

OLD *VERSUS* NEW IN THE SA'ŪDI EXPANSIONS OF THE MOSQUE OF THE PROPHET (ﷺ)

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This paper discusses the relationship between tradition and modernity in the Sa'ūdi expansions of the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ). Two major expansions by King 'Abd al-'Azīz and King Fahd have been targeted. The first expansion by the first Sa'ūdi King, during the Kingdom's formative years, is regarded as a precursor to the second one, which was truly epic and grandest of all previous expansions. The latter was necessitated by the factors of incessant overcrowding and King Fahd's need for boosting an Islamic image. When completed, the Mosque represented a harmonious blend between old and new, and between tradition and modernity. It was modern and progressive in terms of its form, structural performance and engineering means and methods, but traditional and conventional in terms of its embedded meaning, function and substance. The Mosque oozed the aura of authentic Islamic architecture.

Keywords: The Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ), King 'Abd al-'Aziz, King Fahd, Sa'ūdi Arabia, Expansion.

Introduction

Just like most of their predecessors, the Sa'ūdis, too, showed great concern and affection for the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) in Madinah, so much so that there was no Sa'ūdi ruler (up to King Fahd who was the fifth king of Sa'udi Arabia and who died in 1426 A.H./2005 C.E.) who did not leave a significant mark on the form and configuration of the

Mosque. Nonetheless, their contributions greatly varied, from epic to modest, and from original to auxiliary. As a result, scholars disagree as to how many expansions there were. Some say four,¹ others three,² and yet others, who constitute a slight majority,³ say two.

Those who claim that there were four expansions have in mind the contributions of King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 1373 A.H./1953 C.E.), King Faysal (d. 1395 A.H./1975 C.E.), King Khālid (d. 1403 A.H./1982 C.E.) and King Fahd, attributing one expansion to each of them. The only ruler that is omitted is the second King, King Sa‘ūd (d. 1384 A.H./1964 C.E.), whose rule was marred by relentless internal tension, following which he was forced out from the throne and replaced by his brother Faysal. To be fair to King Sa‘ūd, furthermore, the first expansion of the Mosque initiated by his father, King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, had to be taken over by him following the latter’s death. The job was completed two years into King Sa‘ūd’s reign.



Fig. 1

The Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) after the first Sa‘ūdi expansion by the first Sa‘ūdi King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz.
(Courtesy of the “Muhammad the Messenger of Allah” Exhibition held in Madinah in 2016-2017)

Those who believe that there were three expansions do away with the name of King Khālid, whose main contributions accounted for provision of vast shaded open spaces with minimum of other facilities outside the Mosque's western side. Finally, those who maintain that there were two expansions omit the name of King Faysal, whose contributions, like those of his successor, King Khālid, centered mainly on provision of vast shaded open spaces outside the Mosque's western side. However, since King Faisal conceived the project of clearing the huge and densely populated areas on the Mosque's western side, and building rather short-term and ephemeral shading structures for the newly created public spaces, or squares, there, he is regularly referred to as the originator of the idea and its executor. What his successor, King Khalid, later did, by and large, was the extension of, as well as an upgrade to, the former. Hence, King Faysal generally comes ahead of King Khalid in terms of contributions to the architectural evolution and growth of the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ).

In this paper, the view that there were only two Sa'ūdi expansions of the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) is adopted. Those two expansions are ascribed to the first King, King 'Abd al-'Azīz, and the fifth one, King Fahd. They were successfully carried out between 1370 A.H./1951 C.E. and 1375 A.H./1955 C.E., and between 1405 A.H./1984 C.E. and 1414 A.H./1994 C.E. respectively. The jobs of both King Faysal and King Khālid cannot be called expansions. They only served as provisional measures for a fast becoming desperate situation, on the one hand, and as transitions between the two comprehensive expansions, on the other.

The first relatively moderate expansion is regarded as a reflection of the formative phase of the creation and development of the Kingdom of Sa'ūdi Arabia and its gradual assertion on the regional and global socio-political and economic stage. Whereas the second expansion, which was the grandest and one of epic proportions, could be viewed as an affirmation of the identity, crystallized vision and further developmental aspirations of the Kingdom. As always, the Mosque signified both the means and goal of a common and unified civilizational drive. It was the beginning and end of a set of national interests.

As an additional and extremely important dimension in the Sa'ūdi expansions was the impact of the emergence of globalization, end of

imperialism, decolonization, unprecedented newfound oil wealth which brought with it considerable power and influence, and the gradual growth of the Sa‘ūdi society in sophistication and its equally gradual, but particularly cautious, embracing of modernization. Thus, the paper both conceptualizes and contextualizes the two expansions from the perspective of the relationship between tradition and modernity in Islamic architecture, which, in the case of the Sa‘ūdi expansions of the Mosque, oscillated between the moods of harmony and conflict, with the former seemingly outstripping the latter. The discussion in the paper is tripartite, concentrating on (1) a formative phase, (2) motives for the second epic expansion, and (3) assessing the originality of the architecture of King Fahd’s expansion.

A Formative Phase

When on 23 September 1932 C.E./23 *Jumāda al-Awwal* 1351 A.H., ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Fayṣal formally united the Najd and Hijaz regions into the Kingdom of Sa‘ūdi Arabia, with himself as its first king – as a culmination of a long process that started on the night of 15 January 1902 C.E./6 *Shawwāl* 1319 A.H. with the capture of the city of Riyadh – he knew that ahead lay winding and challenging roads of consolidation, unification and development that would require maximum tapping into his inborn qualities and talents, including courage, shrewdness, farsightedness and religious fervor. Saddened by disintegration and the state of anarchy, ignorance and poverty in the Arabian Peninsula, resulting partly from the decline and ultimate collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and partly from the centuries old local conflicts and vendettas, he resolved to unify the ranks of his nation under the banner of Islam and its monotheistic creed.

King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz went on to unify the scattered parts and splintered tribes of the Arabian Peninsula. Soon after establishing security in the Kingdom, he began to organize the state. Departing from the traditional administrative and organizational systems, he developed the modern advanced systems that were needed for the new state to function properly. The modern state also established diplomatic relations in accordance with officially recognized political representation, including the appointment of ambassadors.⁴

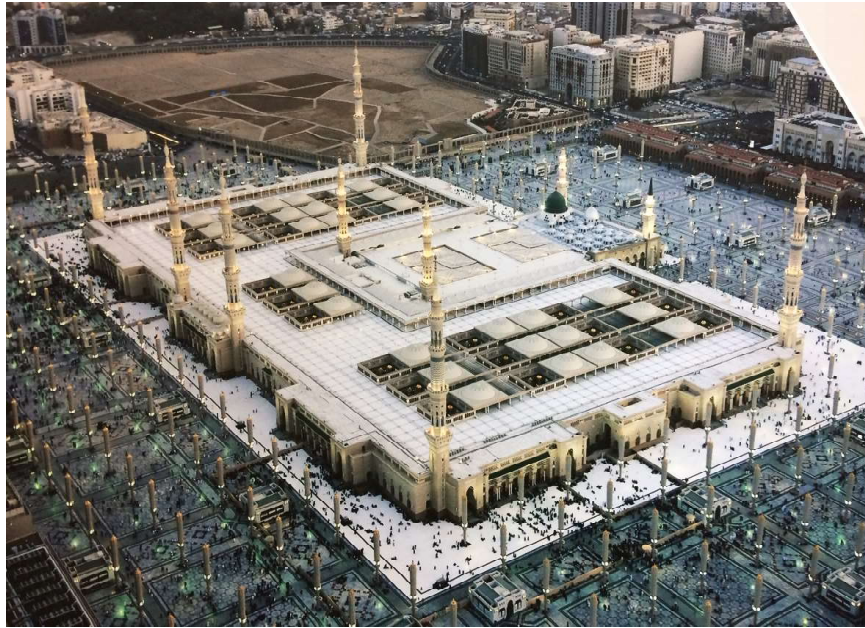


Fig. 2

The Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) after the second Sa'ūdi expansion by King Fahd.
(Courtesy of the "Madinah: the Refuge of Faith" Museum in Madinah)

King 'Abd al-'Azīz was a ruler highly regarded by his people. He was the father of the Sa'ūdi nation, establishing its unity and national identity, and laying the foundations of its modern evolution. He believed that his successes teemed from "his faith in Islam and his determination to maintain and build on the traditions of the region."⁵ "It remains this unique combination of faith and respect for traditions, while adapting to the technological developments of the modern world, which characterizes Sa'ūdi Arabia today."⁶ According to Weston,⁷ after 'Abd al-'Azīz took Riyadh in 1319 A.H./1902 C.E., his political career went through three different phases: about twenty-four years he expanded the kingdom, about nineteen years he ruled it in poverty, and about eight years he managed to the best of his ability – at times, mismanaging, though – its immense new wealth.

