

Oasis Departed: The Decline of Anglo-Saudi Relations

A thesis presented to  
the faculty of  
the College of Arts and Sciences of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts

John David Blom

March 2009

This thesis titled  
Oasis Departed: The Decline of Anglo-Saudi Relations

by  
JOHN DAVID BLOM

has been approved for  
the Department of History  
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

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Peter John Brobst  
Associate Professor of History

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Benjamin M. Ogles  
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

## ABSTRACT

BLOM, JOHN DAVID, M.A., March 2009, History

Oasis Departed: The Decline of Anglo-Saudi Relations (107 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Peter John Brobst

The thesis examines the decline of the relationship between Britain and Saudi Arabia from 1939 to 1951. Britain's ties with the Hashemite kings of Transjordan and Iraq raised suspicion in the mind of King Abdul-Aziz ibn Saud. With the rise of the United States as a factor in Middle Eastern politics, the King slowly looked to Washington as his kingdom's primary western ally. The dismissal of the British Military Mission in 1951, which had provided training for the Saudi military, represented a low point in Anglo-Saudi relations. The way in which the British thought about and dealt with Saudi Arabia provides insight as to the nature of the British Empire and the strategic considerations which influenced its formation.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Peter John Brobst

Associate Professor of History

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Brobst for serving as the advisor for this thesis. I am also indebted to Dr. JonDavid Wyneken, Dr. Robert Davis, and my entire family for their encouragement throughout the process. My colleagues at Ohio University provided a wonderful environment to study and learn, and for that I am grateful. Most of all, I am tremendously appreciative of the patience and support of wife Deborah. Without her, this project never would have been completed.

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## INTRODUCTION

The House of Saud has ruled over parts of the Arabian Peninsula in three different periods. The roots of the dynasty date back to 1745, when Muhammad ibn Saud formed an alliance with Muhammad ibn ‘Adb al-Wahhab. Wahhab advocated an Islamic revival based on the “commendation of virtue and the condemnation of vice.”<sup>1</sup> Wahhabism played a significant role in the rise of all three Saudi states, and continues to influence Saudi politics today. Each incarnation of the Saudi state has had more contact with the British than the one before. Although the British had little interest in the interior of the Arabian Peninsula, as the Saudi state expanded it repeatedly came into contact with British imperial interests in the Middle East. It is these contacts which have formed the basis of the Anglo-Saudi relationship for the past two and a half centuries. While never a part of the formal British Empire, Anglo-Saudi relations provide insight into the nature of that empire, and the continuity of British policy and strategy in the region from the eighteenth century through the Cold War.

Like regions associated with the British Empire, the reason for the Empire’s existence in the Middle East is debated by historians. This discussion can be divided into two camps. The first, following the themes of Cain and Hopkins, argues that economic incentives motivated British expansion. Even when this region proved unprofitable for investment, they argue that maintaining the lucrative trade with India and territories further east demanded some level of British involvement in the political issues of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia: The Formative Years, 1902-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 8-9.

area.<sup>2</sup> The second argument, represented best by Robinson and Gallagher, states that the British concern in the Middle East stemmed from strategic imperatives, such as containing the influence of European rivals.<sup>3</sup>

Part of this strategic importance was the direct containment of Russian influence in the Middle East. Another part, however, involved protecting the British trade routes to the Far East. Although the protection of trade might seem to support the economic argument, Britain's role as a global power depended upon its Empire. Without secure shipping lanes, British would be unable to exert significant influence in Europe. Since economic and strategic interests both factored into the British decision to be involved in the Middle East, the question is one of priority: was Robinson and Gallagher's "official mind" subservient to the wishes of Cain and Hopkin's "gentlemanly capitalists," or vice versa?<sup>4</sup> The continued engagement of the British in the Persian Gulf after the completion of the Suez Canal and prior to the coming of the Oil Age, during which time the importance of trade in the Gulf decreased, demonstrates the supremacy of strategy over economics.

The major areas of British imperialism in the Middle East during the nineteenth century were the Ottoman and Persian Empires, the Trucial states along the Persian Gulf, Aden, Oman, and Egypt. The Ottoman and Persian Empire provided a buffer against

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<sup>2</sup> P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2002), pp. 340-359.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia: The Formative Years, 1902-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 13, and Glen Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 98. For more on this historiographical debate, see Peter Sluglett, "Formal and Informal Empire in the Middle East" in *Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. V, ed. Robin W. Winks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 416-418.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher present their argument for the importance of the official mind in *Africa and the Victorians: The Climax of Imperialism in the Dark Continent* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961).

Russian expansion south. Although the British signed some trade agreements with Persia, these provided little profit for British merchants.<sup>5</sup> In the Ottoman Empire there existed greater trading opportunities, but more important than this was their control of the Dardanelles. The power to deny the Russians access to the Mediterranean was a significant benefit to the British. Although the British initially tried to incorporate the Persian and Ottoman into their economic system, the attempt was short-lived. By the end of the nineteenth century, “the City turned to more attractive areas of investment,” leaving the Foreign Office to “tempt reluctant businessmen into unpromising commercial opportunities in order to shore up Britain’s strategic interests.”<sup>6</sup>

In addition to its role in containing Russia, some sections of the Ottoman Empire rested on some of the trade routes to India. One such route crossed the Ottoman territories of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul (the territories that formed Iraq after World War One) then continued by sea through the Persian Gulf. The pacification of the Trucial States in the mid-nineteenth century brought stability to the southwest shores of the Persian Gulf, and removed possible threats to British shipping along this route.<sup>7</sup> Maintaining the safety of trade was a key aspect of the British interest in Mesopotamia. Economically, the sheer immensity of British trade around the world made the small amount that went to and from the Gulf relatively insignificant to the City. However, in the Gulf this trade had become substantial by the late nineteenth century. From 1895-

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<sup>5</sup> P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2002), 353.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>7</sup> Glen Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 98.

1897, trade with the British Empire accounted for over 80 per cent of the region's foreign trade.<sup>8</sup>

Like the Persian and Ottoman Empires, the British presence at Aden served to check the advance of European rivals into the Middle East and secure one of trade routes to the East. In the early nineteenth century the Ottoman governor of Egypt, Mohammad Ali, launched a campaign on the Arabian Peninsula. Ali received encouragement for this offensive from the French. If Ali were successful, the Ottoman Empire would have been weakened, a unacceptable prospect for the British. In addition, a near perfect natural harbor existed at Aden. Its position made it a valuable coaling station and a good base for patrolling the area for pirates. In 1839 the British landed troops at Aden and established a colony. The British position at Aden fulfilled both of the British strategic objectives in the Middle East: strategic location on trade routes and containment of rivals.<sup>9</sup>

The interior of the Arabian Peninsula held little strategic importance. As a result, British interaction with the first two incarnations of the Saudi state was limited to the occasions when Saudi expansion threatened an area which was a part of British strategy in the region. The first Saudi state engaged the British navy several times in the early nineteenth century, but it was the ongoing struggle with the Ottoman Empire that led to the fall of Abdullah ibn Saud to Muhammad Ali in 1818. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the reborn Saudi state reconquered much of the territory that the previous state had occupied, including Najd, Riyadh, and Hasa. Like its predecessor, this Saudi state again tried to bring the coastal states under its control. Its second leader, Faisal ibn Turki

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<sup>8</sup> Gary Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, (London: Frank Cass, 1976), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Glen Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 52.

clashed repeatedly with the British over the Gulf Coast states. Previously the British acted with indifference towards the Saudi ambitions along the Gulf Coast, on the grounds that the second Saudi had not been engaged in piracy like the previous state had done. However, when Faisal attempted to gain control of Oman and Bahrain in the 1850s and the Trucial States in the 1860s the British responded militarily to stop his expansion. In 1871 the Ottoman Empire retook Hasa and in 1891 a rival tribe under Muhammad ibn Rashid completed his fourteen year campaign to overthrow the Saudis.<sup>10</sup>

After their defeat in 1891, the Saudis went into exile in Kuwait. The following decade proved important in the development of the third Saudi state. After a Kuwaiti coup in 1896, the young Abdul Aziz ibn Saud spent time sitting in court with the ruler of Kuwait, Mubarak ibn Abdullah al-Sabah. During this time, Ibn Saud learned the intricacies of international politics. His understanding of *realpolitik* and the potential power of playing one power off another were fundamental to the success of the modern incarnation of the Saudi state. According to Jacob Goldberg, traditional historiography of Saudi foreign policy is flawed in its claim that the third state continued to same foreign policy objectives as the first two. While the first two incarnations sought constant territorial expansion and the spread of Wahhabism, Ibn Saud and his successors have limited their expansion to avoid the wrath of greater powers, except when another power is available to provide a counterbalance.<sup>11</sup>

The rise of the modern Saudi state began in 1902 with the reconquest of Riyadh by Ibn Saud. He tried over the following years to acquire British support for his rule, to

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<sup>10</sup> Jacob Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia: The Formative Years, 1902-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 21-26.

<sup>11</sup> Goldberg, 3.

counter the threat of the Ottomans who supported his rival, Ibn Rashidi. Despite the presence of a willing collaborator, the Najd region did not affect British strategic interests in the Middle East and Ibn Saud's overtures went unrequited. From 1902 until 1914 support for the Ottoman Empire better served British strategic interests in the Middle East. Despite the decline of the Ottoman Empire, it was still easier for the British to check Russian advance by supporting the Ottomans than to commit enough forces to the region to stop the Russians on their own. This situation altered radically in 1914, when at the outbreak of World War One the Ottomans joined the Central Powers.

In order to undermine the Ottomans in World War One, the British tried to instigate a revolt by the Arabs against Ottoman Rule. In picking an Arab to lead this uprising, they looked to Hussein ibn Ali, the leader of the Hashemite family and the Sharif of Mecca, instead of Ibn Saud. Concern for British support for his Hashemite rivals over himself followed Ibn Saud for the rest of his life. Despite being passed over to lead the Arab revolt, the British knew that maintaining their position along the Gulf would be much easier with the cooperation of Ibn Saud. If Ibn Saud fought with the Ottomans, he could threaten the British holdings along the Gulf and the Indian Expeditionary Force which was expected to land in Mosopotamia.<sup>12</sup> To bring Ibn Saud to their side, the British signed an agreement with Ibn Saud in December 1915 that created the original framework of the Anglo-Saudi relationship.

