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# THE JERUSALEM ASSASSIN

THE  
TREASONOUS  
PRINCE



*Political and religious leaders have always been targets of assassinations. From Gandhi to Lincoln, from Sadat to Kennedy, assassins have shifted the course of history.*

*This is the story of one such event:*

THE ROYAL PALACE, RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA  
TUESDAY, 25 MARCH 1975

The prince was young and troubled, but no one took him for a killer.

At the age of thirty-one, Faisal Ibu Musa'id had not particularly distinguished himself from any of his cousins, except perhaps as the black sheep of the royal family. He was of average height and medium build. He was not particularly handsome, though not particularly ugly either. He had a girlfriend but refused to marry and settle down. He wasn't especially bright nor especially focused, attending three different colleges—all in the United States—before finally earning his bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Colorado. Twice he had been arrested for possession of drugs. The first time his family was able to persuade the judge simply to give him probation. The second time they convinced the DA to drop the charges altogether.

So as he entered the great hall and took a seat in the back of the room, the prince drew little attention and certainly no concern.

Just a few feet behind him was a raised wooden platform, upon which three large broadcast television cameras and two sixteen-millimeter movie cameras stood on tripods. Each was manned by a camera operator who worked for the state television authority. Another operator and his camera were positioned about halfway down the right side of the hall. Enormous banks of klieg lights were strategically positioned around the room.

The prince smiled, if only to himself. He would distinguish himself after all. Indeed, what he did tonight would soon be witnessed by the entire world.

The invitation from the royal court had billed the event as a “major address,” and he estimated the audience at about a hundred and fifty people. Scanning the assembled faces, he realized he knew many of them personally. Some of them he knew quite well. Nearly everyone else he recognized from photos in newspapers and magazines. This was the cream of Saudi society. And privately he despised them all.

The door to stage left opened, and in walked the kingdom’s ministers of defense and foreign affairs. These were soon followed by the interior minister and the king’s personal spokesman, each of whom took their seats in the front row. Off to stage right, he spotted the kingdom’s oil minister chatting amiably with his counterpart from Kuwait and several other senior Kuwaiti officials who, the prince had heard, had flown in especially for the occasion.

Once again scanning the ornate ceremonial hall, sector by sector, he noted two Royal Guards near the front of the stage, one positioned by a door located stage right, the other at the door stage left. Each wore a formal dark-green uniform with gold buttons and gold trim, and the red- and white-checked head scarf known as a *ghutra*, bound by the black, ropelike cord known as an *agal*, so distinctive to men of the Arabian Peninsula. Each also wore white dress gloves and a thick white leather belt, to which was attached a scabbard containing a gleaming ceremonial sword, and a white leather holster in which was a nickel-plated pistol.

Two more Royal Guards stood at attention—ramrod straight—in the foyer, astride the main doors. Like their colleagues near the stage, these were trained killers, hand-selected by the royal court’s chief of security not merely for their skill but for their loyalty. Yet the prince was not concerned.

After years of attending these and similar events at the palace, he knew that once all the guests had entered and been seated, these guards would close the doors yet remain in the foyer.

That said, however, he also knew from experience that there would be no fewer than a half-dozen security personnel in plain clothes positioned throughout the hall. Again, this did not trouble him. They would all be armed men, yet not prominent members of the House of Saud. Thus, they would be younger men, most likely in their thirties and forties. They would be alone, of course, not sitting with spouses. They would not be overweight or wearing glasses or walking with the help of a cane or wearing a hearing aid. Nor would any of them be dressed in a *thawb*, the traditional white cotton robe worn by so many Saudi men. Rather, they would have that lean, muscular build of former special forces operators. They would be dressed in business suits more common to the West. And there would be that telltale bulge under their right or left armpit, where they would each have a pistol in a shoulder holster.

They would, therefore, be easy to spot, the prince told himself.

And so they were.

He found all of them in less than a minute. He counted a total of eight. He had fully expected their presence and factored them into his strategy. The plan he had concocted was foolproof. Or rather, he hoped it was. He would know soon enough.

A protocol officer walked to the bank of microphones at the podium, cleared his throat, and asked everyone to stand. Everyone did. It was precisely 8 p.m. The red lights of the TV cameras went on. They were going live to the nation.

