
I. GENERAL

History

Prior to 1932, Saudi Arabia did not actually exist as a national state; the area now known as Saudi Arabia was populated by nomadic tribes and by settlers whose major activity was trading. Most trading routes of the ancient Arab empires had traversed at least part of modern-day Saudi Arabia, bringing to bear the influence of a wide variety of cultural and religious movements.

Under the late King Abdul Aziz bin Saud, Saudi Arabia achieved a measure of unity. Having unified the various tribes of the Arabian Peninsula by the early '30s, Saud embarked on a concentrated policy of closer political and economic relations with the West. At the same time he directed Saudi Arabia into the then emerging Arab League. Upon the death of Abdul Aziz, his son, Saud bin Abdul Aziz, succeeded to the throne. He was instrumental in establishing a program of economic development on a national scale. In 1958, King Saud transferred all executive power to his brother, Faisal, who subsequently succeeded to the throne in 1964.

King Faisal concentrated on industrial expansion and continued the process of extending Saudi Arabia's influence. He was able to achieve economic stability and began the process of utilizing oil revenues for national economic development. He was known for having introduced cautious reforms and conservative foreign policies. In March 1975, King Faisal was assassinated. He was succeeded by his brother, Khalid, who subscribed to a continuation of Faisal's policies centred on Moslem solidarity and Arab unity.