The Anglo-Saudi Treaty of 1915 recognized Ibn Saud's position as ruler of Najd, El Hassa, Qatif and Jubail. It guaranteed British protection of these regions in exchange

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<sup>12</sup> Goldberg, 113.

for control of Ibn Saud's foreign policy.<sup>13</sup> Under the constantly expansive states of his ancestors, such a treaty would have been unimaginable. However, Ibn Saud understood that his nation could not exist without the consent of either the Ottomans or the British. Because of the decline of Ottoman power, Ibn Saud chose to link his fate to that of the British. Three decades later, when the strength of the British Empire in the Middle East was waning, Ibn Saud would again realign his allegiance to the new force in the region: the United States.

After World War One, the British received three mandates the Middle East: Palestine, Trans-Jordan, and Iraq. In Trans-Jordan and Iraq, the British gave control to sons of Hussein ibn Ali, Faisal and Abdullah. Hussein remained king of the Hejaz. In 1921, Ibn Saud completed his conquest of Ha'il. With this conquest, his kingdom now bordered on all three British mandates. Saudi expansion now placed the young kingdom in a dangerous position. It now bordered three nations, led by the rival Hashemite family with British support. Ibn Saud now became an even more important figure in Middle Eastern politics.

Ibn Saud's completed his final territorial expansion in 1925 by defeating Hussein and gaining control of the Hejaz and the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Three factors contributed to Ibn Saud's decision to invade the Hejaz. First, he felt threatened by the position of Hashemite rivals on both the west and the north. Second, after the new secular Turkish regime under Ataturk abolished the Caliphate, King Hussein had declared himself the new Caliph. This position would have given Hussein far too much power for

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<sup>13</sup> The treaty is printed in its entirety in Clive Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia, 1925:1939: An Imperial Oasis* (Frank Cass: London, 1983), pp. 372-73.

Ibn Saud's liking. Perhaps the most important factor was the withdrawal of British financial support. Until 1924 the British had paid him £5,000 a month. When the British ceased this subsidy, he needed to find a new source of revenue. The taxes generated by the pilgrimage to the holy sites in the Hejaz appeared the perfect answer. Historian Madawi al-Rasheed wrote, "with his subsidies withdrawn, Ibn Sa'ud had little to lose by antagonising Britain."<sup>14</sup> However, despite previous British support for Hussein, they did nothing to assist him against Ibn Saud's aggression.

Although Britain supported the Hashemite family throughout the Middle East, this relationship existed only so far as it benefitted the British strategic position, as demonstrated by their lack of response to Ibn Saud's invasion of the Hejaz. The British encouraged and supported Hussein's effort to lead a revolt against the Ottomans during World War One because it served their interests. In a war between two independent rulers for land without little strategic value, they had few reasons to intervene. Whitehall communicated its policy of non-interference to the High Commissioner of Iraq in a letter dated 17 September 1924. The letter described the conflict as a "religious matter... [a] struggle for the possession of the Holy Places of Islam." Britain's only concern was "the safety of their Moslem subjects."<sup>15</sup>

When the High Commissioner responded the next day with a plea for British intervention, his argument rested on strategic concerns. After discussions with King Faisal, he became convinced him that if Ibn Saud succeeded in conquering Mecca, it

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<sup>14</sup> Madawi al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 46.

<sup>15</sup> Undersecretary of State Colonial Office to Acting High Commissioner for Iraq, 24 September 1924, in *The GCC States, National Development Records: Defence, 1920-1960* (hereafter, *GCC: Defence*) vol. 4 (Archive Editions: Chippenham, 1994), pp. 5-6.

would negatively affect Faisal's ability to rule. Some of Faisal's personal prestige stemmed from his father's position as ruler of the holy cities, a position the Ibn Saud sought for himself. If Ibn Saud were to achieve control of Mecca and Medina, his success might also cause many tribes in Iraq to take up the Wahhabi cause. Faisal passed along reports from his brother King Abdullah that some tribes in Trans-Jordan already accepted Ibn Saud's suzerainty.<sup>16</sup>

The British chose not to intervene, and Ibn Saud completed his conquest of the Hejaz in 1926. This territorial gain forced the creation of a new agreement between the British and Ibn Saud. Extension of the 1915 treaty would have conferred protectorate status to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. This situation would have been completely unacceptable to Muslims across the British Empire.<sup>17</sup> As a result, in 1927 London signed a new agreement with Ibn Saud known as the Jeddah Treaty. The Jeddah Treaty contained provisions protecting the rights of Muslims living under British rule on the annual pilgrimage, promised good relations between Ibn Saud's kingdom and the numerous British possessions neighboring the kingdom, and recognized Ibn Saud's absolute sovereignty.<sup>18</sup>

This recognition did not exclude, however, the existence of an "imperial" relationship. A major component of the Anglo-Saudi relationship from 1926 until 1951 was military cooperation and arms sales. Saudi reliance on British military equipment forged an informal imperial bond, similar to the connection described by John Gallagher

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<sup>16</sup> Paraphrase telegram from the High Commissioner for Iraq to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 18 September 1924, in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 4 (Archive Editions: Chippenham, 1994), pp. 15-16.

<sup>17</sup> Leatherdale, 63.

<sup>18</sup> The treaty can be found in Leatherdale, pp. 380-381.

and Ronald Robinson regarding the imperialism of free trade. When Gallagher and Robinson wrote about the imperialism of free trade, they argued that once foreign economies “had become sufficiently dependent on foreign trade the classes whose prosperity was drawn from that trade normally worked themselves in local politics to preserve the local political conditions needed for it.”<sup>19</sup> The sale of arms to foreign government achieved the goal even more efficiently. Unlike “free trade” imperialism, which required waiting for the groups dependent on British trade to gain political power, “arms sales” imperialism benefitted those already in power.

Prior to 1926, the British, French, Italian, and Belgian governments had agreed not to supply arms and ammunition to leaders on the Arabian Peninsula. During the summer of 1926, the British abandoned this policy. The new strategic situation created by the hegemony of Ibn Saud over the bulk of the Arabian Peninsula, and the strategic benefits of making Ibn Saud’s dependent on British arms, justified this reversal in policy. Great power rivalry also played a role, as the British found that the Italians were supplying arms to the Imam of Yemen. Explaining the change, Colonial Secretary Leo Amery stated that selling weapons to foreign governments “secure[d] good will” from recipient leaders, as well as forced them to be dependent on the British for the correct caliber of ammunition.”<sup>20</sup> This gave the British government the kind of control over military policy of foreign countries that economic investment provided over economic policy. Britain acted as the primary supplier of weapons and military training to the

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<sup>19</sup> John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” in *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire*, ed. Anil Seal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 11.

<sup>20</sup> Leo Amery to H.R.C. Dobbs, 7 July 1956. *The GCC States: National Development Records: Defence, 1920-1960*, Vol. 4, ed. A.L.P. Burdett (Archive Editions: Chippenham, 1994), 51.

Saudi Arabia until the Second World War, when the United States slowly began to replace them. In 1951, the Americans completed their replacement of the British.

The lifting of the arms embargo in 1926 and the signing of the Jeddah Treaty in 1927 created the framework of the Anglo-Saudi relationship that lasted for the next twenty-five years. During this period, British strategic interests remained the primary motivator for the British, and for the Saudis close relationship with the British guaranteed their own security. In the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, three events stand out which demonstrate the strategic nature of the Anglo-Saudi relationship.

The first major challenge in Anglo-Saudi relations came shortly after the signing of the Jeddah Treaty. The border between Iraq and Najd had been established arbitrarily in 1922. It ran through the desert between the two countries, 150 miles south of the Euphrates River. As discussed earlier, Iraq (and previously Mesopotamia) was important strategically to the British for overland communications with India. According to Leatherdale, “the strategic value of Iraq increased during the 1920s as plans for road, rail, and air links with the East...matured.”<sup>21</sup> As a result, the British viewed the raids on southern Iraq by Ikwhan tribes from Najd with concern.

Ibn Saud owed much of his acquired territory to the military support provided by him by the Ikwhan. As Ibn Saud reached his territorial ambitions, his need for the Ikwhan diminished and tension developed between the two parties.<sup>22</sup>

Raiding was a traditional aspect of life in the Arabian desert. One British observer described it as a “breath of life to the Badawin...Just as in the civilised West

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<sup>21</sup> Leatherdale, 95.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Rasheed, 66.

man must have his various sports.”<sup>23</sup> In November 1927, the Ikwhan launched a raid on the British post of Busaiyah, well inside of Iraq, killing several men involved in the construction of a fortified position. It seems probable that Ibn Saud had approved of Ikwhan raids into Iraq to try and compensate them for his restriction of raids on the Hejaz.<sup>24</sup>

The High Commissioner of Iraq, Henry Dobbs, blamed Ibn Saud for the raids. Dobbs argues that the Ikwhan could not function for very long without Ibn Saud’s support, so a rebellion by them seems unlikely. Dobbs goes on, “the main problem is that of Ibn Sa’ud himself. I see no prospect of his abating his ambitions [to rule the entire desert] and no profit in trying to buy him off. The price of security is constant vigilance.”<sup>25</sup> The Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) saw the situation quite differently. Although Ibn Saud never claimed responsibility for the Ikwhan raid on Busaiyah, he did complain about the construction of fortifications near the Iraqi-Saudi border. The CID hoped to appease Ibn Saud by reducing the number of fortified posts, but they would not consider dismantling all the posts as they were necessary for defending communication lines.<sup>26</sup>

By 1929, the situation on the ground had changed substantially. At the end of 1928, Ibn Saud sent a message to his supporters throughout Najd announcing his abdication. His gamble paid off, and his rule was reaffirmed by many local leaders throughout Najd. In addition, religious leaders announced that the Ikwhan had

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Leatherdale, 96.