The right-side door suddenly swung open, and in swept his namesake, His Majesty Faisal Khalid Al Saud. And the sixty-eight-year-old Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and Protector of the Two Holy Cities was met by cacophonous applause.

Wearing a regal black robe with gold trim and a white cotton *ghutra* bound by *al-Muqassab Agal*, the ceremonial headband made of gold and black, the king was a strikingly tall man, at just over six feet five inches. His face was



long and oval and beset with deep wrinkles and cheeks that sagged, giving him the appearance of being perpetually exhausted or melancholy or both. Above a large, angular nose sat small, dark, brooding eyes. His eyebrows were thick. His mustache, by contrast, was quite thin and going gray, as was his goatee. He was a bit stooped, walked slowly, and needed the help of an aide to step up onto the stage and reach the podium. Yet when he finally quieted the audience, got them settled back in their seats, and began his live address, his voice was a rich, smoky baritone full of passion and vigor.

With all eyes on the monarch, the young prince subtly slid his right hand under the folds of his own robe. Beads of perspiration began to form across his forehead and upper lip. He reminded himself to take long, deep breaths. Then he silently counted out two full minutes in which he did absolutely nothing but listen to the old man's rambling opening pages. Glancing about the room, he felt certain no one was watching him. Only then did he slide his hand down to the holster strapped to his right leg. He wrapped his warm, moist hands around the cool, nickel-plated revolver, drew it out of the holster, and brought it to his lap, though still under the folds of his robe.

*This was it, Musa'id told himself. There was no other way. It had to be done and done tonight.*

The only question in the young prince's mind was when he should strike.

The subject of the king's address had not been telegraphed in advance. There had been some speculation that the focus would be an update on the oil embargo the king had launched against the Americans two years earlier. The embargo was immensely popular in the kingdom. It had, after all, quadrupled the price of every barrel of oil, creating a massive financial windfall for the royals while sending shock waves through Western economies and causing a severe recession in the United States. Despite his many other grievances, even the young prince had been happy about this turn of events. Yet it soon became clear this was not the theme of tonight's address.

Nor, it turned out, was the king going to denounce the godless Communists who were ruling the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. He should have, Musa'id silently fumed. When were the Arab powers, newly flush with petrodollars and the global political power that came with them, going to

truly confront the infidels in Moscow as well as in Washington? Instead, the king—like so many other Arab leaders—was cozying up to the Communist powers, courting their leaders and acquiring their weapons. To this end, Faisal Ibu Musa'id found himself admiring the course of Anwar el-Sadat, the Egyptian general turned president. The man had woken up one morning in the summer of 1972 and told every single Soviet military and political advisor in his country—all twenty thousand of them—to pack up and leave Egypt immediately. Why wasn't the House of Saud showing such defiance to the infidels of the Kremlin?

After going off on several irrelevant tangents, King Faisal's speech eventually focused on a recitation of the humiliating series of losses the Arab nations had suffered at the hands of the Zionists. He began with the Arab defeat to the Jews in 1948 and again in 1956. He then recounted the far-worse defeat to the Zionists in 1967, resulting in the loss of Jerusalem, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the Dome of the Rock—the third-holiest site in all of Islam. Adding insult to injury, he focused on the disastrous defeat the Arabs had suffered in October 1973. Even after launching a surprise attack on the Zionists on their holiest day, while they were fasting and praying and paying scant attention, the Arabs still couldn't regain the sacred land of Palestine.

As the monarch's voice grew in intensity and then ferocity, the young prince realized his uncle was doing more than providing his audience a history lesson. He was offering them a road map, a call to action.

My brothers, what are we waiting for?

For the world's conscience to rise by itself and act? Where is it?

Where is the international conscience?

Al-Aqsa, the Holy Mosque in Jerusalem, is calling for you.

It is crying for your help, my brothers.

You must save it from the catastrophe, from the plague that has afflicted it.

So what makes us afraid? What is stopping us?

Do we fear death? Why? Is there a better death—is there a more honorable way—than dying as a martyr in the cause of jihad, a servant in the way of Allah?

O my Muslim brothers! We want to make a revolution! An Islamic revival!