It was towards the end of his eventful life, in 1370 A.H./1951 C.E., that King 'Abd al-'Azīz ordered that the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) be rebuilt and expanded. What he did, and how, was it consistent with his

personal qualities and nation building priorities. It reflected the overall spirit of the day. The Mosque expansion took place as much because it was warranted architecturally as because it was needed for boosting the implementation of his nation building and consolidation agenda.

The last time the Mosque was rebuilt and expanded was during the reign of Ottoman Sultān Abdulmecid (‘Abdulmajīd) (d. 1278 A.H./1861 C.E.), a job that lasted 12 years, from 1265 A.H./1848 C.E. to 1277 A.H./1860 C.E. Thus, following the establishment of the Kingdom of Sa‘ūdi Arabia, the Mosque was not too old. During the period of the Kingdom’s expansion and the period of relative poverty, the Mosque underwent only some minor maintenance works and improvements. For example, during the years of 1348-1351 A.H./1929-1932 C.E. – just before the official establishment of the Kingdom, when the region of Hijaz, with the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, was under ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s control – some minimal refurbishment works took place in the Mosque, affecting the ground, the walls, the columns and the arcades surrounding the courtyard.⁸ Moreover, during a period of three years between 1354 A.H./1935 C.E. and 1357 A.H./1938 C.E., only three years after the creation of the Kingdom, the Egyptian government was commissioned to undertake some extensive restoration works that comprised the Mosque’s ground, arcades, walls, entrances and minarets.⁹ Though the latter occasion was consistent with the choice and agreement of the nascent Sa‘ūdi government, it nevertheless displayed to what extent the new Sa‘ūdi administration was still a work in progress. It was still fragile and needed much to be done in terms of upgrading its human resources, skilled workforce and technological advances in order to ensure a strong, sustainable and balanced growth for the country.

Despite all those efforts, the relatively long period of regional political upheavals that marked the crumbling of the Ottoman Empire and the gradual emergence of the modern Kingdom of Sa‘ūdi Arabia, whose beginnings were steeped in abject poverty and yet, whose primary focus was the solidification of its political presence and power, contributed to the adequate maintenance of the Mosque to be every now and then seriously compromised. The matter resulted in some physical aspects of the Mosque to structurally critically deteriorate. It in the end led to the appearance of serious fractures on some columns and in the wall of the northern section of the Mosque. The structural condition of the Mosque

gained international publicity after some Egyptian pilgrims had reported them in 1368 A.H./1948 C.E. The Egyptian newspapers picked up the story and with apparent exaggeration made out of it an international issue that bordered on a scandal. Calls were made for rescuing the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) from the Sa‘ūdi incompetence before it collapsed. Donation drives were instigated and media outlets as well as mosques and other public institutions were mobilized for the purpose.¹⁰

Irrespective of whether the reports were true, grossly exaggerated, or were simply part of a ploy intended to tarnish both locally and internationally – especially in the eyes of Muslims – the image of the newly created state of Sa‘ūdi Arabia and its ambitions not only to become the faithful servant of the holy lands of Makkah and Madinah, but also a regional as well as international force to be reckoned with, the reports were taken most seriously by King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, putting him as much on the defensive as the offensive. No sooner had the Egyptian reports reached the King than he contacted the Egyptian Prime Minister asking him to stop the uncalled-for media witch hunt and indignation.

Indeed, there was so much at stake for the ambitious new state and its leadership, such as national pride, reputation, religious sentiments at home and abroad, and a good rapport with fellow Muslims and their governments. As though partially giving credence to the circulating reports and somewhat admitting responsibility for their substance, King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz pledged to rebuild and enlarge the Mosque. Not only that; he decided to do so with his own money.¹¹ He said that it was his duty to sustain in the best possible shape and condition the Mosque, ensuring thereby the safety, security, wellbeing, services and comfort of its pilgrims and visitors, in their capacity as the guests of the most Compassionate (*dūyuf al-Raḥmān*), as well as of the Madinah citizens. He even went international by writing a letter to the entire Muslim community (*ummah islamiyyah*) about his expansion plans and the *raison d’etre* for it.¹² The resonating message was that as the servant of the holy Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ), King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was simultaneously at the service of Islam and all Muslims and their religious interests. On top of all this there were the perennial issues of steady increase of pilgrims and visitors and their overcrowding inside the Mosque, which also called for an expansion.

After a couple of years of consultations and preparations, involving especially the Egyptian and Pakistani built environment and civil engineering

experts, the work started in 1370 A.H./1951 C.E. As with every other earlier expansion, the buildings surrounding the Mosque, which stood in the way of the projected expansion, were first demolished and their owners duly compensated. In the following year, the foundation stone was laid. A year later, the foundation trenches were excavated at the western side of the mosque, near the Gate or *Bāb al-Raḥmah* where, according to a report presented by the Egyptian engineers, moisture and humidity caused considerable damage to the wall. Work continued for two and a half years, leading to the completion of the new extension. The Mosque reopened in 1375 A.H./1955 C.E. during the reign of King Sa'ūd.¹³

For the work, a special office, or bureau (*maktab*), was created for the purposes of administering, monitoring and supervising all the matters as pertained to administration, management, finance, engineering and construction. The Office had more than fifty officers, including president and several directors and managers covering a number of its sections. Under the technical section, there were 14 engineers, 400 technicians and 1,600 workers. A special workshop, or plant (*maşna'*), was also set up in the area called Abar 'Ali on the outskirts of Madinah, about 80 km from the Mosque. The workshop existed for making bricks, stones and other necessary building materials. It had a number of engineers and other built environment experts, as well as 400 ordinary workers. In addition, imported building materials carried by more than 30 ships via the port of Yanbū', a major Red Sea port in the Madinah province, were provided. In total, there were more than 30,000 tons of materials thus imported.¹⁴

The new building works were characterized by reinforced concrete construction with columns supporting pointed arches. The ceiling was divided into square sections, similar to the wooden ceiling panels, which were decorated with different patterns. That way, the ceiling itself resembled a huge pattern that subtly integrated itself with the rest of the structure's decorative patterns and elements featuring different sizes and shapes. The columns had capitals made out of engraved and pierced yellow brass, the bases of which were covered in dark marble. The column shafts were dressed in white marble and were painted white, a significant departure from an aspect of the individuality of the existing Ottoman architecture in the Mosque according to which the red color

was dominant, with column capitals of carved red stone and the bases of the columns covered in rings of brass. The Ottoman columns were later also repainted white, so as to create a sense of connectivity and harmony inside the building. The depth of the foundations for the walls and columns was five,¹⁵ or seven and a half, meters, as per Mubārakpūri.¹⁶

The Mosque hitherto had five minarets. As part of the latest expansion, three of them: the *Majīdiyyah* at the north-western corner, the *Suleymāniyyah* at north-eastern, and the one near the *Bāb al-Raḥmah* (the Doorway of Mercy) on the western side – all of which were in distinctive Ottoman architectural style – were pulled down. In their place, two new minarets were constructed in a style similar to the new building, which could be best described as Mamlūk revival style that served as an evidence of the continuous Egyptian involvement along with their influences on the expansion mission. The two new minarets stood at the north-western and north-eastern corners at a height of 70 meters each. Their foundations were 17 meters deep.¹⁷ Each minaret was designed in four transversal sections or segments. The first was square topped by a square gallery, the second was octagonal topped by an octagonal gallery, and the third section or segment was round and was topped by a round gallery. The first square section of each minaret rose slightly above the level of the main building. “The first three sections were equal in height while the fourth was higher and topped by what appears to be a fifth segment of a ribbed polygonal shape ending with a ribbed cone.”¹⁸ The Mosque now had four minarets at four corners. No new minaret was erected near the *Bāb al-Raḥmah*.