<sup>24</sup> Leatherdale, 124.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Sir Henry Dobbs to Leo Amery, 29 March 1928. Appendix II to Annexure B of Akwhan Situation: Report of a Sub-committee in *GCC:Defence*, Vol. 4, pp. 87-90.

<sup>26</sup> Akwhan Situation: Report of a Sub-committee in *GCC:Defence*, Vol. 4, 83.

overstretched their authority and needed to be reined in, forcefully if necessary. This allowed Ibn Saud to gather his own forces and cooperate directly with the British to stamp out the Ikwhan rebellion.<sup>27</sup>

After seeing the effectiveness of the Royal Air Force against the Ikwhan rebels, Ibn Saud concluded that his young kingdom could benefit from the establishment of an air force. In June 1929 he began to inquire on the possibility of buying four airplanes from the British, as well as a stock of bombs. He also requested that British personnel assist in the training of the Hejazi-Najd Air Force.<sup>28</sup> The British agreed not only to sell Ibn Saud the aircraft he requested, but to subsidize his purchase. In justifying this position, the British reemphasized the strategic importance of their relationship with Ibn Saud, “whose territories not only have long and ill-defined common frontiers with territories for which we are responsible, but who also controls one of the key positions on the route to India and Australia.” The British also hoped that relationship with Ibn Saud might make him more cooperative in their desire to use Saudi air space as part of the air route to India. Finally, if the British did not assist Ibn Saud, another European power likely would, “and thus gain a footing in Northern Arabia which might lead to considerable complications.”<sup>29</sup>

In 1933, the United States entered the geopolitical scene when Standard Oil of California won a concession for oil rights in Saudi Arabia. Most historians see the extension of lend-lease aid to Saudi Arabia in 1943 as the turning point in both US-Saudi

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<sup>27</sup> Al-Rasheed, p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> Jeddah to Foreign Office, 19 June 1929, in *GCC: Defence*, Vol. 4, pp. 121-23.

<sup>29</sup> Telegram from Mr. Bond, Jeddah to Foreign Office, 5 July 1929, in *GCC: Defence*, Vol. 4, pp. 131-37.

relations and Anglo-Saudi relations.<sup>30</sup> Although an important event, without the granting of a major oil concession to an American company the extension of lend-lease would have been unlikely. During the negotiations for the first Saudi oil concession at Hasa, the British put forward very little effort to win the concession. Following the concession to SOCAL, the British recognized this had been a strategic mistake, and pursued a concession for the eastern part of Saudi Arabia.

Britain's failure to pursue a concession for oil in Saudi Arabia is a case where economic interests influenced British policy more than strategic considerations. In the early 1930s, the global depression decreased demand for oil. Simultaneously, discovery of new fields in Oklahoma, Texas, and California increased the available supply. In Texas, the price per barrel had dropped from \$1.85 in 1926, to around a dollar by 1930, and finally to less than twenty cents per barrel by the end of 1931.<sup>31</sup> The British felt they had all the oil they needed in Persia and Iraq. In fact, one representative of the Iraq Petroleum Company said during the negotiations that the IPC "already had more in prospect than they knew what to do with."<sup>32</sup> Companies from the United States held only a minor role in the IPC consortium, so there was much more incentive for US companies to seek the Saudi concession.

In the case of Saudi Arabian oil, lack of economic incentive prevented the British from strengthening their ties with the Saudis. In the years after the first Saudi concession to SOCAL, the British realized their mistake. In a discussion over the possibility of an American company gaining a concession in Kuwait, the Admiralty argued:

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<sup>30</sup> Aldamer, 62.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Yergin, *The Prize* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 247.

<sup>32</sup> Yergin, 291.

A Concession in the Persian Gulf by arrangement or neglect of local commercial interests which now underlie political and military control, will imperil G[reat] B[ritain]'s naval situation in the further East; her political position in India; her commercial interests in both; and the imperial ties between herself and Australasia.<sup>33</sup>

After 1933, the British pursued and won concessions for the eastern part of Saudi Arabia, as well as “Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Muscat, Dhofar, and the Aden Protectorate.”<sup>34</sup> The case of the first Saudi Arabian oil concession is the exception that proves the rule. Although economic motives temporarily trumped strategic considerations, in the aftermath the British actively sought out new oil concessions throughout the gulf in order to maintain their strategic position.

From 1933 on, Anglo-Saudi relations became more complicated as new actors entered the Arabian stage and the strategic situation in Europe continued to evolve. The Italians hoped to solidify their position in Eritrea by building closer ties with Yemen.<sup>35</sup> The growing Italian presence on the Red Sea forced the British to consider European matters in their policy towards the Saudi Arabia. In 1934, when war broke out between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, the British remained neutral. Since no British interests were threatened by the fighting, they had no incentive to interfere. They did, however, make it clear to the Italians that they would not permit Italy to interfere on the side of the

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Leatherdale, pp. 208-09.

<sup>34</sup> Leatherdale, 211.

<sup>35</sup> Leatherdale, 150.

Yemenis.<sup>36</sup> A key to protecting the strategic interests of the British Empire was keeping any other European power out of the region.

Joseph Kostiner argues while “it was true that in 1939 Saudi Arabia was reluctant to cross over in to the pro-Axis camp, but nevertheless Ibn Saud was not interested in strategic cooperation with Britain.”<sup>37</sup> This exaggerates the intensity of the split between the Saudis and British. Throughout his negotiations with the Germans and Italians, Ibn Saud kept the British well-informed of the nature of these discussions. When the German government demanded, as part of an arm sales agreement, that the Saudis sign a treaty of neutrality with Germany, Ibn Saud consulted the British. They advised against such a treaty, counsel Ibn Saud followed. Shafi Aldamer states that Ibn Saud “was determined to protect his Kingdom’s relations with Britain; particularly once he found out ...that such relations were irreplaceable.”<sup>38</sup> Following the outbreak of World War Two, Saudi Arabia remained neutral, again acting on British counsel. Saudi Arabia had little to offer the British, in terms of strategic position or military force.<sup>39</sup>

Clive Leatherdale titled his book on Anglo-American relations prior to World War Two, *Imperial Oasis*. Despite minor disagreements, the British enjoyed positive relations with Ibn Saud. Although no formal imperial bond existed, London held significant influence over Saudi foreign policy and was the kingdom’s closest western

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<sup>36</sup> Joseph Kostiner, “Britain and the Challenge of the Axis Powers in Arabia: The Decline of British-Saudi Cooperation in the 1930s” in *Britain and the Middle East in the 1930s*, eds. Michael J. Cohen and Martin Kolinsky (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 132.

<sup>37</sup> Kostiner, 141.

<sup>38</sup> Aldamer, 28.

<sup>39</sup> Aldamer, 43.

ally. This story changed dramatically after the war, as the British were forced to depart their “oasis” by the growing ties between the United States and Saudi Arabia.

## CHAPTER 1: ANGLO-SAUDI RELATIONS DURING WORLD WAR TWO

Ibn Saud, who exercised almost total dominance of his kingdom's foreign policy, recognized his nation needed a powerful western ally to remain even a regional power. For many years, the King contented himself with cooperating with the British, despite their divided interest in the region. During the 1930s, however, Ibn Saud explored the possibility of strengthening his ties with either Germany or Italy. Whether or not these brief forays into cooperation with the future Axis nations may have been merely a ploy to squeeze a better deal from the British, in either case the ambition of Ibn Saud to strengthen Saudi Arabia's position in the region becomes clear. After the outbreak of World War Two, the king shifted his attention to the United States. These developments forced Britain to reevaluate the strategic importance of Saudi Arabia. Ibn Saud's approaches to Germany and Italy never progressed to a point that warranted a serious response from London, however the growing wartime relationship with Washington proved troublesome to officials in the Foreign Office. Since Iraq, Transjordan, Palestine, and Persia all remained more critical to the British position, they ultimately could do very little to prevent the deepening ties between Saudi Arabia in the Middle East. This did not mean, however, they that did not try. Whenever possible, the British obstructed the increasing American interests in Saudi Arabia, as long as doing so did not weaken their own position in the region.

The growing Italian presence near the Red Sea in the middle of the 1930s, including the invasion of Eritrea in 1935, generated concern within Ibn Saud's government. The King worried about the extent of Italian ambition in the Red Sea

region. However, Italian expansion also provided an opportunity. Ibn Saud believed he could possibly play the Italians and British against each other to his own benefit, as he had with the Ottomans and the British during World War One.<sup>40</sup> This opportunity disappeared in 1938, when London and Rome signed an agreement pledging not to damage each other's interests.<sup>41</sup> Even before the Italians reached their accord with the British, Ibn Saud sought a new possible ally in Berlin. Despite their mutual sympathies of anti-Semitism and professed anti-British feeling, they failed to reach any meaningful agreements. Ibn Saud tried to purchase German arms, but was unsuccessful. The Germans suspected that Ibn Saud might be using them to get a better deal from the British and were unwilling to provide arms to Ibn Saud as they feared he would very likely join the Allies anyway and use their own weapons against them. Berlin also refused to risk such an open affront to London in return for such little reward.<sup>42</sup> Whether Ibn Saud's overtures to the Italians and Germans were serious is rather doubtful. More likely, he hoped to entice the British to counter any offers coming from Rome or Berlin. Regardless of his true intentions, when war became imminent he began to realign himself with Britain.