We want a non-Communist, non-racist revival, an Islamic calling, a calling to jihad—to a holy war—for the sake of Allah!

For the sake of our religion!

For the sake of our faith!

In defense of our holy places!

And I ask Allah the Almighty that if my destiny is to die, that I die as a martyr—a *shahid*—for the sake of Allah!

My brothers, I hope you forgive me if I am shaken.

But when I see the Haram al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque and our holy grounds in the holy city of Jerusalem violated, degraded, offended, corrupted with blasphemies and moral decay, then I pray to Allah with all sincerity and all fervor!

O Muslim brothers, I tell you now, if Allah does not destine me to wage jihad and liberate all of our holy places and all of the holy



lands of Palestine, then I ask that he not keep me alive on this earth for one more second!

As the call to jihad was sounded, the audience leapt to their feet and erupted in thunderous applause. Faisal Ibu Musa'id, too, slowly rose from his seat in the back row. How could he not when to remain seated would have drawn undue attention?

Clapping along with the others, though with considerably less enthusiasm, he privately seethed. He had heard it all before: the king's perennial pronouncements of loyalty to the Palestinian Arabs and his florid denunciation of the Jews.

Just over three months earlier, the monarch had landed on the cover of *Time* magazine, having been named Man of the Year. At first, Musa'id had laughed when he had read how the American editors regarded his uncle as one of the most powerful men on earth when it came to shaping the global economy. But he had become physically ill when he had read that "politically, King Faisal's influence is enhanced by his position as spiritual leader of 600 million Moslems, and his desire to pray at Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock without stepping on Israeli territory is likely to influence any Middle East peace negotiation."

The king talked a big game, but it was all a lie. Never in a million generations would he send Saudi military forces to annihilate the Jews. No Saudi leader had ever sent troops to fight against the Jews. Faisal was hardly going to be the first.

What's more, for all his braggadocio, his uncle had not truly commenced the oil embargo to punish the Americans for continually siding with the Israelis. He'd done so to expand his already-massive personal fortune. The man was a coward, the prince silently raged, betraying his people and selling his soul for gold bullion and sterling silver. The words were right. The call to jihad against the Zionists and the Western imperialists was exactly what was needed. But words were not enough. This required action. Immediate and decisive action. Clearly his uncle was not up to the task. But there were others who were. And that was why he had come.

After the speech, audience members were allowed to approach the monarch.

Encouraged, even.

Forming a line down the center aisle, they stepped forward one by one, bowed to the king, and showered him with effusive praise for his “wise” and “brilliant” remarks. Those personally close to His Majesty even took his hand and kissed it.

Musa'id stood at the end of the line. As he and those ahead of him inched forward, he could see that two members of the Royal Guard had moved from their post by the doors and were now standing directly behind the king. He also watched as four plainclothes officers had taken up positions around the monarch, two to his right, two to his left. Three others watched an adjacent ballroom, keeping a close eye on the guests who had already greeted the man of the hour and were now enjoying a lavish (though alcohol-free) reception in the king's honor.

The prince glanced at a gold and diamond clock on the wall. The speech had lasted an entire hour. Thus far, the receiving line had consumed another twenty minutes and another forty or fifty people still stood between the prince and his uncle. For the first time, the young man felt a pang of anxiety shoot through his stomach. How much longer would the old man stay in the room? How much longer could he shake hands and listen to these sycophants endlessly drone on? Might not his aides soon shut down the line and whisk the king off to bed? He had seen it happen before. What if it happened now? It could be months before he received another invitation to the palace.

It was then, however, that something happened the young prince did not expect. King Faisal spotted him and his dark-brown, almost-brooding eyes immediately brightened. The king waved the young man to step out of line and approach him forthwith. Surprised, everyone in line craned their necks to see who had caught His Majesty's attention. Then, almost as one, they all took a step back to create enough room for the man's nephew to come forward.

With his head tilted down, his shoulders somewhat drooped, and his hands folded inside in his robes, Musa'id did not look like a man desperate

to get to the front of the line. Nor did he look like an assassin. Rather, he appeared the model of a humble penitent, certainly like a young man deeply respectful of his elders and more importantly of his sovereign.

