CHAPTER VI

THE IHWAN AND ‘ABD AL-‘AZIZ

The second Saudi realm ended in 1891 with the Rashidis taking over the whole of Najd. With the fall of Riyadh, the Saudi capital, and the self-exile of ‘Abd al-Rahman in Kuwait, there remained no Saudi contender for the Rashidis in Najd. In Kuwait ‘Abd al-Rahman had with him his son ‘Abd al-‘Aziz who, since his birth in 1880 had seen the decline of the Saudis in Najd.

‘Abd al-‘Aziz was barely eleven or twelve years of age when he reached Kuwait. He received a religious education under the supervision of a theologian. At a tender age he had memorised a good many parts of the Qur’an. At an early age he was also taught the use of firearms and had perfected the arts of travelling in the

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deserts. In these accomplishments he attained great proficiency, while on the other hand he did not relish the study of books.

At the time of his stay there, Kuwait was recognised as being under the nominal jurisdiction of the luris. During the mid 1890's, however, the growing importance of the area made Kuwait internationally important. In 1896, Shaykh Mubarak al'Sabah assumed power in Kuwait by usurping and killing his brother Muhammad. 'Abd al-'Aziz had, during his stay in Kuwait developed a close friendship with Shaykh Mubarak who was an exceptionally shrewd and able ruler. Mubarak had developed close relations with the British and therefore political activities in Kuwait had increased.

In Mubarak's house 'Abd al-'Aziz had enough time to learn much of diplomacy. Because of its strategical importance all types of people from different parts of the world visited Kuwait. 'Abd al-'Aziz rubbed shoulders with men of all professions and origins: traders, speculators,

4. It is said that he had the backing of the British and the British resident had instigated the murder. Cf. B.C. Dusch, Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914 (Lan Angeles, 1967), p. 97.
explorers, bankers, civil servants, politicians, adventurers, and also with the agents of foreign powers - French, English, Germans, and Russians. He had strong resolves to regain for himself the throne of his forefathers in Najd. Towards the close of the nineteenth century, Kuwait was threatened by the Rashidis of Najd. 'Abd al-'Aziz, who was waiting for a chance to test the power of the Rashidis, raised an army and fought on the side of Kuwait. His aim was to occupy Riyadh but had to return to Kuwait.

'Abd al-'Aziz had not given up his resolve to regain the lost domains of his ancestors. He collected himself and towards the close of 1901 he launched an attack against the Rashidis but was decisively defeated. He did not lose heart and resolved to make another raid. Reluctantly his friend Mubarak and his father gave him permission. With only forty warriors, among whom was his brother Muhammad, he left Kuwait. He wandered for some months in the deserts before finally making up his plans to occupy Riyadh. He reached the outskirts of Riyadh in the night of January 14, 1902. On the following morning he made a surprise attack on the Rashidi governor 'Ajlan as he was coming out of his fort. 'Ajlan was killed with many members of his garrison. On

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7. Philby, Saudi Arabia, p. 239. The whole episode has been vividly described by his biographers. See also A. Rihani, op. cit., pp. 107-13.
hearing the news of the arrival of 'Abd al-'Aziz and the
death of 'Ajlan, the inhabitants of Riyadh came out to
welcome 'Abd al-'Aziz expressing their joy at the change of
events. Thus after eleven years in exile, the Saudis had
been able to regain Riyadh for themselves.

The taking of Riyadh was a master stroke but
there were long, arduous and battle filled campaigns ahead
for 'Abd al-'Aziz who had become more popular as Ibn Saud.
The Rashidis delayed in reacting to the fall of Riyadh and
this gave 'Abd al-'Aziz time enough to fortify himself. The
next step that 'Abd al-'Aziz had in mind was to extend his
authority. By 1904, with the help of his brother Sa'd, 'Abd
al-'Aziz extended his power over the districts of Kharj,
Aflaj, and Wadi al-Dawasir in Southern Najd and Sundayr,
Qasim, and Washm in the North. And all these had been
extorted from the Rashidis. All Qasim as far as the
boundary of Shammar, the stronghold of the Rashidis, now
recognised the sovereignty of 'Abd al-'Aziz. With Qasim
came the important towns of 'Anayza and Burayda. The
notorious tribes of Mutayr in Qasim and Atayba and Qahtan in
Washm began to pay tributes to 'Abd al-'Aziz.