Following the outbreak of war in Europe, Ibn Saud offered to join the war on the side of the Allies. Leo Amery, working in the India Office, sent a letter to Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, suggesting that a declaration of war on the Axis by Ibn Saud might aid the British. He gave three possible benefits. First, Ibn Saud's entrance into the war

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<sup>40</sup> Clive Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia, 1925–1939: An Imperial Oasis* (London: Frank Cass, 1983), 294.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 302-06.

might coerce Yemen not to join the war on the side of the Italians. Additionally, Saudi ports would provide a base of operations to fight in the Red Sea, should the British be pushed out of Egypt. Finally, and most importantly, Ibn Saud's declaration of war could have a positive effect on the morale of Muslims in the Empire, specifically in India.<sup>43</sup> Amery's justifications for accepting Ibn Saud's offer reflect Saudi Arabia's secondary importance to the British. The British wanted Saudi influence in Yemen and India, areas vital to the Empire. The only interest in Saudi Arabia because of Saudi Arabia itself was its location on the Red Sea, and even that was a backup plan for the worst possible scenario. Amery, like the rest of the British civil service, viewed Saudi Arabia as a region from which to defend other areas critical to the empire, but not crucial in and of itself.

Amery's arguments failed to convince the British government to ask Ibn Saud to declare war on the side of the Allies. Halifax responded to Amery on July 1 and explained the government's decision. Halifax stated that Ibn Saud's goodwill towards Britain was well established in both the Arab and Muslim world and a declaration of war would have only a minimal effect. In regards to the potential of Saudi ports on the Red Sea, he dismissed their value entirely. The navy had previously discussed using Saudi ports and decided they would provide little benefit. He became even more assertive when discussing the possible loss of Egypt. Halifax argued if Egypt were lost:

I should not have thought that in that event there would be the slightest possibility of our being able to maintain our position in the Red Sea, or, indeed in the Middle East at all, or that the fact that Ibn Saud was in the war on our side could make any difference to us in the plight in which we should then find ourselves.

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<sup>43</sup> India Office to Foreign Secretary, 25 June 1940, [FO 371/24588] in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 6, 647.

This further reflects Saudi Arabia's worth to the British. Should Egypt fall, a position in Saudi Arabia would be inadequate to try and reverse the British fortunes in the Red Sea. In conclusion, Halifax expressed an official declaration of war from Ibn Saud might cost the British more than it was worth. Ibn Saud might require further subsidies (the British had already provided substantial aid to help offset the revenue decline due to the decreasing number of people making the pilgrimage, a major source of revenue) or promises regarding settlement of the Palestine issue and the border dispute between Saudi Arabia and Oman.<sup>44</sup> Ibn Saud willingness to join the Allies pleased the government, yet they believed the price for a declaration exceeded the possible value.

A week after Halifax's response, a memorandum from the Foreign Office expanded on the limited value of Saudi Arabia. The Foreign Office noted that if Yemen joined the war on the Italian side, the British might wish to have Saudi assistance in attacking Yemen from the north, in order to prevent the fall of Aden. Even in this situation, they did not view Saudi support to be valuable enough to offset the likely costs.<sup>45</sup> Like the question of Ports on the Red Sea, Saudi Arabia was important enough as a strategic asset to justify the expense. The Committee of Imperial Defence affirmed this decision on 10 July.<sup>46</sup>

The discussions of Saudi Arabia joining the allies emphasized the secondary nature of Saudi Arabia in British strategic thinking. The decision to decline Ibn Saud's offer

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<sup>44</sup> Foreign Secretary to Rt. Hon. Leo Amery, India Office, 1 July 1940, [FO 371/24547, FO 24590] in *GCC: Defence*, vol 6, pp. 661-64.

<sup>45</sup> Official Committee on questions Concerning the Middle East: FO Memorandum, 8 July 1940 [FO 371/24547, FO 24590] in *GCC: Defence*, vol 6, pp.666-670.

<sup>46</sup> Minutes from Committee of Imperial Defence, 10 July 1940 [FO 371/24547, FO 24590] in *GCC: Defence*, vol 6, pp. 671-73.

reflects one of the key values of the Empire: cost-effectiveness. As comparative British power declined in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, the concept of grand strategy began to emerge and officials began to see empire as the key to Britain's position in the world. Empire could not be had simply for empire's sake; it must provide value in either economic or geostrategic terms. During World War Two, Saudi oil production did not provide enough economic motivation to make it a primary British concern. Nor did it provide strategic advantages that were not already possessed elsewhere.

Comparatively, the response to trouble in Iraq demonstrates how the British acted toward nations it viewed as critical to the Empire. After World War One, Britain created Iraq from three former Ottoman provinces. By 1929, the government in London believed that Iraq could effectively be controlled through advisors and granted Iraq its independence.<sup>47</sup> By the start of World War Two the power of British advisors had declined. Fear that the Iraqi government might join the Axis led the British to launch an invasion in the spring of 1941. In Saudi Arabia, the British declined Ibn Saud's offer to join the Allies because of the cost supplying his military might incur, while in Iraq they willingly sent their own army (much of it Indian) to secure their interests.

At the end of 1942, the British government reconsidered its position regarding an open alliance with Saudi Arabia. The Imperial General Staff issued a memorandum which argued in favor of an alliance. They based this reversal of policy on many of the previously made arguments. An alliance with Saudi Arabia would provide a morale boost to other Muslims fighting for the Allies and increase security for Iraq, Yemen,

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<sup>47</sup> Joseph Sassoon, *Economic Policy in Iraq, 1932-1950* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 8.

Trans-Jordan, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea.<sup>48</sup> More important, however, was the reassessment of what it would cost to gain Ibn Saud as an ally. A previous memorandum, written two weeks earlier, stated: “it is unlikely that Ibn Saud would use this occasion for pressing for modifications of the Palestine White Paper in favour of the Arabs.”<sup>49</sup> The General Staff projected diminished costs for Ibn Saud’s support, in terms of the amount of military supplies the King would request. The most important change from the COS discussions regarding an alliance with Saudi Arabia from the summer of 1940 to the end of 1941 were not the possible benefits, but the cost at which those benefits could be reaped. The British government sought Saudi Arabia’s full cooperation when they believed it could be acquired with little given in return. The reversal of British policy proved irrelevant. When the British approached Ibn Saud and asked him to declare war on Germany and Italy, he replied that it was not in his nor his country’s best interest to declare war, although he pledged to do everything he could to aid the Allies, short of declaring war.<sup>50</sup>

Ibn Saud knew his future rested with the Allies, but this did not prevent him attempting to increase his own status in the Middle East. He looked to strengthen ties with Washington, either to replace London as his primary western ally, or to convince the British to increase their support of his kingdom. In the early part of the war, the United States was unwilling to deepen its relationship with Saudi Arabia. In 1941, Washington refused to send any financial aid to the kingdom. Not everyone in the State Department

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<sup>48</sup> COS (41) 752, “Neutrality of Saudi Arabia,” Memorandum by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 23 December 1941, in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 4, pp. 683-64.

<sup>49</sup> COS (41) 738, “Neutrality of Saudi Arabia,” Copy of a letter from the Foreign Office dated 6<sup>th</sup> December 1942, 11 December 1942, in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 4 pp. 679-80.

<sup>50</sup> Telegram from Riyadh to Foreign Office, 25 February 1942, in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 4, pp. 706-07.

agreed with this decision. The American minister in Egypt, Alexander Kirk, advocated fiercely for the United States to send financial aid but he failed to convince Secretary of State Cordell Hull of the merits of supporting Ibn Saud. Hull argued that the Near East remained primarily a British area of interest, and there were more urgent areas of need than Saudi Arabia.<sup>51</sup> State Department attitudes toward Saudi Arabia slowly changed as the war progressed. In February 1942, Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles sent President Roosevelt a letter suggesting that in the near future it might be beneficial for the United States to establish air fields in Saudi Arabia.<sup>52</sup> The following month, the United States established a permanent legation at Jeddah. While remaining the minister to Egypt, Kirk also assumed the post as minister to Saudi Arabia. In an effort to build goodwill and lessen the fallout from the refusal to supply economic aid, the United States funded an agricultural mission to Saudi Arabia which began work in March 1942.

American policy towards the Middle East as a whole, and specifically Saudi Arabia, evolved in 1942 and 1943. The pressing needs of the war on domestic oil production created fears of a coming shortage. In December 1943, Harold Ickes authored an article which argued, “if there should be a World War III it would have to be fought with someone else’s petroleum, because the United States wouldn’t have it.”<sup>53</sup> This sentiment, which had been developing long before Ickes put it in words, caused the United States to reverse their decision regarding aid to Saudi Arabia in 1943. American suspicion over British intentions in the Middle East amplified concern over future oil

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<sup>51</sup> Secretary of State to the Minister in Egypt (Kirk), 22 August 1941, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, (hereafter *FRUS*), 1941 vol. III, pp. 645-46.

<sup>52</sup> Under Secretary of States (Welles) to President Roosevelt, 12 February 1942, in *FRUS*, 1942 vol. IV, pp.562-63.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Yergin, 395.

supply. Leaders from both the oil industry and the U.S. government feared that Britain was attempting to put itself in a position to control Middle Eastern oil after the war. Earlier in the year, the Secretary of State, Secretary of War, Secretary of the Navy and Secretary of the Interior made recommendations to President Roosevelt regarding petroleum reserves. The recommendation focused almost exclusively on Saudi Arabian oil as the primary, future source of oil for the United States.<sup>54</sup> At the time, California-Arabian Standard Oil Company (CASOC) concession in Saudi Arabia was the largest American oil concession in the Middle East.<sup>55</sup> Although the report's recommendation that the US government buy a controlling interest in CASOC never came to fruition, its focus on Saudi Arabia illustrated the rising importance of the kingdom in American foreign policy.

The United States' interest in Saudi Arabia ran deeper than oil. In January 1943, Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson sent a letter to the US Lend-Lease Administrator recommending the extension of Lend-Lease aid to Saudi Arabia. This particular request focused not on oil, but returned to the earlier idea that the US might desire to build a large airfield in Saudi Arabia and economic aid would be beneficial in negotiating the rights.<sup>56</sup> These two strategic interests, oil and base rights, established the foundation for US-Saudi relations. Rachel Bronson lists three core reasons for the relationship: oil, strategic location, and religious identity.<sup>57</sup> The religious link developed

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<sup>54</sup> "Recommendations as to Petroleum Reserves, 25 June 1943, in *FRUS*, vol. IV, pp. 925-30.