Swallowing hard, the prince tightened his grip on the revolver. The hammer was already cocked. None of this, of course, was visible to either the king or the men sworn to protect him. So, bowing his head even further, he stepped out of line and began walking toward his uncle. With every step closer, he could feel his heart pounding louder and louder until he thought it might explode. He had thought about this moment for so long. He had even dreamt about it. And now it had come. He was standing directly before his target.

The king greeted him by name, then leaned forward slightly, expecting the traditional kiss on both cheeks, a kiss only given by close members of the family. The prince, however, did not lean in. Instead, he took a half step back, drew the pistol, and fired three shots at point-blank range. The first shot was angled upward. It entered under the king's jaw and exited above his left ear. The second shot entered directly into the man's neck. The third shot went wide and missed entirely.

For an instant, no one moved, not the bodyguards, not even the king. Then blood began spraying out of his neck. A split second later, the king collapsed to the floor. The room broke out in pandemonium. Yet the prince just stood there, covered in blood, the smoking revolver in his hand, aiming down at the king. There were still three more bullets in the chamber, but for some reason the prince did not keep firing.

Just then, one of the Royal Guards unlatched the scabbard from his belt. With lightning speed, he brought it crashing down on the prince's neck. Why he hadn't actually unsheathed the sword was not immediately clear. Had he, there was no doubt he would have sliced off the prince's head. Still, the brute force of the blow forced the young man to drop the pistol, which went skittering across the marble floor.

A plainclothes agent now lunged at the prince from behind him. Musa'id's knees buckled and he crashed to the floor. Two more plainclothes officers pounced on him as well, while another moved to recover the gun. The

officers began to beat the prince in murderous rage. They likely would have killed him on the spot were it not for the intervention of the interior minister, who shouted at them at the top of his lungs to stop.

*"We need him alive," he bellowed. "You fools—we must make him talk. Is he working alone or is he part of a larger plot?"*

It took several moments, but eventually the officers ceased their blows. His face bloodied and swelling, Musa'id was hog-tied and dragged away. Meanwhile, the Royal Guards tried to stanch the bleeding and personally rushed the king out a side door and into an ambulance. He arrived at the hospital breathing on his own, though unconscious, but he had lost a tremendous amount of blood. For the next few hours, they worked frantically to revive him, but nothing the doctors tried was successful. By midnight, all efforts to resuscitate the king were called off.

It was over. The Saudi monarch was dead.



The assassination was not broadcast to the Saudi people.

Not then. Not ever.

The live television broadcast from the palace had ended shortly after the king received his tumultuous final standing ovation. Yet while the photographers in the great hall certainly captured the moment of the assassination on film and videotape in all its gruesome detail, the footage was immediately impounded by the secret police.

That said, news of the shooting immediately started circulating throughout the capital as guests went home and began telling family and friends. Facts were scarce. Rumors were rampant. Foreign news reporters soon caught wind of what had happened but could not file any reports by order of the military censor. Only in the wee hours of the morning did Radio Riyadh at least confirm "an incident" at the palace. The royal court at first denied speculation that the king had been killed, stating only that "shots had been fired" but "it appeared the king has escaped unharmed."

By dawn the following morning, however, the royal court realized such a fiction would not hold much longer. Too many people had witnessed what

Musa'id had done. Nine hours later, far too many individuals in the hospital, in the central police department, and certainly throughout the intelligence services already knew the truth. Therefore, the palace issued a terse statement, noting merely that King Faisal, the third ruler of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the man who had taken the throne eleven years earlier, was dead and would be buried that evening.

All of Riyadh shut down to mourn. Some two thousand foreign and local leaders—including presidents, prime ministers, kings, and sheikhs—poured in from all over the region and the world to pay their respects. All the proceedings were broadcast live to the nation and the world.

The news sent shock waves through Washington. The Ford administration did not send an emissary to the Saudi capital. In the early hours of the crisis, the new American president even refused to comment, not wanting to risk complicating the already-tense relations with the kingdom.