For the expansion, all parts of the Mosque, except the entire southern roofed sector that included the original Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ), his tomb, his *muṣalla* (praying place), the honourable *Rawḍah*, *minbar* (pulpit), notable historical pillars and some of the earliest expansions, were demolished. Only some minor improvements and modifications were affected there, the most remarkable of which was building an additional western wall, and thus masking from outside the sector’s Ottoman wall on that side. This job was unavoidable and was necessitated by some purely structural motives. Hence, the rest of the Mosque, which included the two courtyards with all of their western, eastern and northern arcades were completely destroyed, giving way to the new expansion project.

When completed, the whole Mosque, comprising the new Sa'ūdi sectors along with the preserved southern Ottoman *qiblah* side, was 16,327 square meters. Of this total, 12,271 square meters were the areas – both old and new – affected by the Sa'ūdi expansion, and 4,056 square meters was the roofed southern Ottoman area. In terms of the Mosque's overall size, the Sa'ūdi first expansion added 6,024 square meters to it. 70 million Sa'ūdi riyals were spent for the expansion.¹⁹ The expansion easily eclipsed all the similar efforts in history in terms of their magnitude, scale and expenditure.



Fig. 3

The Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) seen from the southern *qiblah* side. The first two south-eastern and south-western minarets are part of the preserved southern Ottoman area of the Mosque, the next two belong to the first Sa'ūdi expansion, and the last and tallest pair of minarets belong to the second Sa'ūdi expansion.

The Mosque had five arcades at its rear, or the northern end, which run parallel to the *qiblah*. It also had three arcades at the western and eastern sides, running perpendicular to the *qiblah*. Between the two

courtyards there was a wing that also had three arcades, running parallel to the *qiblah* like their northern counterparts. The width of each of these arcades was six meters. The floor was covered with marble. In all, the part of the Mosque built by the Sa'ūdīs had 232 round columns, 474 pilasters, two inner courtyards, 44 windows, 9 gates and 2 minarets. The length of the northern wall was 91 meters, and of the eastern and western walls, 128 meters.²⁰

Of the nine gates, the positions and names of five of them existed before and were retained because they were important historically and entailed important historical references. One of the gates whose location has been painstakingly observed and its name retained was the *al-Bāb al-Majīdī* (the Gate of Majīd or Abdulmecid) at the northern rear side, named after the Ottoman Sulṭān who was the last to rebuild and expand the Mosque before the Sa'ūdīs. Of the four new gates, two were named after King 'Abd al-'Azīz and King Sa'ūd on the eastern and western sides respectively, as the patrons and executors of the first Sa'ūdi expansion.²¹

What stands out perhaps most in connection with the first Sa'ūdi expansion was King 'Abd al-'Azīz's wisdom, farsightedness and penchant for consultation and listening. As a result of such qualities, the entire honorable southern roofed sector that included the Prophet's original mosque, his tomb or burial chamber crowned by the magnificent green dome, his *muṣalla* (praying place), *Rawḍah*, *minbar*, historical pillars and the traces of earlier expansions, was preserved and successfully integrated into the latest expansion plan. According to al-Anṣārī,²² it was a premeditated objective of the first Sa'ūdi expansion to impeccably integrate itself with the existing Ottoman-style Mosque, further enhancing it structurally and complementing as well as enriching it architecturally.²³ Had it not been for those qualities of the Sa'ūdi leadership, the most sensitive and, at the same time, most evocative, consequential and so, hallowed segment of the Mosque would have been done away with as well.

The King had to make some tough decisions after two Egyptian expert committees had presented conflicting reports and recommendations. They had been commissioned to assess the architectural and functional state of the Mosque, and come up with comprehensive reports and action plans. While one committee recommended the complete preservation

and integration of the sanctified southern *qiblah* side of the Mosque, the other committee, conversely, proposed that the area in question, except the Prophet's (ﷺ) burial chamber, be destroyed and rebuilt like the rest of the Mosque proper. The latter also proposed that the new design should increase the height of the structure by approximately ten meters, to 24 meters.²⁴

Finding it difficult to decide, and feeling the pressure of ordinary people, both locally and internationally, who wanted the most special segment of the Mosque to remain intact, with the exception of some necessary restoration works to be accomplished on it, King 'Abd al-'Azīz sought yet another opinion, this time from a group of most competent Pakistani building technology and engineering experts. Following thorough studies, the latter decided in favor of preservation, rather than demolition, for the reason that the area of the Mosque in question was structurally solid and was going to prove no impediment whatsoever to the planned expansion – to the delight of most people, including, certainly, the King himself. So earnest and genuine was the King about the matter that he from the very beginning engaged the services of only the best, and he did so by contacting and dealing with none other than the governments of both Egypt and Pakistan.²⁵

This way, the King did not want to break away from the past. He knew that comprehending the present and successfully charting a future course depended on how the past is understood and dealt with. He knew that the southern sector of the Mosque, in terms of its architecture, plan and decorative systems, denoted a historical reference and guide, thus serving to the people as an inspiration and motivation, as well as a source of enlightenment and spiritual guidance. It was more than just a structure, or an architectural space.

The new Mosque was a combination of old and new, seamlessly incorporated into one cohesive whole. Most of the old sections were refurbished and enhanced in such a way as to make it difficult sometimes to pinpoint where they stopped and where the new ones started. One of the intended purposes and functions of the Mosque – as advocated primarily by the Ottomans – to be a kind of an exhibition, yet an open air museum, planned both to educate and inspire the people, was duly retained with a modern touch concerning the general development style plus the provision of facilities, services and products.

The new expansion was meant to enrich the already invaluable legacy of the Mosque. Such was projected to be done artistically and architecturally and at both conceptual and physical planes. The presence of a great many Mamlūk, Ottoman and now modern Sa‘ūdi components inside the southern *qiblah* section of the Mosque presented the story of the evolution of the identity of Islamic architecture. Furthermore, since architecture represents the level of the cultural and civilizational consciousness of a people, the legacy of the Mosque likewise stood for a story of the growth of Islamic culture and civilization.

The southern part of the Mosque, it goes without saying, was as much a mirror into the past as it was a springboard to the future. It was a treasure. It had an unparalleled intrinsic value for all parties. Destroying it would certainly have led almost everybody to regret sooner or later. This is so because the preservation of historic buildings is a one-way road. Once it is gone, there is no chance to restore or revive a historic building or site. And the people will never know what will be valued and why in the future. Preservation teaches the people to respect others and ensure thereby that they and their legacies are respected by others. Equally, preservation helps the people find their place in the matrix of things and ideas, just as it helps not only the past, but also the present, acquire their due recognition and place in the people.

Finally, amalgamating old with new, or modernity with tradition, was implemented in the first Sa‘ūdi expansion, principally, owing to King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s undisputed personal piety and certain especially religious revivalist tendencies.²⁶ The decision, in turn, went a long way in propelling the new Kingdom as a country with a vision that transcended its own cultural, historical and even ideological parameters, extending towards those of the whole Muslim community. Regardless of how some people might have interpreted those decisions of the formative Sa‘ūdi leadership, they, nonetheless, enhanced significantly thereby their standing in the eyes of other Muslims. Had they destroyed and then rebuilt according to some novel means and designs the most honorable *qiblah* section of the Mosque, they would have generated more questions than answers. The message aired to the world would have been that the Sa‘ūdis were hijacking and privatizing the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ). Their civilizational mission would have appeared as though pure

Sa'ūdi rather than *ummatic*, i.e., belonging to and concerning the whole Muslim fraternity. In that, furthermore, the Sa'ūdi detractors and outright enemies would have found an infinite substance for endlessly condemning and criticizing the Kingdom. In short, demolishing the most sensitive part of the Mosque under whatever pretexts would have been suicidal for the Sa'ūdis. Marketing themselves as the true custodians of the holy lands and their holy Mosques would have never been successful thereafter.

Preserving the oldest section of the Mosque with the Prophet's elaborate burial chamber, or tomb, and other historical civilizational vestiges there, also helped the Sa'ūdis to justify many of their other equally sensitive religious initiatives and programs, the most important of which, certainly, was the purification of the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah and their environs of the myriads of impious customs and religious innovations accrued over many centuries. The Sa'ūdis needed to present themselves to the world as the bona fide champions of genuine Islamization and global Islamic revivalism, rather than extremists and sheer dogmatists bent on pursuing their narrow radical and excessive religious as well as national agendas. And surely, expanding the Mosque the way King 'Abd al-'Azīz did only played into their hands, giving them the edge over their critics.