<sup>55</sup> Yergin, 396 and Rachel Bronson, *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 40.

<sup>56</sup> Secretary of State to the Lend-Lease Administrator (Stettinus), 9 January 1943, in *FRUS* 1943, vol. IV, pp.854-55.

<sup>57</sup> Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 23.

during the Cold War in reaction to the officially atheist Soviet Union, but the first two ties can be traced back to World War Two. Over the next eight years, American interest in Saudi Arabia continued to grow, whereas Saudi Arabia remained a secondary priority for the British. Throughout 1943 and 1944, both the United States and Great Britain continued to supply Ibn Saud with economic and military aid, although the burden shifted increasingly to the United States. The British expressed mixed reactions to the growing American aid. They welcomed this aid, to the extent it helped solidify their own position in the region. At the same time, Foreign Office officials questioned whether the United States might try to replace the British in the region after the war.

In the final months of 1943 a series of letters passed back and forth between London and Washington discussing the importance of Anglo-American collaboration, a sentiment shared by the leaders of both nations. The Foreign Office proposed a meeting between American and British officials to discuss the future of Anglo-American relations in the Middle East, to take place in London sometime in 1944. Although the State Department responded positively toward the idea of such a conference, they requested that the meeting be held in Washington, due to the difficulties of wartime travel. The State Department argued that the British had more officials already in Washington capable of discussing technical matters relating to the Middle East, so they would have to send a smaller contingent. The debate over where to hold the conference continued in following correspondence. The British claimed that because of their long history in the region, more information would be available in London to answer questions that might arise. The Americans answered back that because of their long history, the British should

have more officials familiar with the region that they could spare, whereas the State Department had relatively few people assigned to the Middle East. Eventually the Director of the State Department's Near Eastern Office travelled to London to discuss topics relating to the region. Although rather petty, the debate over where the conference should be held demonstrates a larger truth in Anglo-American relations regarding the Middle East. While both sides agreed in the abstract that cooperation would be beneficial, in practical matters they often could not agree on the most basic affairs.<sup>58</sup>

In the last years of the war, economic aid to Saudi Arabia became a major point of contention between Washington and London. The Allies subsidized Saudi Arabia's domestic and foreign expenditures, as well as provided military aid. In 1943, they divided the aid into domestic and foreign expenditures; the United States provided the former and Britain the latter. During the annual pilgrimage, Saudi Arabia often experienced a shortage of currency. The United States agreed in October to mint 15 million riyals, using a little over five million ounces of silver from the United States Treasury to ensure sufficient currency.<sup>59</sup> Saudi Arabia looked to Britain to subsidize its foreign expenditures. The British provided 5 million riyals and 400,000 British pounds worth of gold in 1943 to cover the costs of maintaining its diplomatic missions.<sup>60</sup> Military aid for 1943 was provided on a 50-50 basis. In 1944, they extended the principal of equal sharing principal to economic aid as well. Supplies and commodities worth £3,046,000 (over \$12 million) were provided by the United States and Britain. In

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<sup>58</sup> The exchange is published in *FRUS*, 1943 vol. IV, pp. 6-18.

<sup>59</sup> "Saudi Arabian Silver," annex to Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs (Alling), 11 November 1943, in *FRUS*, 1943 vol. IV, 849.

<sup>60</sup> The Chargé in Saudi Arabia (Shullow) to the Secretary of State, 1 December 1943, in *FRUS*, 1943 vol. IV, 915.

addition the British provided £10,000 a month to pay for Saudi foreign ministries while the Americans contributed another 10 million silver riyals as lend-lease.<sup>61</sup> Although the exact amount provided by each of the Allies varied, both nations endeavored to give at least the appearance of equality in economic assistance. In 1945, this ceased to be the case.

During the Anglo-American discussion regarding the Saudi aid package for 1945, the mistrust and suspicion on both sides of the Atlantic rose to the surface. The Americans doubted the British willingness to continue to provide aid in the amounts needed to support the Saudi government. In April 1944, Ibn Saud expressed his own concerns to the American Minister in Saudi Arabia over the capability of London to continue to provide him with the aid he needed.<sup>62</sup> Two months later, during Anglo-American discussions regarding the amount of aid Saudi Arabia was to receive in 1944, an American involved in the negotiation complained to Washington that the British seemed “so determined to effect drastic reduction not only in British subsidy but in all Saudi expenditures that they seem to consider Saudi stability as of secondary importance.”<sup>63</sup> Ironically, concern in Washington over the lack of British support in Saudi Arabia developed simultaneous with fear of long term British imperial ambitions in Saudi Arabia.

The day after Ibn Saud voiced his doubts regarding the British ability to continue providing adequate support, the American minister in Saudi Arabia sent a dispatch to

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<sup>61</sup> The Secretary of State to the Minister Resident in Saudi Arabia (Moose), 26 July 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, pp. 719-722.

<sup>62</sup> The Minister Resident in Saudi Arabia (Moose) to the Secretary of State, 29 April 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, pp. 695-96.

<sup>63</sup> The Chargé in Egypt (Jacobs) to the Secretary of State, 7 June 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, pp. 702-03.

Washington which stated the activities of the British legation, “look remarkably like [an] attempt to establish British influence.”<sup>64</sup> He argued that the United States should consider taking full responsibility for aid to Saudi Arabia, in order to protect American interests from “British pressure.” The State Department deemed this concern credible enough for Secretary of State Cordell Hull to raise the issue with the British Ambassador in Washington.<sup>65</sup>

One specific area of disagreement in the middle of 1944 was a proposed economic mission to Saudi Arabia. Because a British officer was to be in charge of a joint military mission, the Americans wanted an American to lead the financial mission planned to help Ibn Saud manage the Saudi economy. Secretary Hull further justified this claim by stating “that the preponderant interest in [the] Saudi Arabian economy is unquestionably American in character and will presumably remain so for many years.”<sup>66</sup> The ARAMCO oil concessions formed the basis of Hull’s argument. The British reacted fiercely against this assertion. They responded that Ibn Saud received far more of his income from the pilgrimage than he did from oil revenues. Furthermore, they estimated these revenues would double once the war was over. Because of the great number of Muslims living under British rule, this made the Saudi economy more of a British concern than an American one. Although they conceded that in the long run oil production would replace the pilgrimage as the primary source of revenue for Saudi Arabia, they concluded that “the American claim to present preponderance in [the] Saudi Arabian economy is based

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<sup>64</sup> The Minister Resident in Saudi Arabia (Moose) to the Secretary of State, 30 April 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, pp. 696-97.

<sup>65</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, 26 June 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, 710.

<sup>66</sup> The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Winant), 1 July 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, pp. 711-13.

upon a misconception of the facts.”<sup>67</sup> The proposed economic mission never materialized, so the argument remained unsettled. The debate, however, shows the growing tension between the Americans and the British regarding Saudi Arabia. It also illustrates the way in which the British sought to extend their control without incurring great expense. Providing an economic advisor would give a substantial amount of influence over the Saudi economy while costing very little.

Despite growing frustration, when the Americans and the British presented their joint aid program to Ibn Saud on 1 August 1944, they emphasized the equal division of the aid.<sup>68</sup> Although the Allied powers might compete in private, they publicly maintained the aura of cooperation to the fullest extent possible. In the latter half of 1944, two issues arose which created further tension between London and Washington: the construction of an airfield by the United States at Dhahran, and the construction of a radio-telegraph station in Saudi Arabia by the United States to be operated by Saudi Arabia.

In July 1944, two representatives from ARAMCO met with King Ibn Saud and proposed the construction of a radio-telegraph station in Saudi Arabia that could be used for direct radio communication with the United States. The stations would be built by the United States but operated by Saudi Arabia. Ibn Saud reacted favorably towards this idea, but had to act carefully because of previously granted a monopoly on Saudi Arabia’s foreign telegraphic communications to the British firm, Cable and Wireless, Ltd. In order to modify this agreement, he had to inform Cable and Wireless, Ltd. of his

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<sup>67</sup> The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Winant) to the Secretary of State, 21 July 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, pp. 718-719.

<sup>68</sup> The Secretary of State to the Minister Resident in Saudi Arabia (Moose), 26 July 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, pp. 719-22.

intention to do so by 1 December 1944.<sup>69</sup> If this deadline passed, Ibn Saud could not modify the agreement for another five years. When London discovered the American intentions, they sent an objection to Ibn Saud without informing the United States and specifically asked Ibn Saud to keep their objection secret. The American Minister in Egypt found out about the British objection from a confidential source and informed the Secretary of State.<sup>70</sup> When confronted, the British claimed they believed the matter had been forgotten by ARAMCO, so they did not see a need to bring it up.<sup>71</sup> Upon further investigation, the American Minister in Saudi Arabia reported to Washington he received secret information that the British intended to “conceal their objection to Saudi radio station until after deadline December 1 when nothing could be done for 5 years.” Eddy went on to question the British motives: “if security of communications was the reason[,] why conceal their objection from our Government?”<sup>72</sup> Ibn Saud informed Cable and Wireless of his intention to modify the agreement before the deadline, but the negotiations with the Americans continued on into 1945.

The Americans also proposed in 1944 to build an airfield at Dhahran. They brought the proposal to Ibn Saud in July and received a negative response in September. Although the king did not outright refuse, he clearly opposed the project. Once again, a confidential source informed the American minister in Egypt that the British government

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<sup>69</sup> The Minister Resident in Saudi Arabia (Moose) to the Secretary of State, 7 July 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, pp. 760-61.

<sup>70</sup> The Minister in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State, 29 September 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, 761.

<sup>71</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 21 October 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, 762.