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8. For the conquests of 'Abd al-'Aziz during 1902-4, see,
Shortly afterwards 'Abd al-'Aziz twice encountered the combined forces of the Rashidis and the Ottomans. The decisive battle was the battle of Shinana (1904) after which the Ottomans had little stomach for further fighting in Arabia. The Turkish government sought the intervention of Shaykh Mubarak of Kuwait to come to an agreement with 'Abd al-'Aziz but the offer was turned down by 'Abd al-'Aziz. Later in 1906 the Rashidi ruler was killed in an encounter with 'Abd al-'Aziz and consequently there followed a war of succession in Ha'il, the Rashidi Capital.

In 1908 a significant change was effected in the affairs of Hijaz by the Ottoman Sultan. Husayn b. Ali was appointed the new Sharif of Mecca. Husayn had designs of extending his authority towards Najd. Some years back during one of his many encounters with the Rashidis, 'Abd al-'Aziz had affected the release of his six family members, the grandsons of his uncle Sa'ud ibn Faisal, who had been captivated by the Rashidis when they took over Riyadh in 1891. They were subsequently dubbed as 'ara'if. They were

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9. For details see Ahmed Assah, *Miracle of the Desert Kingdom*, pp. 25-6


treated with honour in Riyadh. In 1910 they silently slipped out with evil designs and joined the rebellious 'Ajman tribe, and became pretenders to the Saudi succession. 'Abd al-'Aziz, being pre-occupied by the war with the Muntafiq tribes and the Rashids, could not deal with them immediately. In 1912, in order to deal with the 'ara'if revolt, 'Abd al-'Aziz sent his brother Sa'd to get more forces, but by chance Sa'd fell into the hands of Sharif Husayn who had been raiding in that area. To secure the release of his brother 'Abd al-'Aziz had to agree to the 12 conditions put forward by the Sharif. Then he proceeded to put down the rebellion of the 'ara'if. He dealt with the leaders sternly in contrast to his usual practice of treating his conquered enemies with charity and generosity. By this incident 'Abd al-'Aziz had learnt a lesson. Like his ancestors in the preceding century, he depended on regular conscriptions of badw and hadar to compose his army. As 13 Philby writes:

12. The terms were: (a) to acknowledge Turkish suzerainty over the districts of Qasim, and (b) to pay a small annual tribute. Cf. Aramco Handbook, p. 66.

13. After rounding up the rebels who had assisted his cousins, he had eighteen members of the Hazzani family publicly executed at Layla, the capital of al-Aflaj. They had been forgiven once but now they had forfeited the right to further mercy. The oldest member of the 'Ara'if, Sa'ud ibn Abd al-'Aziz (Sa'ud al-Kabir), was given a chance to go into exile but chose instead to become a loyal subject of the ruler and married the King's sister. Other members of the 'ara'if escaped to Hijaz or Eastern Arabia. Cf. Ibid.

Their military arrangements were entirely administrative; and the mobilisation of their armies was based on registers, in which the obligations of every town, village and tribe to supply men, camels and horses for the various kinds of muster were duly recorded and fully understood by those concerned. In principle arms and ammunition were supplied by the state when necessary, but the mustered had to bring their own camels (in some cases two men to one camel) or go afoot, while horsemen had special inducements.

The bedouin were politically unreliable, characteristics of their inherent individualism. In the midst of the battle they would quit, either individually, or in groups, if they had acquired sufficient booty, if the battle was going against them or their leader, if the enemy was putting up a hard fight. Rihani defines the opportunism of the bedouin eloquently: "Today a sword in the hand of the prince, a dagger in his back tomorrow." The bedouin engaged in raids only for sport and for loot. They belonged only to themselves and the entire desert was their home.

Having himself spent enough time with the bedouins, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was well aware of their nature. He

17. Loc. cit.
took steps to supplant the tribal loyalties of the bedouins with a broader loyalty. Consequently he founded agricultural communities peopled by bedouin recruits. In some cases new communities or settlements were built from the ground up; in others, bedouins were assigned to existing villages. The idea was to mobilise them in villages and acquaint them with the doctrines of Islam. In this way they could be made more reliable citizens and, at the same time, be moulded into a formidable martial force. But this called for them to give up their old ways of life and to embrace a new one. Their settlements were called hijar (sing. hijra) and the settlers came to be known as Ikhwan (brethren). Very soon in Arabia the term Ikhwan came to denote the bedouin population which left their abode of tents and settled in a special place and built for their homes mud huts as a sign that they left their own detestful life for another more beloved life. Hafiz Wahba describes them as a people of bedouin who left their bedouin life and who agreed to fight for God and the raising of his word.

22. Ibid., p. 309.
The first historical reference to a hijra of the Ikhwan is found in a letter from Prince 'Abd Allah, the son of King Husayn, to 'Abd al-'Aziz: 'If you wish well for the Muslims then send back those whom you ordered to sell their flocks and for whom you built home.'