Motives for the Second Epic Expansion

Following the first expansion undertaken by King 'Abd al-'Azīz and completed by his son, King Sa'ūd, the next full-fledged expansion was undertaken by King Fahd. In between, King Fayṣal and King Khālid furnished the Mosque with vast shaded spaces outside its western side, described by Mubārakpūrī²⁷ as mere shelters. The time span between the two major expansions was only 29 years.

The second expansion was the greatest and grandest of all. It was an epic undertaking, producing one of the most remarkable buildings in the Muslim world, which became a source of pride to Muslims. It was the largest continuously roofed building in the world.²⁸ Its total size, including the surrounding piazzas, was more than 12 times the size of the first Sa'ūdi expansion. Its capacity was to accommodate in excess of one million worshippers.

Various reasons could be given for conceiving and embarking on such a mammoth project by King Fahd. The following two are most striking: unprecedented crowding and the issue of boosting an Islamic image.

Unprecedented Crowding

The first and most often cited reason for any expansion of the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) is increase in the number of pilgrims and visitors, leading to serious overcrowding, which, in turn, leads to the wellbeing of pilgrims being proportionately affected. This was the case especially with regard to the second Sa'ūdi expansion due to the following.

The emergence of the modern Kingdom of Sa'ūdi Arabia coincided with the conceptual and actual cultural ascendancy of the phenomena of globalization and modernization. Such phenomena, as a consequence, set in motion global movement of people, goods, ideas, values and systems. Moreover, popularization of air travel, which dramatically changed the world and many people's lives in more than one way – such as relating to increase in the speed of travel, aiding international businesses and tourism, and making the world more connected and globalized: economically, politically, socially and culturally – and which was closely connected to rising global prosperity, falling travel costs relative to people's wages, and lower overall business and travel risk, contributed as significantly to the escalating cross-border and cross-continental movement of people. The airplane, thus, is sometimes regarded as the single greatest cultural force since the invention of writing. On the word of Bill Gates, former CEO of Microcosm, the airplane became the first World Wide Web, bringing people, languages, ideas and values together.²⁹

Sa'ūdi Arabia in its capacity as a leading world oil producer, generating an enormous wealth for the country, and increasing manifold the standard of living of most Sa'ūdis, as well as in its capacity as the home of two of Islam's holiest sanctuaries, enhanced roughly from the middle of the 20th century its global stature not only in the eyes of Muslims, but also among non-Muslims as well. As the site of the *Hajj*, or the Muslim annual pilgrimage, which constitutes a fundamental pillar of Islam, Sa'ūdi Arabia, too, was one of the countries that had been

most seriously affected by the global developments. According to Baz Lecocq,³⁰ over the last years, in average, 2.1 million people per year performed the *Hajj*. These millions stand in contrast to the numbers visiting Makkah half a century ago. On average, until 1946 roughly by 60,000 pilgrims visited Makkah annually, with at least half of these coming from the Arabian Peninsula. Today Sa'ūdi nationals make up about a quarter of all pilgrims.

Based on another statistics, approximately during the past 60 years, the number of pilgrims increased about 26 times. In 1364 A.H./1944 C.E., only 37,630 pilgrims from outside Sa'ūdi Arabia performed the *Hajj*. But in 1414 A.H./1993 C.E., as many as 995,611 did so. The figure is expected to rise up to 4 million pilgrims in decades to come.³¹

The explanations for the staggering nearly thirtyfold increase in total pilgrims, and the even more spectacular growth of the number of foreign pilgrims in slightly more than half a century, are quite simple. First of all, the increasing world population in general led to larger numbers of pilgrims. Second, the journey became safer and better organized during the 20th century. In those parts of the Muslim world where it was not already (the Ottoman Empire), the organization of the *Hajj* became a state affair, organized first by the colonial authorities, and by the postcolonial states afterwards. Third, improving global economy, and despite growing disparities in the distribution of global economic wealth, an increasing number of Muslims could afford to pay for the journey. Fourth, the availability of cheap mechanical mass transport increased over this period of time. Finally, Muslim independence from colonialism, and more freedom for Muslim minorities, especially those that lived under the Communist yoke, played likewise a big role.³²

The growth of *Hajj* since approximately 1369 A.H./1949 C.E. has shown an increase of pilgrims by 100% for every decade. Dramatic increases in pilgrims put severe strains on the cities of Makkah and Madinah, which had remained little changed for decades. At *Hajj*-time, roads became impossibly congested, water scarce and pilgrim accommodation overcrowded.³³ The only solution was a spontaneously comprehensive and hugely expensive program of expansion and renovation of the two holy cities' infrastructure and *Hajj* facilities, which began in the second half of the 20th century and still continues. As a matter of fact, ever since the Kingdom was officially established, the Sa'ūdi inclusive

renovation and expansion programs were set in motion and never ceased. With brief hiatuses, the mission only moved from one level of intensity and volume to another, reaching a sort of a climax in the current stage.

In order to tackle somehow the issue of unprecedented and endlessly increasing crowding in the Mosque, especially during the holy month of *Ramaḍān* and during the *Ḥajj* season, King Fayṣal and King Khālīd created the shaded spaces outside the Mosque's western side. The spaces were so vast that they were about three to four times the size of the total first Sa'ūdī expansion. The place, however, was neither pretty nor adequately functional. It provided the pilgrims and visitors with little comfort and relief, particularly in summer and winter when the people needed added protection against the elements. It also lacked some basic facilities, whereas the others were either insufficient or were not up-to-date. In peak season, many people had to pray on streets and in other adjacent open spaces, risking thereby their safety and health, let alone their comfort and general well-being.

To all intents and purposes, the place was a sign of desperation and the over whelmingness of the situation, and was calling for a brave and avant-garde initiative. The initiative, coupled with concrete plan of action, had to be like no other in history. It had to be commensurate with the predicaments the Mosque and the city of Madinah were facing. Not only that; it had to be revolutionary and long-term. That is to say, it had to be so immense, functional, serviceable and ultramodern that no new expansion will be sensibly needed in a foreseeable future. Unquestionably, the issue of unprecedentedly swelling overcrowding in the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) waited to be tackled head-on and fittingly resolved once and for all.

No sooner had Fahd bin 'Abd al-'Azīz ascended to the throne on the death of his half-brother King Khālīd in 21 *Sha'bān* 1402 A.H./ 13 June 1982 C.E., than he started preoccupying himself with the prospect of solving the perennial dilemma of the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ). He was of the view that the existing facilities and conditions were neither sufficient nor conducive to the best fulfillment of the intrinsic purpose and function of the Mosque and the city of Madinah. In their capacity as the guests of the most Compassionate (*dūyuf al-Raḥmān*), the pilgrims and visitors deserved more, even if they did not ask, and the Sa'ūdīs,

both as government and ordinary citizens, were duty-bound to do their level best to make their stay in the Kingdom as comfortable, safe, beneficial and memorable as possible.³⁴

Hence, when he visited Madinah in the month of *Muḥarram* 1403 A.H./October 1982 C.E. – only four months after his enthronement – King Fahd decided to embark on an unmatched expansion of the Mosque, so as to finally solve all the outstanding crowding related problems. In addition, he chose to do so in style and make the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) the biggest and most beautiful mosque in the whole world, employing the latest and most sophisticated building technology and engineering advancements. The expansion was devised to represent a harmonious blend between old and new, and between tradition and modernity, in Islamic architecture, using the existing Ottoman part of the Mosque and the first Sa‘ūdi expansion as a blueprint and a platform for moving forward. The three: the Ottoman section, the first Sa‘ūdi expansion and the new impending one, were set to flawlessly combine and make up an aggregate that, even though so dynamic, modern and forward-looking, would remain faithful to the permanent Islamic teachings and values in general, and to those associated with the mosque institution in particular.³⁵ Although there were physical demarcations that were relatively faintly delineating each of the three historical dimensions of the Mosque, conceptual and spiritual distinguishing benchmarks did not exist.

In this manner, when completed, the Mosque was both modern and traditional. It was modern and progressive in terms of its form, structural performance and engineering means and methods, but traditional and conventional in terms of its embedded meaning, function and substance. In other words, the Mosque oozed the aura of authentic Islamic architecture. It epitomized one of a few exemplars of contemporary Islamic architecture.

