even that was in jeopardy because of Sultan’s health conditions.

Nayif bin `Abdul `Aziz

As stated above, the Nayif nomination on 27 March 2009 came as something of a shock though Prince Sultan’s treatment for colon cancer, and his extended absences from several demanding duties, necessitated a stop-gap selection. Because ’Abdallah was about to travel to Doha to attend the League of Arab States Summit before proceeding to London for the G20 Summit, it was imperative to leave a senior official in charge, which added burdens to the leukemia-suffering 76-years old Nayif.21

Bewildered by Nayif’s appointment, Prince Talal bin `Abdul `Aziz, a noted liberal senior prince, issued a statement a day later, questioning the very assumption of a Nayif election to the heirship. Unabashedly, Talal reflected the dissent that existed within the ruling family, releasing a statement to Reuters in which he asked the monarch to “clarify” the meaning of the selection. Without waiting for an answer, he further declared that Nayif’s promotion should be subject to approval by the Allegiance Council, as he called on the court to confirm whether Nayif “will become crown prince.”22 Talal and many liberals were concerned that if Nayif were to eventually become Heir and Ruler, that Saudi Arabia’s gradual steps toward reform would suffer severe setbacks.

21 Born in Ta’if either in 1933 or 1934, Prince Nayif bin `Abdul `Aziz Al Sa`ud received basic religious education at the Palace, and held several government positions starting with a brief stint as Governor of Riyadh (1953-1954). He was appointed Deputy Minister of Interior in 1954 by King Sa`ud bin `Abdul `Aziz and became Minister of State for Internal Affairs in 1970. Five years later, he was entrusted the interior ministry portfolio in full, a post he preserved in 2007. Over the years, and because of his most sensitive position, Nayif developed a rare reputation for being the most assertive Al Sa`ud. To his credit, he fulfilled his mandate with gusto, winning universal scorn for implementing an iron-fist policy to preserve and protect family interests. So-called liberals and alleged conservatives criticised him in unison, maintaining that he relied on the sword more than the law, and that his methods backfired as the Kingdom experienced a steady stream of opposition forces. Like other senior Al Sa’uds, Nayif balanced his preferences, ostensibly to better gauge what would be tolerated.

In 2006, he curbed the powers of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, denying the mutawa’in the right to arrest suspects without the presence of police officers. This was certainly a difficult decision but in line with King ’Abdallah’s sharp directives to abandon un-Islamic, disruptive, and questionable behaviour by law-enforcement personnel. Nayif, who was not necessarily on the best of terms with his monarch, applied his ruler’s wishes both because he was a committed family player and, equally important, because he was the target of sustained denigration. In the aftermath of the 9/11 bombing attacks in the United States, Nayif sustained a vilification barrage from sources that identified with the fifteen Saudis involved in the attacks, allegedly for tolerating their movements within and outside of the kingdom.

As part of the original “Sudayri Seven,” Nayif was one of the most powerful members of the ruling family, technically third in line to the Saudi rulership. His essential role at the Ministry of Interior, to oversee public security, direct coast guard forces, supervise civil defence units, coordinate fire departments, instruct border police, control special security and investigative functions, including criminal inquiries, and administer the clergy within the Kingdom, concentrated immense powers in his hands. By virtue of these responsibilities, he is a major power broker in internal family affairs, and cannot be dismissed for obtuse views. On the contrary, his opinion carries weight within various groups, including more moderate forces that would wish to see him on their side in any deliberation. Likewise, conservative voices will also rally to him, believing that he would represent their opinions best. See Mahmoud Ahmad, “Prince Naif Curbs Power of Virtue Commission,” Arab News, 25 May, 2006, at http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=82705&d=25&m=5&y=2006; Michael Scott Doran, “The Saudi Paradox,” Foreign Affairs 83:1, January/February 2004, pp. 35-51; and Simon Henderson, “Desert Schism: Prince Nayef Bids for Saudi Throne,” op. cit., 31 March 2009.

Moreover, because Talal remained a close ally of `Abdallah, it may be accurate to speculate that the ruler approved this press release. In the event, Saudis close to the Palace confirmed that the ruler was aware of the Talal missive, but felt it necessary to go ahead with the appointment for technical reasons, knowing that members of the Allegiance Commission would intervene if need be. Accordingly, senior members gave their consent to Nayif’s nomination, reserving the right to examine his credentials at the right time. Towards that end, and even if ill, it was critical to note that Sultan was still the Heir Apparent and, once elevated to rulership, could appoint whomever he chose. Still, Nayif-bashing was added to the on-going Saudi-bashing repertoires, allegedly because Nayif was “perceived as one of the most conservative forces in the kingdom and an opponent of reforms that may reduce the clout of both the monarchy and the religious establishment in the kingdom.”

