

## A Speech by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia on the War with Israel (1967)

### Source reference:

“Jalala al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam Yaltaqi bi-Ibna’ al-Sha‘b al-Su‘udi” [His Majesty the King Meets with the Saudi People] *Umm al-Qura*, June 9, 1967, p. 1.

### Source:

[Speech delivered in Riyadh, June 6, 1967]

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful,

I thank God, praise be to Him, that he gave us an opportunity to meet with you and see you after our journey. It is a blessing and a gift. Brothers – our absence was short, but it seemed long, considering our eagerness to meet with you and see you again. We visited some of the European countries on both official and unofficial invitations. There, we found a most hospitable reception that, if it indicates anything, shows what these countries see in you and their assessment of your high position and lofty rank. It is our pride and glory that we are related to you and represent you, fellow countrymen.

My dear native land –

We had an appointment with fate. As soon as we set foot on the soil of our beloved homeland, we were overtaken by events – the actions of the criminal gangs. Those actions were neither surprising nor unfamiliar.

Brothers –

The world depicts these actions as aggression by the Israelis against the Arabs, but we, brothers, know that from the year 1948 until today, the aggressive war against the Arabs in their homelands and their countries... the mere presence of the Israelis on Arab land is the greatest aggression and injustice known to history.

Countrymen –

Today we are a single line of soldiers in the battle. Rather than a leader and his followers, all of us are part of an armed campaign for the sake of God, the homeland, and the Arab nation. On this occasion, brothers, I cannot neglect the opportunity to thank some of the Islamic countries, recognizing that these countries have supported the Arabs and loyally backed them in their cause. I speak openly, calling out with an appeal to all the Muslims in the nations of the world. I call on the Islamic community, the people of Muhammad, peace be upon him, and all the believers in God. They are on the side of truth and the victory of the Muslims and the Arabs over the lies of Zionism and imperialism.

Brother countrymen –

We need to teach Zionism and imperialism a lesson they have never known before. Any state or country that supports or helps the Zionist Israeli enemies against the Arabs in any way – we, brothers, will consider that an attack on us, directed against us. We will take measures, with all our might, against those who aid our enemies and support them in any way at all.

Brother countrymen –

Today we are in the battle, and there is no difference here between a soldier and a citizen, no difference between a leader and a follower. All of us are one rank, as if we were one man in the heart of the fighting. You, countrymen, are no strangers to battles or to enduring hardships for the sake of your religion, for the freedom of your homeland, and for the preservation of your security. To the jihad, countrymen... to the jihad, countrymen... to the jihad, people of Muhammad, people of Islam... people of Islam, to the cleansing of the holy places from the Zionist filth, Israel, and imperialism!

Brothers –

This is not a time to keep talking or repeating what has been said. Rather, today we must work energetically, proving what we say with action, not with posturing and shouting. Brothers, from the moment the news arrived, both young and old have enlisted. I am honored to share with you the desire of our brothers to be in the vanguard of the fighting ranks at the front. I promise them, and I promise you, that this desire will be fulfilled if necessary, God willing and by His power, if conditions reach that point.

Fellow countrymen –

I pray that God, praise be to Him, grants us success as we unite to support our religion, save our homeland, and defeat our enemies. We must all believe in God, be sincere in His cause, and hold fast to Him. God Almighty, the Most Trustworthy, praise be to Him, is the one who delivers victory and leads us, God willing. May His peace, mercy, and blessings be upon you.

Blurb:

King Faisal of Saudi Arabia delivered this speech in Riyadh shortly after returning from a diplomatic visit to Western Europe. Faisal came home just as the Six Day War was breaking out between Israel and its Arab neighbors. He soon found himself under heavy pressure to support Egypt and the other Arab countries on the front lines of the fighting. Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser was popular throughout much of the Arab world, and Egyptian state media, especially the "Voice of the Arabs" radio station, reached millions across the region. They broadcast Nasser's false accusations that U.S. and British aircraft had attacked Egypt, demanding that Saudi Arabia and the other Arab oil producers impose an embargo on the United States and other supporters of Israel.