As such, the Mosque was also meant to serve as a catalyst for a total urban transformation and development of the city of Madinah. That made perfect sense in that the same pilgrims and visitors needed a host of other exemplary facilities and services during their brief but hectic stay in the city, such as roads, transportation, accommodation, provisions, shops and healthcare. The city urbanization programs, therefore, were required to be as comprehensive, visionary and long-term as those

of the Mosque. That made perfect sense, furthermore, because since its inception during the Prophet's era, the Mosque was envisioned as a community development center, positioned at the heart of the city's life and fabric, and influencing, guiding, besides dictating the fate of the latter. While deciding to make the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) the driving force in Madinah's future urban growth, King Fahd clearly made it go full circle.

Boosting an Islamic Image

During King Khālid's seven years in charge of the country, Sa'ūdi Arabia became one of the richest nations in the world. By 1401 A.H./1981 C.E., Khālid's last full year as monarch, the Kingdom's income soared to USD 300 million a day. There was enough money for everything: palaces for the royal family; free schools and medical care for the people; and new highways, seaports, refineries and power plants for the country's economy.³⁶ The Sa'ūdis generally regarded their oil wealth as God's reward to them as recognition of their piety.³⁷

Towards the end of King Khālid's reign, a few dramatic events on both local and international scenes took place. They significantly affected in many ways the Kingdom's affairs, and their profound impacts were still resonating across the country following King Fahd's ascension to the throne.

Those events were the seizure of al-Masjīd al-Ḥaram in Makkah in 1400 A.H./1979 C.E. by a group of Sa'ūdi conservative rebels claiming that a political and religious revolution in the country had begun. The uprising ended in bloodshed. This event triggered significant protests by the Shi'ah in the city of Qatif in the oil-rich Eastern Province as well. The protests that quickly morphed into widespread rioting spread to other towns and lasted three days, resulting in 17 people being killed, hundreds wounded, and several oil installations being sabotaged.³⁸ The latter series of incidents looked yet more ominous when juxtaposed against the backdrop of the rise of Khomeini and the subsequent Iranian revolution in 1400 A.H./1979 C.E. The revolution was followed by Iran-Iraq war (1401-1409 A.H./1980-1988 C.E.) in which the Sa'ūdis openly and generously supported Iraq. Moreover, the beginning of King Fahd's rule coincided with the beginning of the end of the oil boom which

translated itself into the sharp fall in price, production and revenues. For example, the Kingdom's oil revenues plunged from USD 116 billion in 1402 A.H./1981 C.E. to just USD 17 billion in 1407 A.H./1986 C.E.³⁹

The first set of events had one thing in common. All of the rebels in al-Masjid al-Ḥaram in Makkah, the local Shī'ah population and the Shī'ah of Iran spearheaded by their new charismatic leader, Khomeini, accused the Sa'ūdi leadership of being corrupt, impious and materialistic. The leader of the nearly 300 rebels in the holy Mosque in Makkah, Juhayman bin Muḥammad al-Utaibi, while urging the people to join him and his revolution, denounced the Sa'ūdi royal family as un-Islamic and said that power should be based on one's devotion to Islam alone. He described them as fraudulent, worshipping money and spending it on palaces rather than on mosques and other religious establishments.⁴⁰ "He called for the Sa'ūdi princes to give a full accounting of their wealth and demanded that they break their diplomatic, military and educational ties to non-Muslim countries." He also demanded that the Sa'ūdi government stop selling oil to the West and stop investing money abroad.⁴¹

Khomeini, too, made repeated television and radio broadcasts that attacked the house of Sa'ūd as "pleasure-seeking mercenaries" unworthy of ruling the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah and their holy Mosques. At one point he asked: "How long must Satan rule in the House of God?"⁴²

Accordingly, in the early eighties the Kingdom of Sa'ūdi Arabia was approaching something of the crossroads. Hence, when King Fahd took the reins of power, he had to adapt some of his major governmental programs and policies to the tune of the prevailing local and international socio-political and religious circumstances. Even his image he had to adjust considerably, not due to principle, but due to political exigency.

Fahd had long held a reputation for being one of the Sa'ūdi liberals, and he was the chief architect of the Kingdom's modernization programs. His rise to power raised the hopes of Sa'ūdi progressives that long-promised political reforms would be enacted. However, those hopes were dashed shortly after Fahd's enthronement, as the strict implementation of the Islamic laws and traditions continued unabated. Worse was the fact that Fahd's succession coincided with the first inklings of the bursting of the country's petrodollar bubble. It became a popular belief that since oil

wealth was bestowed by God due to the Sa'ūdi people's piety, its dwindling was on account of God expressing His displeasure over the Sa'ūdis' gradual drift from Islam into materialism and Westernism.⁴³ Reversing the trend, it follows, was the only avenue to reversing the country's fortunes.

In such an atmosphere, hopes that Fahd could oversee liberal reforms quickly evaporated. Instead – and true to many people's expectations – he resorted to shoring up his Islamic credentials and building a reputation of a wise, caring and moderate leader steeped in the spirit of the Islamic message, so as to fend off the growing criticism at home and abroad targeting his policies and personal life.⁴⁴ He might have been frustrated at first with the *'ulamā* (religious leadership), but he needed them on-board if he wanted to succeed in circumventing potential controversies and scandals – especially in the latter stages of his life – and in modelling himself as a true leader championing in equal measure the interests of Islam, his people and all Muslims. The strategy worked to a great extent and both history and public opinion were generally kind to King Fahd, either singing praises to him or regarding him neutrally without taking any sides.

As one of a few tentative reformist measures of King Fahd, while addressing a meeting of scholars from the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) just a couple of weeks after his ascension, he called for the scholars to give up their monopoly on interpreting what is right and wrong in society. He also suggested a refurbishment of the practice of consultation or *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) between scholars and believers that would reconcile the *Sharī'ah* with modern life. Observers are of the view that the gist of his message was unpalatable to the *'ulamā*, who quickly distanced themselves. That might have caused the King to recoil and never mention the subject again.⁴⁵ He might yet have regretted the content of his address, working thereafter on bolstering his religious reputation and commitments with the aim of offsetting the untoward repercussions his speech had earlier generated.

This outlook of King Fahd is epitomized by the following words of his: "The aims of Kingdom of Sa'ūdi Arabia are to strengthen God's *Sharī'ah* and to stick to all its aspects of life, using all the natural resources which God gifted us, exert great efforts so as to achieve comprehensive development and to raise the citizens' standards of living

so that they could live in peace and prosperity. Moreover, God has enabled these countries to achieve so many things and we will achieve more and more due to God's will and strength as well as the cooperation of citizens seeking to achieve such aims."⁴⁶

As part of the boosting of his and his government's Islamic image, King Fahd undertook the most ambitious expansion of the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) (he also expanded as extensively al-Masjid al-Ḥaram in Makkah, and restored al-Masjid al-Aqṣā and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem). Despite the lean years of his tenure, often called the age of austerity,⁴⁷ he spared no expense in carrying the epic expansion through. Eventually, the cost of the expansion of the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) swelled to whopping 30 billion Sa'udi riyals. King Fahd once said to the effect that investing in the expansion of the holy Mosques meant investing in the country's future. The noble mission will return ample goodness (*khayr*) and blessings (*barakah*) to the country and its people.⁴⁸

In order to immortalize his association with the two holy Mosques and his contributions towards their total transformation and painstaking upkeep, setting in the process some new standards for further popularization of the Sa'udi monarchy and legitimization of its undertakings, King Fahd adopted the honorable title of *Khādim al-Ḥaramayn* (Custodian, Protector or Servant, of the two holy Sanctuaries or Mosques). He was the first Sa'udi ruler to do so, thus reviving a tradition that dates back to legendary Ṣalāhuddīn al-Ayyūbi (Saladin) (d. 589 A.H./1193 C.E.) – according to some, even earlier – and which was widely articulated thereafter by some Mamlūk and Ottoman *sultāns* as well.⁴⁹ To Ḥāmid 'Abbās,⁵⁰ King Fahd's adoption of the title in question was an official declaration and endorsement of what was transpiring all along in the Kingdom since its establishment. It was an overdue formal proclamation of the obvious.