A leading source informed its readers that when asked what he [Nayif] thought of women becoming members of the Shurah Council, he apparently declared that he did not “think it was necessary,” further illustrating how unqualified the new second deputy prime minister was. But Nayif’s record was stellar on the key front of counter-terrorism, “and he is credited with Saudi Arabia’s relative success at curbing radical Islamist terrorist groups.” While it may be facile to dismiss Talal’s criticisms, those views represented a rare facet of internal debates, simply because so few senior leaders shared deliberations and views. Talal spoke loudly, but he spoke for many, and whereas equally powerful princes disagreed with his zeal for reforms, few ignored him.

Succession Dilemma for Al Sa`ud

Senior members of the Al Sa`ud recognized that they have a succession problem. As recently as mid-2005, Prince Talal bin `Abdul `Aziz, a brother of King `Abdallah, called on Riyadh to “start with political reform, that is introducing a new basic stature (of government), or what is known in the West as a constitution.” Talal emphasised that the proposed constitution would be tantamount to “a social covenant between ruler and ruled, compatible with known constants in Saudi Arabia in terms of religion and genuine traditions.” Five years earlier Talal had cautioned that the Al Sa`ud ought to “find a smooth way to pass the monarchy to the next generation, or face a power struggle after the era of old royals passes.” Prince Talal, who was the leader of the “Free Princes” movement—which called for democratic changes in the early 1960s—drew the ire of senior Al Sa`ud family members in the late 1950s and early 1960s and may do so again. Still, he was rehabilitated after several years in exile and, equally important, after pledging his undivided loyalty to the family.

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More recently, Talal saw the need to further modernise the Kingdom, “including giving women more rights to work and allowing them to drive, … limit[ing] Riyadh’s substantial military spending, and pass[ing] power to the next generation because,” he further clarified, “our problems are with the grandsons,” who will, presumably, require a new mechanism to ensure smooth successions. In September 2007, Talal proposed to form a political party in Saudi Arabia, a proposal that could not have been made without the King’s approval.²⁷ This was a calculated declaration by a trusted brother who no longer challenged family concord. In fact, Talal believed that political reforms were in the best interests of the ruling establishment, even if others preferred reform at a slower pace. `Abdallah for his part recognized that genuine sociopolitical reforms were long overdue and seemed to be working in earnest to address them. Should a political party be established, chances were excellent that it would be led by an Al Sa’ud steeped in established traditions and would further guide whatever reforms were implemented. The ultimate challenge for Riyadh, however, was whether the Al Sa’ud were able to keep up with the reformist ruler, since reorganisations by themselves were not enough. Rather, as societies equipped themselves with the wherewithal to self-govern, and trained legal minds to look after their interests—both those of the general public as well as of each individual—it behooved the ruling establishment to correctly interpret their “will to power.” `Abdallah’s ultimate challenge was to affirm his own resolve as well as acculturate putative successors to appreciate the limits of power. This was critical as he forged ahead with inclusive political institutions that added value to citizens at large—not easy propositions under the best of circumstances, but certainly within the realm of the possible in Riyadh because of the monarch’s foresight, dedication, and impeccable credentials.

Although King `Abdallah did not publicly respond to Talal’s latest demands about modernisation, social restructuring, and succession, these critical questions—certainly the most urgent and obvious facing the Kingdom—were well known to him. As Talal noted in June 1999, the ruling family faced certain inevitable challenges, to modernise and come to terms with the difficult succession question. Nonetheless, his frankness amply illustrated the dilemma for `Abdallah—as well as his successors—eager to maintain Saudi Arabia’s traditions while engaging in a full-scale modernisation programme. `Abdallah was amply aware of the delicate relationship between the kingdom’s sustained development and various political reforms. How up and coming Al Sa’ud leaders positioned themselves and how their decisions affected Western security interests, mattered to political and economic leaders everywhere. How the Al Sa’ud defined and shaped their “will to power” (the determinants to prevail against all odds), further affected long-term relationships between Saudi Arabia and a slew of Western, Eastern, as well as Muslim countries.

Conclusion

Five years into his rule, `Abdallah bin `Abdul `Aziz is demonstrating a knack for significant changes, first with his 2007 Succession Law and now with both dramatic shifts in the judiciary, as well as the appointment of a second deputy prime minister. Neither of these measures will upset the 1744 alliance between the Al Sa`ud and the Al Shaykh, which forms the cornerstone of the Kingdom’s legitimacy, and which will not be subjected to any cataclysmic tests. Rather, the Saudi monarch probably intends to strengthen that critical alliance by interjecting fresh reforms, not to eliminate any party or group, but to open the doors for gradual transformations required by time. These were clear signs of inherent skills to refine his “will to power.”