<sup>72</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 22 October 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, 763.

told the Saudis to deny the request.<sup>73</sup> At the same time as this was happening, there was growing concern that the British might seek to take over an American airfield in Persia, due to the growing British oil interests in that country.<sup>74</sup> This led to terse exchange between the United States and Britain regarding cooperation in the Middle East. Individually, all the British officials consulted responded positively towards the construction of the airfield, yet a change in policy was not forthcoming from London. In late October, the American Minister in Saudi Arabia, Colonel William Eddy, reported to Washington that the British objection to the radio-telegraph station “together with objection to [the] United States Army airdrome [at] Dhahran we have two recent proved incidents where British are attempting to damage or limit American interests.”<sup>75</sup> Despite professed cooperation, the British continued to block American interests. In 1945, Anglo-American negotiations over foreign aid, the construction of a radio-telegraph station and an airfield at Dhahran, and the deployment of an American Military Mission to Saudi Arabia demonstrated the British would continue to interfere with American policy when they could so at a minimal cost.

The State Department became more aggressive in its pursuit of influence in Saudi Arabia at the beginning of 1945. In February, the British Minister to Saudi Arabia, Stanley Jordan, had a private discussion with Eddy regarding the Saudi aid package for 1945. Jordan estimated the Saudi finances to be in better shape than the Americans

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<sup>73</sup> The Appointed Minister to Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 4 September 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, 662-63.

<sup>74</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, by the Assistant Secretary of State (Berle), 9 October, 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, vol. V, 664.

<sup>75</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 22 October 1944, in *FRUS*, 1944 vol. V, 763.

believed. Eddy left the discussion convinced that the British would again push for a reduction of aid.<sup>76</sup> The British confirmed his suspicion in March. At a meeting with Dean Acheson, one of the multiple acting Secretaries of State, the Foreign Office stated they intended to cut Saudi aid in half from 1944.<sup>77</sup>

In Washington, government policy moved in the exact opposite direction. On the first day of 1945, the State Department issued a memorandum outlining the need to pass legislation that would allow the United States to continue providing Saudi Arabia with financial aid after the termination of Lend-Lease.<sup>78</sup> In recommending this policy to the President, the Secretary of State referred to a report from December 1944, outlining the strategic value of Saudi Arabia to the United States.<sup>79</sup> The importance of Saudi Arabia was threefold: a “strong and independent” Saudi Arabia would contribute positively to regional stability; American oil interests needed to be protected; and finally, the military needed airfields in Saudi Arabia to facilitate the transfer of aircraft to the Pacific.<sup>80</sup> In response to the British proposal of halving Saudi aid, another Acting Secretary of State, Joseph Grew, requested the Foreign Economic Advisor to consider fully funding the “minimum essential requirements” of Saudi Arabia in 1945, regardless of British aid. He estimated the amount required to be \$18 million.<sup>81</sup> This request demonstrated the increasing importance of Saudi Arabia in the strategic planning of the United States. The

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<sup>76</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 12 February 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, 849.

<sup>77</sup> The Acting Secretary of State to the Minister in Egypt (Tuck), 19 March 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, pp. 863-64.

<sup>78</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs (Parker), 1 January 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VII, pp. 845-46.

<sup>79</sup> Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Roosevelt, 8 January 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VII, 847.

<sup>80</sup> Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Roosevelt.

<sup>81</sup> The Acting Secretary of State to the Foreign Economic Administrator, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, 866.

continued growth of American involvement made Saudi Arabia's economic stability a major interest for the United States.

In April the British Embassy sent a memorandum to the State Department arguing again for a reduction in aid. The memorandum set the limit of British support to one and a quarter million Pounds, about five million dollars. They justified this decision based on the increasing amount of revenue being collected by Ibn Saud from the pilgrimage. The memorandum made it clear the United States could provide further aid if it wished. If the United States chose to do so, however, the British wanted to divide the American aid into "supply" and "subsidy." The supply portion would be divided 50/50 between the United States and Britain, as the 1944 aid package had been. Any extra provided by the United States would be considered a subsidy. In closing, however, the British stated their hopes that the United States would agree to reduce their aid package, as the "abandonment of the principle of equal partnership would inevitably give the impression of Anglo-American rivalry."<sup>82</sup> Britain's own economic troubles forced a reconsideration of economic policy in the Middle East. London knew it could no longer match the amount of aid the United States would provide to the region, but they hoped to maintain the same level of influence in the region as they had previously held.<sup>83</sup>

The spirit of wartime cooperation prevailed, at least in the matter of aid, and the United States and Britain reached a compromise agreement. The two allies provided a joint aid package to Saudi Arabia in July. The package totaled ten million dollars,

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<sup>82</sup> The British Embassy to the Department of State, 17 April 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, pp. 875-77.

<sup>83</sup> Sassoon, 19.

exactly the amount dictated by the British in March.<sup>84</sup> The United States provided a further three million dollars worth of supplies and ten million Riyals.<sup>85</sup> Despite failing in their efforts to convince the United States to reduce their overall aid to a matching level, the British continued to try and obstruct American interests in Saudi Arabia.

Washington reopened the discussion over the construction of radio-telegraph station at Dhahran early in the new year. The British responded that the concerns about the existing service raised by the United States in 1944 had been addressed in previous responses. They claimed that atmospheric conditions would limit the capability of a radio-telegraph station on the mainland of the Arabian Peninsula. Even if such a station could provide better service, constructing a station at Dhahran would damage the interests of a British company unnecessarily, since the traffic requirements from Saudi Arabia did not merit two separate lines. They again requested that the United States accept modifications to the existing service.<sup>86</sup> When the Americans continued to push for the construction of a Saudi station, the British avoided giving a straight answer. When pressed on the matter, they often stated it was being discussed by multiple departments and no final answer had been reached. By July, the inability to secure British accepted began to negatively affect the prestige of the United States. In a long report to the Secretary of State, Eddy described this failure as “humiliating.” The delay reinforced the

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<sup>84</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 30 July 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, pp. 935-36.

<sup>85</sup> The Acting Secretary of State to the Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy), 16 July 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, pp. 930-31.

<sup>86</sup> The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Winant) to the Secretary of State, 23 January 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, pp. 1011-12.

view in the Saudi government that Britain remained the primary foreign power in the Middle East.<sup>87</sup>

American influence in Saudi Arabia hit a new low in July. On July 4, Ibn Saud informed the American he would not to accept a new American Military Mission. This mission, which would have improved the road from Dhahran to Riyadh, trained Saudi pilots, helped the Saudi army develop their medical capabilities, and provided other military training.<sup>88</sup> Ibn Saud cited internal objections to more foreign involvement in his country as the major reason for his refusal.<sup>89</sup> Soon after, it became apparent that while internal pressures had an impact, the key factor in Ibn Saud's decision was British pressure on him to reject the American mission. In a meeting with Eddy, Ibn Saud confirmed this suspicion. Another source in the Saudi Foreign ministry told Eddy, "The Americans are our friends and we like them; but Britain is the power with which to deal." Eddy concluded in the report to Washington that:

only when we find a way to match Britain as an effective guarantor of [the] Saudi Arabian economy can we hope to eliminate, once and for all, this British veto on United States proposals in Saudi Arabia. Otherwise, for all our investments in the land, Britain, I believe, will enjoy full political advantage over the United States of America.<sup>90</sup>

Britain's long-standing position in the Middle East allowed them to maintain a disproportionate amount of influence over the Saudi government. As a result, despite providing less aid to Ibn Saud than the Americans, there were able to maintain their

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<sup>87</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 8 July 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, 925.

<sup>88</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia to the Secretary of State, 24 March 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, pp. 867-69.

<sup>89</sup> The Vice Consul at Dhahran (Sands) to the Secretary of State, 4 July 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, 920.

<sup>90</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 8 July 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, 926.

power in Saudi Arabia without putting in the cost that other, more important areas of empire required. Not until the Cold War when it became obvious that the United States intended to remain in the Middle East did Britain's view of Saudi Arabia as a secondary concern cost the British their role. The complete transition did not occur until 1951 when Ibn Saud informed the British their military mission would no longer be required, but the origins of the shift can be seen in World War Two.

Frustration over the telegraph issue in the United States reached such a level that Secretary of State James Byrnes raised the issue with the British delegation at the Potsdam Conference and then later directly with the British Foreign Secretary.<sup>91</sup> The Foreign Office finally responded in October. They said if Saudi Arabia wished to change the agreement they had every right to do so, and they had no legal grounds to object. In closing, they felt they had behaved quite reasonably throughout the negotiations and did not understand why the Americans were so upset about the whole matter.<sup>92</sup> Not until December, however, after an international Telecommunications Summit at Bermuda did the British inform Ibn Saud they had no objection to the project.

The British opposition to an American constructed and Saudi-run telegraph station demonstrates the importance to the Empire of controlling the flow of information. In *Global Communications Since 1844*, Peter Hugill emphasizes the close relationship between global communications and power. In his introduction, he surmises "if information is power, whoever rules the world telecommunications system commands the

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<sup>91</sup> The Secretary of State to the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Bevin), 22 August 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, pp. 1023-25.

<sup>92</sup> The Chargé in the United Kingdom (Gallman) to the Secretary of State, 20 October 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, pp. 1026-28.

world.”<sup>93</sup> Although his narrative focuses on development of communication technology, an underlying theme is the constant attempt by Britain to control global communications. In the first half of the twentieth century, they had mostly succeeded in this effort. Within this context, the motivation behind British opposition to new lines of communication becomes clear. By the end of World War Two, the United States began to see itself as a world power and recognized the importance of communications in filling that role. Drawing from the work of Ludwell Denny, Hugill argues that “a polity that could not break the effective British monopoly of telecommunications could not hope to succeed Britain as a hegemon.”<sup>94</sup> British efforts to protect their global dominance in communications showed their desire to continue acting as a first-rate power, even in the aftermath of World War Two. The new Labour government continued the policy of its predecessor obstructing the interests of the United States, particularly when doing so cost them nothing.