Faisal was sharply critical of Israel and the threat that Zionism posed to Muslim control of Jerusalem. He was not, however, eager to impose an oil embargo. Saudi Arabia was heavily dependent on oil revenues, and any export cutoff would be costly for the kingdom. It

would risk alienating the United States, Britain, and other countries that provided military and political support to Saudi Arabia. Faisal was not keen on helping Nasser, either. Saudi Arabia, a conservative monarchy, and Egypt, a revolutionary republic, had been engaged in a bitter rivalry for years, as described in Malcolm Kerr's classic *The Arab Cold War* (1964). Faisal accused Nasser of helping communism and seeking to overthrow monarchical governments across the Arab world. Faisal advocated pan-Islamic solidarity, including with non-Arab states, as an alternative to Nasser's secular Arab nationalism.

The tensions in Saudi foreign policy were evident in Faisal's speech. He condemned Zionism and pledged Saudi support for the war, but without mentioning Egypt or any other Arab countries on the front lines of the fighting. Faisal emphasized Islamic unity and religious themes – “the cleansing of the holy places from the Zionist filth.” He promised that Saudi Arabia would “take measures, with all our might, against those who aid our enemies and support them in any way at all,” but never named the United States – or any other specific target – and refrained from any explicit commitment to an oil embargo.

The ambiguity of Faisal's speech disappointed some of his listeners. The king spoke to a large audience in the Malaz horseracing track. The official account in the Saudi government gazette, *Umm al-Qura* (from which this text is drawn) noted “the cheers of the huge crowds” who were “inflamed by enthusiasm.” The Saudi dissident Nasir al-Said wrote that the people began chanting: “Oil, oil... cut off the oil from America, Britain, and Israel! Faisal, cut off the oil!” A similar account came from the U.S.-owned company Aramco, which ran the Saudi oilfields and kept a close eye on Saudi politics. An Aramco representative privately reported that the crowd was too unruly for Faisal's liking, repeatedly interrupting him with their chants about an embargo. At one point, the noise was so loud that the king could not make himself heard for two minutes. An angry Faisal cut the rally short and sent the audience home early.

As the crowd left the racetrack that night, some went to the local Aramco office and smashed its windows. That act was soon followed by a larger wave of protests, strikes, and destruction of U.S. property in Saudi Arabia, leading the Saudi government to call out the paramilitary National Guard to protect the Aramco compound. This episode is discussed in Rachel Bronson's *Thicker than Oil* (2006) and Victor McFarland's *Oil Powers* (2020).

Saudi Arabia joined the other main Arab oil producers in declaring an embargo against the United States and Great Britain in early June. The kingdom also temporarily reduced its total oil production levels. Privately, however, Saudi representatives criticized the embargo and reassured foreign diplomats that the kingdom wanted to keep shipping oil. In any case, the embargo had little immediate impact on the United States, which did not import much Arab oil and still had spare production capacity that could be tapped to cover the shortfall. One exception was the U.S. military, which needed Persian Gulf oil to fuel American forces in the Eastern Hemisphere. Saudi Arabia was reluctant to exploit that vulnerability, however, and reportedly carried out secret oil deliveries to the U.S. Navy in violation of the official embargo policy.

The kingdom soon reversed its production cuts, easing the pressure on the global oil market. It also lobbied other Arab nations to lift the embargo. At the beginning of September, the Arab League met in Khartoum and allowed the resumption of oil shipments to the United States and other embargoed countries, while – as an alternative way of aiding the Arab cause – Saudi Arabia and the other oil producers began giving financial aid to the frontline states like Egypt. Over the next six years, Saudi Arabia would continue its delicate balancing act, criticizing U.S. support for Israel while maintaining a close diplomatic, military, and economic relationship with the United States. Meanwhile, the global oil market tightened, spare capacity evaporated, and

Saudi Arabia emerged as the world's top oil exporter. When Faisal again ordered production cuts and an embargo against the United States in October 1973, the effects would be far more dramatic than in 1967.

Source selected, translated, and annotated by Victor McFarland.