The first such colony was started in 1912 in Najd near the wells of Artawiyya. It consisted of the Mutayr and Harb tribes under the leadership of Faisal b. Sultan al-Dawish of the Mutayr tribe. Very soon the next hijra came up at Ghatghat near the Tuwayq near Riyadh consisting of the members of 'Utayba tribe under Sultan b. Bijad ibn Humayd who later came to be known as Sultan at Lih. The number of hijras increased rapidly. Within a decade and a half of the founding of the first two, more than two hundred hijras were established. Although most of the hijras were located in Najd, some were founded on the fringes of the Hijaz, others in the north country populated by the Ruwalah and Shammar tribes near the Syrian-Jordanian border, and still others on the edge of the Rub' al-Khalī. Two were located at the west end of the Qatar peninsula.

namely, Sīrāf and Ambaq. The population of the hijras ranged between ten and ten thousand depending upon the size of the hijra. Soon after their establishment the Ikhwan replaced the townsmen of Najd as the elite of 'Abd al-'Azīz's bodyguard under his banner.

The Ikhwan were basically inspired by the teachings of Wahhabism. The strength of tribal ties as well as religious fervour contributed to form a community bond which was above the tribal division. They were enthusiastic to spread Islam through jihad and die as martyrs. Many devoted themselves to learning, to read and write and to memorising parts of the Qur'an and the hadith. But, as Hafiz Wahba describes their beliefs: "... this very transition was violent enough to be dangerous. The people had absorbed only a small amount of religious education and principle, but they came to think that this alone constituted the whole of religion and that everything else was heresy. They even went so far as to believe evil of Imam Abdul Aziz, their own Chief. They came to regard the-


27. G. Rentz, loc. cit.

28. Ibid.
turban as the only proper and traditional headgear, scorning the head cloth and band as an undesirable innovation, some even going so far as to regard it as the sign of an 'infidel' to be shunned by true believers. Many, too, began to believe that no Bedou, however virtuous he was and however much he disliked the evils of desert life, could be called Moslem unless he lived in a hijrah; they refused to greet these Bedouin with the customary "Salam aleikum" and if they were themselves greeted refused to reply. They would not even eat the food of these people."

The government looked after the organisation of the various hijras by choosing of sites, and grant of land, and after that construction of mosques, schools, and residential places, the supply of seeds and tools for farming, side by side, the supply of arms and ammunitions. Religious teachers (mutawwīl) were frequently sent to acquaint the Ihwān with the teachings of Islam. They were also supplied with religious literature composed for this very purpose under the guidance of Shaykh 'Abd Allah b. Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Latif, a descendant of Shaykh Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab. This literature was based on, and prepared from, Hanbali teachings. Consequently the Ihwān

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were soon infused with such religious zeal that they became extremists. They ‘proved to be men of uncompromising religious temperament and fearless fighters, whose chief fault was overzealousness. Nevertheless, through the religious teachings they were well moulded to become honest and law abiding citizens when they were not at war. They called themselves ‘Knights of God’s unity, and those who obey God’.

The Ikhwan colonies were distributed by ‘Abd al-’Aziz in such a way so as to enable them to reach any particular place in not more than a day. Their tribal distribution provided links to all the major tribes of Najd. They served dual purpose. During peace time they served as outposts of loyalty and collection points of intelligence at the farthest distances from Riyadh, and in war they became centres of mobilisation and springboards of attack against specific targets. Ikhwan troops marching from the remotest corners could find many hijras on their way from where they could get their provisions, water, intelligence and other necessities. The hijras served as military bases, supply bases, and religious outposts. These hijras

also acted as a disciplinary influence on towns, keeping them safely within the Wahhabi fold. In the beginning the bedouins of the hijras dedicated themselves totally to religious pursuit. But later they were moulded to become merchants, farmers, shepherds, religious teachers etc. all contributing their share to the welfare of the community.

The organised structure of the Ikhwan made them an almost unique institution in the peninsula but at the same time their rapid spread presented 'Abd al-'Aziz with a problem that became apparent very soon: the Ikhwan, impelled by their deep religious conviction, under almost constant motivation of the 'ulama' and the mutawwiyyn, posed a threat to the power and authority of 'Abd al-'Aziz.

The success of the Ikhwan can be attributed to a number of factors. First they were highly mobile and armed with modern weapons. Second, as former bedouin, they had hardened themselves to travelling for days with little to no food or water and were renowned for long stabbing raids and surprise dawn attacks. The last but most important factor was their religious zeal.