The British also continued to obstruct the construction of an airfield at Dhahran. The United States intended to build the airfield and utilize it during the war to transfer troops from the European to the Pacific theater. After the war, the Saudis would operate it as a commercial field. Rather than directly approach the Foreign Office with the request, like they had in 1944, the United States opened discussions with British military leaders regarding the airfield. They convinced the British Chiefs of Staff that the project was critical to the war effort. The Chiefs of Staff then recommended it to the British government. By avoiding the civil servants in the Foreign Office, the Americans secured

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<sup>93</sup> Peter J. Hugill, *Global Communications Since 1844: Geopolitics and Technology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

British approval for their plans in May.<sup>95</sup> In August, the United States formalized the agreement with Ibn Saud. After finalizing the deal, Eddy commented the negotiations for the airfield progressed more easily than the previous discussions regarding the American Military Mission. Eddy credited the announcement of the aid package at the end of July as the reason for the ease of the negotiations.

The Foreign Office refused to give up that easily and soon found a way to revive their objections. Shortly after London approved the plan in May, it became likely the war against Japan would be over before the airfield could be completed. In June, Joseph Grew sent a memorandum to President Truman arguing that the United States should proceed in the construction of the airfield, as it served the long term national interests of the United States. To justify this, however, it would be necessary to insure the rights of American airline companies to utilize the field without discrimination.<sup>96</sup> This opened a window for new objections from the British. They argued their consent had been solely for a military airfield, although the initial plan had discussed the use of the Dhahran airfield as a civilian facility after the war.<sup>97</sup>

The struggle over the Dhahran airfield represented only part of a larger struggle between the United States and Britain over postwar civilian aviation. Neither nation desired full scale competition for civil air transport, but both wanted a more favorable position within international agreements than the other was willing to concede. Lord Beaverbrook coordinated civil air policy for Britain while Adolph Berle did the same for

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<sup>95</sup> British Embassy to the Department of State, 4 May 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, 887.

<sup>96</sup> Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to President Truman, 26 June 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, pp. 915-17.

<sup>97</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs (Merriam), 16 June 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, pp. 905-907.

the United States. While these two tried to outmaneuver each other on the national level, British Foreign Office officials tried to keep the United States from building an airfield in Saudi Arabia.<sup>98</sup>

In October, the Saudi government began negotiations with Transcontinental and Western Air to operate civilian and cargo service to Dhahran. After the first set of discussions, the acting Saudi Foreign Minister informed the Americans that “the principal obstruction to any agreement with an American company was the objection of the British government.”<sup>99</sup> Even after receiving the generous aid package from the United States in 1945, the Saudi government remained unconvinced that they could look to Washington as a long-term ally. The British continued efforts to try and block the American project until the very end of the year. Like their objection to the telegraph station, they had no legal grounds for their case. On December 24, they finally conceded and gave Ibn Saud their consent to work with the Americans.<sup>100</sup>

Although the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia had grown closer over the course of the war, throughout 1945 Ibn Saud was unsure about the future of American involvement in the Middle East. He knew the British would remain after the war and so he did not want to do anything to make them unnecessarily angry.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Alan P. Dobson, “The Other Air Battle: The American Pursuit of Post-War Civil Aviation Rights” in *The Historical Journal* 28 (June 1985): 429-439. See also, Betsy Gidwitz, *The Politics of International Air Transport* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1980).

<sup>99</sup> The Chargé in Saudi Arabia (Sands) to the Secretary of State, 31 October 1945, in *FRUS* 1945, vol. VIII, 966.

<sup>100</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 24 December 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, 991.

<sup>101</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 13 September 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, pp. 954-56.

Certain dynamics of the Anglo-American relationship when it came to Saudi Arabia seem contradictory. One on hand, the British argued in 1944 and 1945 to reduce the amount of aid being sent to Saudi Arabia. In 1944, this raised concerns in the State Department that the British might not care about the stability of Ibn Saud's government. Some of the same officials, however, worried about encroachment by the British on American interests in Saudi Arabia. Barry Rubin balances these opposing views by accusing the State Department of being overly paranoid of British policy. It is true that the British welcomed increased American involvement in Saudi Arabia in terms of financial and military aid. Rubin correctly states that at the beginning of the war the British pushed the Americans to become more involved in Saudi Arabia.<sup>102</sup> However, they attempted to limit the amount of influence the Americans had in the region, despite providing the majority of the aid. Rubin only briefly mentions the role the British played in attempting to block the construction of the telegraph station and air field at Dhahran. When he does discuss it, he dismissed British involvement as mere allegations, despite the confirmation of British interference from multiple sources within the Saudi government.<sup>103</sup> He implies that any evidence the Americans had was created by the Saudis to trick them into providing more aid. Rubin's article works from the assumption that by the end of the war, the British had given up on empire, and so they had no long term ambitions in Saudi Arabia. The next six years of Anglo-American competition in Saudi Arabia demonstrates the flaws in this assumption.

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<sup>102</sup> Barry Rubin, "Anglo-American Relations in Saudi Arabia, 1941-45," in *Journal of Contemporary History* 14 (April, 1979): 254.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

Amikam Nachmani provides a more accurate portrayal of the difficulties of Anglo-American cooperation in the Middle East. His title quotes a British foreign office official, who said of the challenge: “It is a matter of getting the mixture right.” Like Rubin, Nachmani shows that London sought some level of involvement in the region by Washington. He also explains British misconceptions about American involvement. Because the United States was not actively involved in the Middle East before the war, the Foreign Office thought they could draw them into the region to provide support without fear of the Americans challenging British interests. Even if they tried, the British believed the Americans to be inept in foreign policy.<sup>104</sup> Later in the war when some in the Foreign Office realized the Americans were seeking to establish post-war influence in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, they believed that only through cooperation could prevent a total loss of British influence in the Middle East.<sup>105</sup> The struggle for Britain became finding a way to work with the United States while protecting its own interests. Although fear of the Soviet Union fostered cooperation in most of the Middle East, the British failed to “find the right mixture” in Saudi Arabia and were replaced by the United States as the primary western ally of Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>104</sup> Amikam Nachmani, “ ‘It is a Matter of Getting the Mixture Right’: Britain’s Post-war Relations with America in the Middle East” in *Journal of Contemporary History* 18 (January, 1983): 122.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

## CHAPTER 2: PALESTINE IN US-ANGLO-SAUDI RELATIONS

The problem of Palestine's future became a major factor in the Anglo-American-Saudi triangle after World War Two. The history of British policy toward Palestine has been extensively researched and it is not necessary to give a full description here. However, a short summary of British policy from the inception of the Palestine Mandate is required to understand how they approached the problem after World War Two.

At the San Remo Conference in 1920, Britain and France divided up the territory of the Middle East between themselves. The French received control of Syria, while the British received Iraq, Trans-Jordan, and Palestine. The League of Nations gave its approval to this division in 1922, but added the call to create a "Jewish homeland" in Palestine. There lacked a clear definition of what constituted a homeland. Zionists claimed this meant the formation of a Jewish state, others felt it meant only a spiritual center. In response to ongoing violence, Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill issued a White Paper for Palestine in 1922.

Throughout his career, Churchill consistently believed the Jews to be an enterprising and productive people, in contrast to the Arabs whom he held in contempt. At one point in his career, when questioned about the legitimacy of the Jewish claim to Palestine, Churchill responded by blaming the Arabs for the poor condition of Palestine: "where the Arab goes it is often desert."<sup>106</sup> Churchill, however, was not an unwavering Zionist. Although he publicly supported the idea of a Jewish state, privately he expressed concerns for geostrategic reasons. According to Michael Makovsky, Churchill believed "the Turks might grab northern Mesopotamia, deepen its ties with Bolshevik Russia, ally

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<sup>106</sup> Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews*, 79.

with the Palestinian Arabs, and foment regional uprisings against the British.”<sup>107</sup> In the long term, however, Churchill felt the Jews would be stabilizing force in the Middle East. Over time, the economic development stimulated in Palestine by the industriousness of the Jews (as he believed them to be), would shift the opinion of the Arab people.<sup>108</sup> However, this plan could not succeed if the Zionists kept stirring up trouble. A desire to calm both sides and open the door to eventual reconciliation led to the 1922 White Paper. This policy directive supported the idea of a national home for Jews within Palestine, but not involving all of Palestine. It also stated that Jewish immigration “[could] not be so great in volume as to exceed whatever may be the economic capacity of the economy at the time to absorb new arrivals.”<sup>109</sup>

Churchill’s policy statement never transformed from an abstract idea into any sort of action. Palestine made little progress toward independence and the British continued to limit Jewish immigration into Palestine. The next major policy initiative came in response to the growing persecution of Germany’s Jews. The Peel Commission, formed in 1936 to investigate possible solutions, issued a 404 page report which called for the partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states. Although moderates on both sides supported the proposal, as a whole neither group accepted the commission’s findings.<sup>110</sup> Even members of the British government opposed partition. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain opposed any radical change in policy which would negatively affect the feelings of the Arabs. With the growing instability in Europe, the last thing the British

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<sup>107</sup> Makovsky, 103.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>109</sup> Winston Churchill: The Churchill White Paper (June 1922), in *The Israel-Arab Reader*, pp. 25-29.

<sup>110</sup> Segev, 402.

needed was major problems in the Middle East.<sup>111</sup> Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden worried that the new Palestine policy might cause the Arab nations to join with Mussolini or Hitler.<sup>112</sup> Arab riots in 1938 led the government to retract the offer. A policy statement released in November 1938 stated that “further examination has shown that the political, administrative and financial difficulties involved in the proposal to create independent Arab and Jewish States inside Palestine are so great that this solution of the problem is impracticable.”<sup>113</sup> Despite citing administrative efforts the primary impediment to partition, the key factor in the decision to abandon the recommendation of the Peel Commission was strategic. The British needed Arab goodwill if war erupted in Europe, a requirement reflected in a new White Paper formulated in 1939.

In the latter half of the 1930s, British military planners embraced the “organic whole” concept, which stipulated that what happened in Iraq, affected Trans-Jordan, Palestine Egypt and the Sudan.<sup>114</sup> As the British prepared to open negotiations with Palestinian Arabs in 1939, the Chiefs of Staff Committee emphasized to the British delegation the need to appease the Arabs; the delegation complied perfectly. The final agreement, released in May 1939, limited future Jewish immigration into Palestine to 10,000 per year for five years, after which point the Arabs could veto any future immigration. In addition, 25,000 Jewish refugees would be allowed to enter. The White Paper also called for an increase in self-government, divided between the Arabs and Jews

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<sup>111</sup> Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews*, 176.