Historically, the *Khādim al-Ḥaramayn* designation was oscillating from being merely honorable and hereditary, to being expressive and indicative of tributes for outstanding services rendered to the two holy cities and their holy Mosques, and by extension, to Islam and Muslims at large. It appears as though the reason behind King Fahd's use of the title was a combination of both. After King Fahd, King 'Abdullah (d. 1436 A.H./2015 C.E.) and the incumbent King Salmān both followed suit and adopted the same honorable title.

Proud of his royal family's role in making the pilgrimages to Makkah and Madinah easier, more comfortable, cheaper and safer for Muslims around the world, King Fahd announced on 23 *Ṣafar* 1407 A.H./ 27 October 1986 C.E. that he wanted a new and more humble title. He is reported to have said: "I want to replace 'His Majesty' by something I adore and am honored to carry, and that is '*Khādim al-Ḥaramayn*.'" The title indicated the King's belief and total care for the holy Mosques. Similarly, it implied all the aspirations in his mind and conscience, i.e., return to God, Islam, *Shari'ah* and serving the two Mosques. That was considered at once an honor and responsibility.⁵¹

When once some sceptics questioned the timing and feasibility of such massive expansion projects under the existing challenging economic conditions, King Fahd self-assuredly replied that he did not worry at all, for he knew that because the projects were intended to be undertaken most sincerely for the sake of God and for the benefit of the entire Muslim community, God and his Divine providence will guide him to the best of ways. The successful completion of the Mosque expansion in record time – sceptics were arguing that between 20 and 30 difficult and taxing years were needed – plus what persisted of the country's financial sustainability, a subsequent new oil boom and a new favorable business climate, were perceived as a heavenly reward for the heroic completion of the expansions (not only of the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ), but also al-Masjid al-Ḥarām). The boons were seen as the return on the earlier investments, vindicating the courage of the King and his government.⁵²

Regarding the expansion assignment as a duty towards Islam and all Muslims, King Fahd contacted mainly during a planning stage the Muslim governments, in addition to some other relevant international consultative bodies, informing them of his government's intentions, and seeking constructive advices and suggestions as to how best it should go about doing it.⁵³ Given that the Mosque belonged to all Muslims, it stands to reason that the King felt that they all should be duly informed and kept in the know about the development plans, and that their governments and other relevant agencies yet be allowed to express opinions and put forward suggestions pertaining to the nature and implementation of the whole thing.

From the outset, King Fahd took the Mosque expansion to heart. He formed a ministerial committee which was headed by himself to supervise the expansion project. In order to ensure continuous progress

without even slightest delays and distractions, he appointed the *emir*, or the governor, of Madinah province as his deputy. Another executive committee was also formed, and was directed by the latter as well. The King made it a point to make site visits to the Mosque project at least once a year to personally inspect the progress and quality of the work. His leadership as well as supervisory involvements from the project's conception to its completion were both remarkable and painstaking. He meticulously and to the minutest details studied every architectural, artistic, engineering and operational idea, proposal, plan and design concerning virtually every aspect of the Mosque's development, making countless constructive remarks and suggestions in the process. For example, it was him who chose building materials for the Mosque's floor and walls. Also, when his designers and engineers proposed that only one level be designated for parking with a capacity of 2,000 vehicles, the King objected on the grounds that it was insufficient. He then ordered that two levels with a double parking capacity be built instead.⁵⁴

Assessing the Originality of the Architecture of King Fahd's Expansion

Following the second expansion, the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ), including its external open spaces, or piazzas, which were designated as additional praying areas, could accommodate in excess of one million worshippers. It was a massive undertaking, resulting in the Mosque becoming the biggest and architecturally most outstanding in the world. To some, the expansion represented "the realization of one of the most unique architectural feats in the world."⁵⁵

The entire Mosque area, together with the piazzas, became 400,500 square meters. It encompassed the core of the city of Madinah as it was during the Prophet's (ﷺ) time. The Mosque had three levels: a basement, ground-floor level and roof terrace. The latter is used as an additional praying space whenever required. Since all the services for the building were relegated to the basement area, the space of the ground-floor level was completely freed to be used by pilgrims and visitors for worship purposes. This created panoramic views of the interior of the main praying floor without any visual barriers or interruptions between the arcades, axes and dividing walls.

The height of the ground floor is 13 meters. The height of the basement, however, is only 4 meters, raised above the 20 meter deep foundations. The basement takes up an area identical to the ground floor. Italian white Carrara marble covers the floors of the main prayer hall at the ground-floor level. Its cold feel is always a welcome cooling effect especially during the long hot summer months. At the roof level, floors are covered in white Thassos marble which reflects heat, providing also a cool floor space. At the basement level, the floors are covered in ceramic tiles, governed by the functional requirements of that area.⁵⁶

The plan of the expansion was rectangular. It featured a system that was formed by the repetition of units similar in form and dimension, which enclosed 27 courtyards adorned with sliding domes. The units are connected with a forest of columns and arches, forming numerous arcades some of which run parallel, and others perpendicular, to the *qiblah* side. The ceiling is based on a dimensional unit of either 6 × 6 meters or 18 × 18 meters, and is supported by a set of regular load-bearing columns at 18 meters intervals.⁵⁷

The plan thus appeared as though a macro-arabesque, so to speak, consisting of endlessly intertwined flowing lines, axes, shapes and patterns. It followed a logic of geometry, the knowing and following of which prove invaluable if one wanted to aptly discover, appreciate and interact with the Mosque. Due to a forest of columns and arches that alternated white and bluish-grey voussoirs, the Mosque often reminds of the interior of the Great Mosque of Cordoba in Spain where a forest of columns and arches, alternating red and white voussoirs, was famously featured.

The second expansion incorporated 2,104 columns. All columns are covered with Italian white Carrara marble. The capitals have an octagonal base. They are made out of fine polished brass, engraved and carved in a floral geometric motif which is repeated on each of the four faces. Above each capital is a rectangular frieze cast with three eight-pointed stars in artificial stone. The frieze surrounds each capital on four sides, with another artificial stone frieze worked in pyramid shapes running above it. Four arches spring from each column (with the exception of the courtyard arcade in which there are three), to form the arcade spaces and the structure of the ceiling. The arches are covered in artificial granite in alternating bands of bluish-grey and white on the interior soffits,

and embellished with decorative floral motifs at the top side corners of the outer arches as they meet the ceiling.⁵⁸

A unique feature of the expansion project was the development of 27 main internal courtyards, each courtyard being capped by a state-of-the-art sliding dome, which can be rapidly opened or closed according to the weather and can be used in unison or separately as required. Elaborately carved stone friezes decorate the domes, and the courtyards have been paved in decorative geometrically patterned marble tiles.

These mobile courtyard domes perform an effective environmental and climate-modifying function, contributing to the sustainable integrity of the Mosque. They counteract the extreme seasonal changes in climate and control as well as support the air-conditioned environment of the building. "In summer, as the sun rises in the morning, the domes move silently over the courtyards, sealing the openings perfectly and thus providing shade and supporting the air-conditioning system. In the evening, the domes slide back, warm air radiating to the cold night sky. In winter this process is reversed, so that heat can be absorbed from the sun during the day and radiation prevented at night when the courtyards are covered. In addition, the white background of these domes had the added benefit of reflecting sunlight, thereby lowering the overall temperature of the structure."⁵⁹

It is notable that the design of the domes had to be considerate towards both the architectural proclivity of the new expansion and the Mosque's oldest and most revered section. The form of a shallow pendentive segmented dome was thus designed to complement the original majestic green dome above the Prophet's burial chamber, or tomb, with neither conceptually, nor visually, nor aesthetically challenging its pre-eminence, or integrity, within the Mosque. Furthermore, "the uniformity in the design of the domes, with their white exteriors interlaced with blue, was preconceived as creating a serene relationship with the sky, while reflecting upon the intrinsic values in the geometric designs which embellish the interior sphere of each dome."⁶⁰

The project also included six additional minarets, each one being 105-meter tall and crowned with a four ton gold-plated crescent. Each minaret has a foundation 40 meters deep. The Mosque now has 10 minarets in total. The development of the surrounding open areas and the seven newly constructed entrances ensured the smooth passage of

pilgrims into the Mosque. An extension to the roof area for praying purposes has also been added, whilst also allowing for the possibility of adding another floor to accommodate worshippers in the future, boosting thereby the building's sustainability prospect. In order to facilitate the movement of people across different levels, the building extension has also been fitted out with 18 staircases and 12 escalators placed at the most strategic places near the main entrances.