34. C.M. Helms, Cohesion of Saudi Arabia, p. 144.
'Abd al-'Ariz made first use of the Ikhwan in 1913 against the Turks at Hofuf, the principal town of Hasa'. The Turkish governor was surprised and made an immediate surrender. All the Turkish troops were allowed to depart. 'Abd Allah ibn Jiluwi was made the governor there. Thereafter, the Ikhwan became the main force of Saudi state. In 1915 a treaty was concluded between the British and 'Abd al-'Aziz. In 1917 Husayn had sent three expeditions against Hurma, inhabited by the 'Utayba tribe, but all were repulsed. The people of Hurma sought help from 'Abd al-'Aziz and immediately Ibn-Humayd was sent with a contingent of the Ikhwan. The Hashimite forces were thoroughly routed at Taraba and it was now easy to push forward to Mecca but for diplomatic reasons the Ikhwan were held back. In 1920 the Ikhwan were engaged in the capture of Abha, the capital of 'Asir. But their high-handedness in the area resulted in a revolt which forced 'Abd al-'Aziz to send his son Faisal along with a detachment of the Ikhwan under Ibn Humayd to regain it. In 1920, the Ikhwan were involved in a number of raids in Kuwait and Iraq which forced the British to

35. He was one of the forty warriors who had accompanied 'Abd al-'Aziz on his historic exploit on Riyadh in 1902.

36. Britain had also signed an agreement with Sharif Husayn but its contents were kept secret from 'Abd al-'Aziz just as the agreement with 'Abd al-'Aziz was kept secret from Husayn. Cf. Ahmed Assah, op. cit., pp. 34-5.

intervene on behalf of Kuwait and Iraq both. The conflict between Kuwait and the Saudis was resolved when a delegation from Kuwait reached Najd. In 1921, a congress was held in Riyadh which was attended by many of the Ikhwan. At this congress ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was acclaimed Sultan of Najd while his father ‘Abd al-Rahman kept the title of Imam. The new Sultan celebrated by crushing the Rashidis after a siege of nearly two months in which Dawish and the Ikhwan played a significant role. Ha’il was taken in November 1921. The Ikhwan criticised ‘Abd al-‘Aziz for the generous terms which he accorded to the Rashidis.

After World War I Transjordan and Iraq, both British mandates were ruled by ‘Abd Allah and Faisal. Therefore, the Ikhwan, who considered the Hashimites a legitimate target diverted their raids towards Iraq and Transjordan. A column of the Ikhwan reached almost up to Amman killing many of the inhabitants before they were pursued by the British. In 1922 the boundaries of the Saudi State in the direction of Kuwait and Iraq were agreed upon by ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and Sir Percy Cox in a meeting at ‘Uqair. Despite this settlement the Ikhwan continued their raids against the ‘unrighteous’ and the rivalry between the Saudis
and the Hashimites continued along its bitter course. The British arranged a conference in Kuwait in order to resolve the crises between their three allies but it was of no consequence.

The situation turned to the worse when in 1924, after the abolition of the Caliphate by the Turkish Republic, Husayn was proclaimed the Caliph. This act was considered by the Ikhwan as a further proof of Hashimite heresy. In 1924 a conference of 'Ulama', tribal chiefs, Ikhwan, and notables was held. Ibn Bijad demanded that they should attack Husayn. It was decided to attack Hijaz. The same year after the Hajj season Ta'if was attacked. Husayn abdicated in favour of his son 'Ali once Ta'if was taken. In October the same year Mecca fell to 'Abd al-'Aziz and Madina followed early the next year. Jeddah capitualated two weeks later. The fall of Hijaz ended the Sharif's rule there. The King's second son, Faisal, was appointed viceroy of Hijaz. In January 1927 'Abd al-'Aziz was proclaimed King of Hijaz and Najd and its Dependencies with headquarters at

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Riyadh. The British Government in the Treaty of Jiddah in 1927, recognised the kingdom as a sovereign state and renounced the long-outdated special rights as set forth in the Treaty of 1915. The final step in the creation of the modern state was taken on September 22, 1932, when it was renamed the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The fight was over. 'Abd al-'Aziz had reached the peak of his career. The Arabia over which he was to rule for nearly three more decades was united as never before; within the utmost limits practicable in the international circumstances of the time, and exceeding anything which any of his ancestors had effectively controlled. Within these limits he would not be challenged again; and the realm which he had carved out for himself with his sword and his faith would descend intact to his successor. The vital factor at the moment was his reputation for justice and resolution, which was seldom put to the test, and always vindicated when the rare need arose. For the first time in human memory, writes Philby, Arabia had a single ruler whom all could, and did, respect.