Yet in a hastily assembled meeting of the National Security Council in the White House Situation Room, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger argued to his colleagues and to President Gerald Ford personally that this could actually prove a turning point. Perhaps, Kissinger said, in the aftermath of such an event, a more positive relationship could be forged with Faisal's younger brother, Khalid, the crown prince, who had within hours acceded to the throne. U.S. intelligence had been detecting signs of a rift within the royal family for some time. Not everyone in Riyadh thought it wise to create such deep enmity with the Americans. Perhaps now cooler heads would prevail, and the Saudis could be persuaded to end—or at least ease—the oil embargo.

Ford was initially skeptical. But desperate to jump-start the moribund American economy, drive down inflation, and forestall a Republican primary challenge from a handsome California governor named Ronald Wilson Reagan, Ford gave Kissinger permission to probe the Saudis through back channels and the press.

"Would you comment on the assassination of King Faisal and its implications for this country?" a reporter asked U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger during a press gaggle in the lobby of Foggy Bottom the following day.

“Well, of course, I only have very fragmentary facts, but I can tell you that King Faisal was a good friend of the United States and a force for moderation in the Middle East,” Kissinger replied. “I can only express on behalf of the administration and the American people our sorrow at this tragic event.”

It was a bald-faced lie, of course. Kissinger knew full well King Faisal had been no friend of the United States. The man certainly had not been a force for moderation. Yet Kissinger had begun trying to signal to the new regime in Riyadh Washington’s openness to reset the relationship.

“Does your information tell you that it was, indeed, a deranged nephew who assassinated King Faisal, or do you have any other facts?” a woman reporter asked.

“I have no new facts at all at this point.”

“Do you have any impression of the new ruler?” asked a network correspondent.

“I have only met him once,” Kissinger replied. “I’m afraid I can’t express an opinion at this time.”

To most reporters, and certainly to the public, this was a mind-numbingly bland answer. But to any diplomat worth his salt, Kissinger was clearly telegraphing to King Khalid and his closest advisors that the Ford White House was not going to judge the new monarch for the sins of the old.

Meanwhile, Faisal Ibu Musa’id was mercilessly beaten and tortured in the dank chambers deep under the Interior Ministry. The longer he refused to confess to being part of a broader conspiracy rather than a lone wolf, the more severe the treatment. Yet he stuck to his story. He had plotted all this alone. No one had helped him. No one had paid him. He worked neither for a foreign government nor for any Saudi citizen.

The story didn’t seem to add up. Senior Saudi intelligence officials felt certain Musa’id was not being forthcoming. He had to have been working with others. How else, to name just one issue, could he have acquired the pistol in a country with such strict controls on the possession of firearms? Yet they could not break him. Nothing the secret police tried shook the young man’s story. Then word came down into the bowels of the prison that the palace wanted a fast trial and a quick resolution. It would be easier to



tell the Saudi people and the world that this was the act of a single deranged madman, not a highly orchestrated coup d'état. It would certainly be more comforting to the nation. It might even be true.

Thus it was that on the afternoon of June 19, a Thursday, at precisely 4:30 p.m., the young prince was led out of his prison cell and up the steps of the governor's residence in downtown Riyadh. His hands and feet were bound. His mouth was taped shut. Earlier that day, the court had handed down its sentence. The justices declared that Musa'id had not been legally insane or mentally unbalanced at the time of the assassination. He had acted alone—with premeditation, malice, and a clear mind—and he must die, they declared, before the sun set that very day.

"Kneel," commanded Riyadh's chief of police.

His whole body shaking in fear, Musa'id obeyed as a crowd of ten thousand Saudi men looked on in the sizzling summer heat. Not three full months had passed since the attack. Now the end had come.

A large, muscular man wearing a black cloth hood over his head stepped out of a nearby building. Through two slits in the hood, his brown eyes flashed with unnatural intensity. He strode up the marble steps, took up his position beside Musa'id, and looked to the police chief, who nodded immediately. The prisoner was not asked if he had any final words. He was not offered a prayer nor a moment of reflection. The hooded man now drew a glimmering, gold-hilted scimitar out of his scabbard, raised it above his head, then brought it slicing down onto the neck of Musa'id with exceeding force. And the multitudes roared with hearty approval.

"*Allahu akbar! Allahu akbar!*" they cheered. "*God is great and justice has been done!*"

We hope you enjoyed your bonus chapter of *The Jerusalem Assassin*.

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