The Mosque became fully air-conditioned. The comfort of worshippers has been further enhanced by the unique and ingeniously conceived shading system. Twelve enormous mechanically operated Teflon umbrellas, six in each of the two open courtyards, have been deployed to protect pilgrims and help them withstand the high temperatures. Their height – 14 meters when opened – corresponds exactly with the height of the eaves of the Mosque and in this position they perfectly fit the proportions of the two courtyards. The umbrellas are programmed to open and close according to climate conditions. The process takes less than 90 seconds, drastically influencing the internal conditions of the building and reducing energy consumption.⁶¹ Later during the time of King 'Abdullah, 250 similar umbrellas were installed in the Mosque's surrounding piazzas (thus totaling the figure to 262).

The Mosque project also included provision of extensive car parking facilities. A labyrinth of service tunnels, drainage systems and supply networks also now crisscrosses the area. In fact, the magnitude of support services made it necessary to construct a vast basement complex in which to accommodate the service equipment and wiring needs, as well as various other maintenance works.

The reconstructed main gate leading into the Mosque site, the new King Fahd entrance, is situated on the northern side, and is topped with a profusion of domes and minarets on both sides. The exquisite decorations and architectural touches here and elsewhere are in complete harmony with earlier building work on the site, and they feature wonderfully crafted golden grilles, cornices, pillars, brass doors and marble works, as well as special ornately carved pigeon holes for the copies of the holy Qur'an.

The decorative systems of the Mosque are admirable. They feature extensive calligraphy, geometry and floral patterns, often interwoven into intricate arabesques. The effects of these are further augmented by ingenious use and manipulation of rich and bright colors and abundant

light. As a result, the expansive prayer hall seems all the more magnified and outspread by its clever organization of arcades and repeated geometry. A view from one end of the Mosque into any of the prayer arcades, displaying the seemingly endless progression of arches, generates a feeling of an infinite craving and a constant spiritual movement towards a higher order of ontological realities and experiences. The building thus accentuates the effects of its shape and volume, ensuring a strong chromatic impression as well. The decorative conceptualization that emphasized the repetition of the myriads of geometric units, often led to the creation of bigger and more complex patterns as a result of repetitions and unfolding. This regeneration, based on geometric principles, is what causes the ideas of proportion and harmony to be reflected and intuitively felt in the spaces.

Befitting its religious and historical significance, the building has much to offer to the body, mind and soul. The completeness of its structural, aesthetic and functional performances necessitates the completeness of experiences in its users. The building's decorative styles engender a mixture of feelings of peace, tranquility, devotion, enthusiasm, elation and curiosity. It as much soothes and relaxes as it inspires and educates. For instance, while some decorative elements are used for demarcating the prayer bays running between the bases of the columns, others are used for demarcating certain structural components and entire units and their harmonious relationship with other components and units, and yet others are used for determining the positions and points of openings, arches, heights and both the vertical and horizontal lines with curvatures.⁶²

The plan, design and decorative schemes of the Mosque intimate that it was never meant to impose itself on its existential surroundings. Nor did it intend to conquer, as it were, space, though its foremost objective was to carve out and enclose some of it. Rather, the Mosque was meant to be in complete harmony as much with its physical as with metaphysical truths and realities. The concern was how the end result will stand out when juxtaposed with the existing universal setting, a result of heavenly will and artistry, in terms of both the outward appearance and total function of the Mosque: will it complement, or contrast with it; will it go well with it, or will it appear as if something of a misfit, an oddity, or even offensiveness?

A perceptive observer easily gets a feeling that, as a corollary of

such an attitude, the space carved out for the Mosque has been approached with reverence, not arrogance, as it is God's physical realm where people are to live and operate as mere servants. It has been furthermore cut off in humility and with ease, harboring neither might, nor self-assertion, nor defiance. This is an important at once spiritual and intellectual lesson to be duly communicated to the people not only in relation to the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ), but also in relation to the whole sphere of Islamic architecture. Besides, the ultimate objective of the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) – and indeed, of every other mosque – is to promote, inculcate and facilitate in a person peaceful and productive relationships with his Creator and Master, with fellow men and women, and with the rest of creation.

Accordingly, it is an Islamic architectural precept that Muslim architects, designers and structural engineers should strive to exhibit through their creativity and skills, anchored in the power of the Islamic worldview, that the buildings designed by them interact with space, flowing into and becoming part of general space, instead of separating from it. Buildings thus generally remain connected with outside space by means of the open inner courtyards, windows and other apertures. Toward the same end, the edge of many Muslim building is often crenulated, the skyline sometimes multiplied, and the vertical edges recessed or protruded with broken surfaces designed to lessen the impact of the cut-off in space.⁶³ It goes without saying, therefore, that in Islam, architecture – just like any other noble pursuit and craft taken up for the sake of pleasing God – is but a vehicle for aiding the accomplishment of the mission of Islam, not a goal in itself. It is a form of worship, and those who practice it correctly will be rewarded correspondingly.

The Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) has further given prominence to this salient Islamic architectural principle by rendering its surrounding spaces incorporated into the overall design scheme, forming from them open piazzas that essentially became transitional spaces between the surrounding town (space) and the Mosque proper. These can be converted into additional prayer areas, should the need arise to accommodate a greater capacity than the interior of the Mosque complex can hold, in particular during the pilgrimage season and the weekly Friday *Jumu'ah* prayer. "The treatment of these spaces serves as an extension of the Mosque complex, defining its exterior surroundings and ensuring a

coordinated link with the urban fabric. This can be seen in the squares which extend around the Mosque and their link with the street network leading to the city and its urban matrix which encompasses administrative, commercial and residential buildings. The new Mosque extension has been the heart and initiating force of the urban planning process.”⁶⁴

The concept behind the new design was to achieve a harmonious integration between the existing historical areas and elements of the Mosque, dating back to the Mamlūkes, Ottomans and the first Sa‘ūdi expansion, and the new technologically advanced expansion, resulting in a balanced and organic entity. The protrusion of the oldest part of the Mosque from the building’s main rectangle frame on the southern *qiblah* part signaled that the old architectural traditions of the Mosque, along with the principles and values such traditions exemplified, connoted a basis of the building’s architectural legitimacy, and a point of reference for evaluating its overall operations and prospective future directions. Therefore, to some, like Badr,⁶⁵ the plan of the Mosque after the second Sa‘ūdi expansion resembled somewhat a wide human upper body with broad shoulders. The protruding oldest Ottoman part of the Mosque brings to mind the idea of the head, and the first Sa‘ūdi expansion lying under the former and very much inside the Mosque proper, reminds one of all those vital organs that function in the chest directly beneath a person’s head and neck. Without a doubt, the message that the allegory conveys is unmistakable insofar as the relationship between the old and new sections of the Mosque are concerned. As a matter of fact, in terms of architectural design, plan and decorative style, King Fahd’s expansion in many ways was inspired by and followed the first Sa‘ūdi expansion. The latter, thus, was as much the former’s archetype, or antecedent, as its prelude, or overture. Such a relationship was a proof of the Mosque’s spontaneous and harmonious architectural growth, despite its immense size, instead of random and indiscriminate additions, or sprawls.

Moreover, the expansion was to concentrate on the amalgamation of the classical Islamic architectural traditions, while at the same time accentuating the use of suitable building materials that distinguish the historical, alongside geographical, landscape of Sa‘ūdi Arabia, such as granite, marble and stone. The intention, additionally, was to simultaneously apply the latest advances in building technology and engineering through high-tech building designs, industrialized construction materials, production

as well as building methods and techniques. The pure vernacular styles of architecture in the Arabian Peninsula, employing mainly mud bricks, timber, earth plaster and stone rubble, were shunned, firstly, because, when it comes to durability, strength and visual appeal, they were inadequate for the sophisticated and ultramodern expansion, and, secondly, because they were essentially local in character and, as such, were not in a position to create a globally recognized and accepted brand of Islamic architecture.