All was not well with 'Abd al-'Aziz. The Ikhwan, who were the driving force behind the Saudi victories in the modern period, had become rebellious.

43. Saudi Arabia, p. 292.
After conquering Hijaz, the Ikhwan, by 1926, had returned to Najd. They had became more specific in their grievances against 'Abd al-'Aziz. A conference at Artawiyya was held which was attended by the Chiefs of the Mutayr, 'Utayba, and 'Ajman, they lashed out against him for the following reasons:

(a). Sending his son Sa'ud, to Egypt which was occupied by the Christian English and inhabited by infidel Muslims.

(b). Sending his son, Faisal, to London, the land of polytheism.

(c). Using automobiles, telegraph, wireless, and telephones, all of which were Christian innovations of the devil.

(d). Taxing the tribes in the Hijaz and Najd.

(e). Allowing the infidel Muslim tribes of Iraq and East Jordan to graze their flocks in the land of the Muslims (Arabia).

(f). Prohibiting trade with Kuwait because if this was meant as punishment because the Kuwaitis are infidels then the Ikhwan should be allowed to raid them, and if they are true Muslims then why boycott them?
(g). Failing to force the Shi'ites of Hasa' to adhere to Wahhabi Islam.

Reacting to this demand of the Ikhwan and also realising the gravity of the situation, 'Abd al-'Aziz convened a meeting of the Ikhwan leaders and chiefs at Riyadh. Ibn Bijad was absent from this meeting. The meeting ended with the issuance of a fatwa by the 'ulama' in which all the above mentioned Ikhwan objections were answered, and which even covered problems not raised by the Ikhwan.

Ever since his creating of the Ikhwan, various advisors had warned him that they would cause him great trouble and a trouble they did become when against the orders of 'Abd al-'Aziz they constantly raided the Iraqi and Kuwaiti borders. Negotiations with British and Iraqi officials was held to root out this problem but no tangible result was arrived at. Meanwhile the Ikhwan themselves were becoming more hostile toward 'Abd al-'Aziz. They accused him of selling himself to the English and of being in league with them, at the expense of his earlier commitment to spread Islam, and fight the infidels. The Ikhwan threat to

44. Hafiz Wahba, Jazirat al-Arab, p. 289.
45. For the full text of the resolution see idem., Arabian Days, pp. 134ff.
'Abd al-'Aziz was mounting and the king was now convinced that the three Ikhwan leaders were motivated less by religious zeal than by personal desires for power. The Ikhwan returned to Najd in November 1928. By this time the Ikhwan were all but in open rebellion. He realised that a confrontation with the Ikhwan was unavoidable. He, therefore, convened an assembly of the representatives of all the elements of the Najd population. 'Abd al-'Aziz had considerably strengthened after this conference. All his efforts to resolve his differences with the rebel chiefs were unsuccessful. A series of messages exchanged and several attempts to arrange face to face meetings never bore fruit. The Ikhwan now had to begin attack even the natives of Najd. Ultimately, the differences culminated into a battle between the king and the rebels. The two armies met at Sabila near the Ikhwan capital Artawiyya. The Ikhwan were decisively routed in the battle that took place in January 1929 never to raise their heads again. The battle of Sabila, writes Philby, marked the end of an epoch. Sa‘udi

47. He was convinced that the three Ikhwan leaders had already agreed upon the spoils once he was overthrown: Faisal al-Dawish was to become the ruler of Najd; Sultan Ibn Bijad Ibn Humayyid of Hijaz, and Dhihan Ibn Hithlam of Hasa’. Cf. Ibid.

48. This is also called the Riyadh Conference of Notables. For details Cf. Hafiz Wahba, Arabian Days, pp. 137 ff.

49. J. S. Habib, op. cit., p. 137.

50. For an interesting account of the battle see Wahba, op. cit., pp. 140 ff.
Arabia had virtually assumed its final shape as a result of constant war upon the infidel and henceforth the infidel would be a valued ally in the common cause of progress. Hitherto the killing of infidels in the way of God had been regarded as the supreme virtue; but Faisal al-Dawish had been taught at Sabila that the virtue must not be practised without the permission of higher authority; and henceforth its practice would be strictly forbidden.

After the battle of Sabila, the king declared that religious issues would be decided only by the ‘ulama’ and banned all meetings for any purpose without prior approval of the ruler. Artawiyya and Ghatghat, the most notorious of the Ikhwan colonies, were razed and other hijras brought under strict control. The Ikhwan were not banned and were used for good effect in the 1934 war with Yemen. But, the Frankenstein of his own creation would surely have destroyed him, if he had not taken the initiative of destroying it himself.