Architecturally, the expansion followed the Mamlūke revival, or neo-Mamlūke, style. It featured massive entry portals that easily remind one of massive *īwāns* in typical Mamlūke four-*īwān* plans; façade recesses into which doors and windows are placed; colored glass and stucco grills for window openings and other smaller apertures; inlaid marble for surface decoration; intricate arabesque patterns with geometric and floral elements for decoration; calligraphy, particularly on horizontal bands that run across the façade of a building; stilted pointed arches with alternate white and bluish-grey voussoirs – a technique known as *ablāq* in which the Mamlūkes excelled; richly ornamented and embellished flat ceiling, clad in artificial stone, featuring carved floral and geometric patterns; and minarets that have different sections along the component parts of their shafts, resulting in an arrangement referred to as the three or four-tiered minarets.

The one thing that the highly symmetrical Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) did not adopt from the Mamlūke architecture was the latter's consistent asymmetry. In their overall composition, the Mamlūke buildings, time and again, tended to emphasize the use of balance over symmetry. The alignment of the buildings with the different directions of the streets and the *qiblah* wall was emphasized. However, that was understandable in that the Mamlūke society and architecture thrived, for the most part, in densely populated urban environments, such as Cairo and Damascus. Frequent asymmetry in their buildings was not by design, but due to necessity.

Resorting to the Mamlūke revival style was a reasonable course of action for the Sa'ūdīs on account of the following two reasons. First, the last truly international Islamic architectural style was that of the Ottomans. However, the Sa'ūdīs were not inclined to adopting it because of a considerable feeling of resentment many Sa'ūdīs, thanks to the past political tensions and conflicts, harbored against the Ottomans and their

heritage in the Kingdom, as well as because of the comparative inappropriateness of the Ottoman architectural style – whose main characteristic was the dominance of a central dome, often combined with a series of half-domes and small domes that cascaded from the former, which covers a significant part of the prayer hall – to thrive in a hot-arid, or desert, climate.

In addition, although the Ottoman mosque architecture struck a delicate balance between the internal and external spaces, it still could be regarded as introverted, or inward-looking, rather than extroverted, or outward-looking. Whereas, such are the character, volume and scale of the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ), plus the geographical and environmental setting wherein it had been planted, that the disposition of the Ottoman mosque architecture would not have fully satisfied them. The latter parts of this reality even the Ottoman Sultāns themselves had fully grasped. Hence, they never contemplated the prospect of expanding and rebuilding the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ) in an Ottoman architectural style.⁶⁶

Second, the phenomenon of architectural revivalism has become popular globally since the 19th century. That was so in part as a romantic reaction to the impersonal and soulless nature of the industrial revolution. Mass production of objects, including furniture and art, caused people to hark back to the “good old days”, firmly rooted in the prevailing trend of Romanticism. While many people tried to re-discover themselves, no past style was safe from “updating” during the 19th century, especially in the United States. Initially, classically inspired styles such as Greek revival and Roman revival were madly popular in the US because of the perception by Americans that American democracy was based on the “democracies” of antiquity.⁶⁷

As a consequence of these global trends, a number of Islamic architectural revivalist trends in the Muslim world also emerged. The Mamlūke revival style played a significant role in the Middle East because it represented in many ways a cumulative representation of most former Islamic styles.⁶⁸ As such, it was also most evocative of the fast-fading cultural and civilizational glory of Muslims. It was still living on, both in the form of many functional masterpieces that were dotting the region, and in the minds and hearts of many people. It was most fluid and open-ended style, ever receptive to new ideas, refinements and enrichments. Thus, for example, at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the

20th century, the Mamlūke revival style architecture was chosen for the majority of public buildings commissioned by the state in Egypt. Such was the case because of the increasing influences of Europe and how the people responded to them, the wave of modernization in Cairo, and, of course, because of certain religious motives.⁶⁹

It was easiest for the Sa'ūdīs, too, to relate to and accept the neo-Mamlūke style while they were grappling with the phenomena of westernization, globalization and nation-building, trying at the same time to capitalize on the elements of populism and religion in their evolving political ideology. Such a style was a combination of the familiar and the innovative, of the old and new.⁷⁰ It was so flexible that it could endlessly incorporate into its orb as much of the elements of tradition as of the innovative and technological ideas and solutions of modernity. It could easily be described as Islamic, yet modern, or modern, yet Islamic, whichever appellation was making more sense and was more marketable to the people.

No wonder that apart from the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ), the Sa'ūdīs embraced, partly or completely, the same neo-Mamlūki style for many of their great many public buildings, including mosques. That was in equal measure a political, social and religious statement. It was a confirmation of the Sa'ūdi national development paradigm, and a part of the building of their own architectural identity. However, it also showed the extent to which Egypt, from the beginning the epicenter of the Mamlūke revival style, was still influencing the region, above all culturally and socially.

Conclusion

There were two major Sa'ūdi expansions of the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ), one by the first King 'Abd al-'Azīz and the other by the fifth King Fahd. The first expansion took place during the formative years of the newly formed Kingdom of Sa'ūdi Arabia. It was thus regarded as a prelude to the second expansion, which is aptly described as epic and the grandest of all earlier expansions. Its total area encompassed the entire core of the city of Madinah as it was during the Prophet's era. At the end of each expansion, the Mosque's architecture was a combination of old and new, seamlessly incorporated into one

cohesive whole. Following the second expansion, the three main dimensions of the Mosque: the Ottoman section, the first Sa‘ūdi expansion and the latest one, were flawlessly integrated, making up an aggregate that, even though so dynamic, modern and forward-looking, remained faithful to the permanent Islamic teachings and values, in general, and to those associated with the mosque institution, in particular. Although there were physical demarcations that were relatively faintly delineating each of the three historical aspects of the Mosque, conceptual and spiritual distinguishing benchmarks did not exist. Both expansions, in principle, adopted the neo-Mamlūke style in mosque architecture, which particularly at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century dominated especially in Egypt the Muslim leading architectural revivalist tendencies. This additionally demonstrated the extent to which Egypt culturally and socially was still wielding influence over the Kingdom. The Mosque truly oozed the aura of authentic Islamic architecture. It epitomized one of a few exemplars of contemporary Islamic architecture. It is unheard of that anyone who visited the Mosque had any serious complaints or unpleasant experiences relating to the building’s form, function, aesthetics, facilities and services, which is the strongest attestation to its architectural excellence.

Finally, the newly emerging local and global trends had a great many far-reaching implications for the form and function of the Mosque. But the Sa‘ūdi leadership appears to have quickly and fully come to terms both with the significance and magnitude of the subject matter. Irrespective of what their inner spiritual motives might have been – and irrespective of what some people might say in favor of, or against, them – they were ready to pour their petrodollars amassed through exports of crude oil into the prospects of expanding and advancing the contours, function and services of the Mosque and other correlated sites and their own infrastructure. They felt that they owed that, first of all, to the Mosque itself, and to the entire Muslim *ummah* (community). They witnessed the effects of the country’s vast wealth – which, when all is said and done, God had nothing but honored and greatly tested them with – amply manifesting themselves in all spheres of life, so, neither did they hesitate to bigheartedly sanction the same insofar as the Mosque and its expected performances were concerned. Such was always regarded as an act of servitude, philanthropy and remuneration, so to

speak, not only with respect to the pilgrims, but also to the Mosque as an ideological concept and architectural reality. It must have appeared unfair to the Sa'ūdi leadership that the Mosque should have been left lagging behind in mirroring God's abundant boons and blessings, while all other sectors of society unselfishly did otherwise. They must have reasoned, furthermore, that such a scenario could even lead some people who harbored incorrect thoughts, or possessed weak faith, to disrespect the Mosque and all the history, meanings and values it evocatively symbolized. Without a doubt, nonetheless, to be in charge concerning any of the affairs of the holy city of Madinah and its holy Mosque denotes as much an individual glory and privilege as a communal and civilizational responsibility, the latter perhaps somewhat overshadowing the former owing to its infinitely diffused scope and ramifications.

This principle that generally governed the evolution of the identities of the culture and civilization of Muslims is derived from the following Qur'ānic words: "Say: who has forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of Allah which He has produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure, (which He has provided) for sustenance? Say: They are, in the life of this world, for those who believe, (and) purely for them on the Day of Judgment. Thus do We explain the Signs in detail for those who know" (*al-A'rāf*:32).

God also says: "O you who have believed, do not prohibit the good things which Allah has made lawful to you and do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like the transgressors. And eat of that which Allah has provided for you (which is) lawful and good. And fear Allah, in Whom you are believers" (*al-Mā'idah*:87-88).

On this, Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) also said that when God bestows a gift on a servant of His, He loves to see the traces of that gift on him.⁷¹

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