<sup>112</sup> Martin Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East: Strategy and Diplomacy, 1936-42* (Houndsmill: Palgrave, 1999), 61.

<sup>113</sup> British Government: Policy Statement Against Partition (November 1938), in *The Israel-Arab Reader*, 43.

<sup>114</sup> Kolinsky, 71.

based on their proportion of the population.<sup>115</sup> On the future executive council, the Arabs would receive two out of every three representatives.<sup>116</sup> Once again, neither the Arabs nor the Jews accepted the new British policy. The shift in favor of the Arabs did help solidify London's relationship with the other Arab rulers in the region.

Interwar British policy over Palestine illustrates the way in they formed imperial policy. Whitehall officials and politicians alike acted on geostrategic concerns. Their decision-making process demonstrates a major problem of dividing foreign policy into *realpolitik* and ideologically driven schools. To the extent it was ideologically driven, the British Empire sought stability above all else. Tranquility allowed for the economic benefits of empire through capital investment and trade. It minimized the maintenance costs of empire that its critics claimed would be its downfall. It even provided an opportunity for the spread of British society and values, which was for many the moral imperative behind empire. In order to achieve this stability, however, over time the British employed a variety of approaches which often contradicted each other. These changing tactics, which might normally be indicative of a *realpolitik* foreign policy adjusting to changing situations, instead demonstrate a more subtle, ideologically driven policy.

Ibn Saud's views regarding Palestine are difficult to define, although they do fit within his general attitude regarding foreign policy. His foreign policy before World War Two can be divided into two period. The years from his return to Riyadh in 1902 until 1932 represented an era of state expansion. During this time, almost all of his only

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<sup>115</sup> British Government: The White Paper (May 17, 1939), in *The Israel-Arab Reader*, pp. 44-50.

<sup>116</sup> Kolinsky, 85.

contacts with powers outside of the Arabian Peninsula were with the Ottoman Empire before its collapse and Great Britain. Ibn Saud learned from the example of the previous incarnations of the Saudi state not to make an enemy of the great powers. He made sure to gain the acquiescence of the British to the expansion of his hegemony over the Arabian Peninsula. Once he reached the maximum reach of his power that could be gained without a direct clash with a foreign power, he announced the formation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with himself as king and started the process of state consolidation.<sup>117</sup> From the time Britain received the mandate for Palestine until Ibn Saud made himself king, he had little time to bother with the plight of the Palestinian Arabs.

Following the declaration of the new state, Ibn Saud focused on both the domestic structure and foreign relations of Saudi Arabia. He continued to develop the governmental organizations first created in the 1920s: the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as beginning a new organization to manage the army and police force.<sup>118</sup> In foreign policy, he strengthened his ties with other Arab nations. In 1933, he signed a treaty with Transjordan. In 1936, he reached agreements with Kuwait, Iraq, and Egypt. Ibn Saud's approaches to other Arab nations reflected his concern over Britain's ability and willingness to defend his kingdom, brought on by the decision in London not to intervene in Italy's invasion of Abyssinia.<sup>119</sup> When the Peel Commission announced their findings regarding the future of Palestine in 1937, Ibn Saud opened dialogue with the Axis powers. Domestic support for the Palestinian cause forced

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<sup>117</sup> A history of this period of expansion can be found in Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.39-71.

<sup>118</sup> Al-Rasheed, pp 88-90.

<sup>119</sup> Leatherdale, pp.265-66.

him to intervene on behalf of the Arabs to placate his own population.<sup>120</sup> Ibn Saud did not give any more support to the Palestinian cause than was necessary, for fear of the repercussions within his kingdom. According to Leatherdale, “It was one thing for Ibn Saud to outwardly support Moslem solidarity movements; it was quite another to encourage the popular xenophobia, intellectual agnosticism, and the reformist ideals which could permeate his kingdom.”<sup>121</sup> As discussed previously, Germany could not provide Ibn Saud with the assurances he required and by 1939 the British government revised their position on Palestine, removing it as an obstacle in Anglo-Saudi relations.

Throughout World War Two, Ibn Saud believed the Peel Commission to be the final word on the Palestinian question. Ibn Saud “oppose[d] Zionist ambitions in Palestine,” but felt that discussion of the matter could wait until the end of the war. He encouraged the government of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen to not make an issue over it and conditioned his participation in an Arab conference in Alexandria on Palestine not being on the agenda.<sup>122</sup> He assured the Arab nations they could count on the “integrity” of the British government to fulfill the promises of the 1939 White Paper.<sup>123</sup> Had the British remained the dominant western power he may have been correct. However, the active engagement of the United States in the Middle East complicated an already difficult problem. Ironically, the British and the Saudis encouraged further American involvement in the region, only to have Washington trample their own interests in Palestine.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., pp.272.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>122</sup> Annual Report on Saudi Arabia for 1944, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* Part III, Series B, Vol. 9 (University Publications of America, 1997), pp. 463-70. Hereafter *B DFA*.

<sup>123</sup> “Annual Report on Saudi Arabia for 1945”, in *B DFA* Part IV, Series B, Vol. 1, 362.

The policy of both Britain and the United States shifted in 1945. In February, Ibn Saud met both President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill following the Yalta Conference. During his meeting with Churchill, discussion of Palestine dominated the conversation. Churchill attempted to convince the king that some level of Jewish immigration must be allowed. He argued that the Arabs should be more trusting and pointed to the placement of Hashemite rulers in Iraq and Transjordan as evidence of British goodwill.<sup>124</sup> Given the level of suspicion with which Ibn Saud viewed the Hashemites, this could hardly have been an effective argument. Roosevelt similarly failed to convince Ibn Saud of the necessity of Jewish immigration, while promising not to do anything to harm Arab interests.

In the general election in 1945, the British Labour platform supported the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.<sup>125</sup> They won the election predominantly because of their domestic policy. Domestic issues united the party and provided a clear alternative to the Conservatives. Foreign policy, meanwhile, divided not only the party but also the cabinet.<sup>126</sup> The Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, believed empire to be a luxury Britain could no longer afford. In order to pay for the social programs which represented the foundation of Labour's platform, expenditures abroad had to be reduced. The Foreign Minister, Ernest Bevin, believed the exact opposite. Bevin argued without the resources of the empire, particularly in the Middle East, Britain would be unable to have the

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>125</sup> Michael J. Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers, 1945-1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 22.

<sup>126</sup> Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951* (London: William Heinemann, 1983), 227.

accustomed standard of living.<sup>127</sup> This belief is not merely the product of a self-aggrandizing minister attempting to establish himself in the cabinet. Indeed, it reflects the importance of the Empire within the British government. Empire existed not only to project power around the world, but also to strengthen the British economy. Bevin's belief in the benefit of empire extended beyond domestic material gain. According to Wm. Roger Louis, "[Bevin] believed, as did many English of his generation, that the British Empire was a beneficent force in world affairs." He realized, however, that the Empire would have to alter its form to insure its survival.<sup>128</sup>

In September, 1945, Bevin hosted a summit of British ambassadors to the Middle East in London. In addition to a several specific strategic and organizational issues, he wanted to work with the Ambassadors to create a new framework for British policy. The conference rested on the principal that "influence that rested on military or political props could not be enduring." Instead, British policy "should aim at an economic partnership between the United Kingdom and the Middle East countries and, by promoting developments in that field, move towards a partnership in the sphere of defence."<sup>129</sup> The postwar British Empire in the Middle East relied on the cooperation of the Arab states and the mutual benefit of the informal imperial relationship. To achieve this cooperation, the Labour government had to retreat from its campaign promises regarding a Jewish state in Palestine.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 359.

<sup>128</sup> Wm. Roger Louis, "British Imperialism and the End of the Palestine Mandate," in *The End of the Palestine Mandate*, eds. Wm. Roger Louis and Robert W. Stookey (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 3.

<sup>129</sup> Mr. Bevin to His Majesty's Representatives at Bagdad, Cairo, Tehran, Beirut, and Jeddah, 18 October 1945, in *BDF*, III-B-10, 529.

Britain could not rely only on the cooperation of the Arab states to achieve its ambition of maintaining power in the Middle East. Due to the rising presence of the United States in Saudi Arabia and Britain's financial weakness, London required Washington's cooperation in the region as well.<sup>130</sup> Britain's financial situation after the war required American support. At the end of 1945, they accepted a \$3.75 billion loan from the United States. Bevin and the Foreign Office hoped to utilize American funds to subsidize the British Empire, despite anti-imperial sentiment in the United States. In Saudi Arabia, Britain could no longer afford providing financial aid to Ibn Saud. They hoped, however, that an arrangement might be made with the Americans in which the United State provided the economic aid while Britain supplied advisors.<sup>131</sup> Essentially, they wanted Washington to carry the burden while London reaped the reward.

Increasingly after World War Two, the issue of Palestine brought the interests of the Arabs and the Americans into conflict, with the British in the middle. President Truman inherited a rather ambiguous policy from President Roosevelt. He would make speeches supporting Zionist claims while the State Department promised the Arabs nothing would be done without considering their interests.<sup>132</sup> In March of 1945, Ibn Saud sent Roosevelt a long letter, arguing against the creation of a Jewish state. He claimed the Jews had no historical right to Palestine. He supported this claim with the historical narrative in the Bible, in which the Jews conquered the native Canaanites, an Arab tribe, to take the land. Not only do the Jews have no historical right to the land, their recent behavior does not justify any sort of reward. Jewish organizations plotted against the

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<sup>130</sup> Louis, "British Imperialism," 2.

<sup>131</sup> Aldamer, 106.

<sup>132</sup> Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers*, 45.

British and Arab governments, using violence to achieve their objective. Roosevelt responded by pledging to consult with both Arabs and Jews before formulating any policy toward Palestine. He also reiterated his personal promise to Ibn Saud, made when the two leaders aboard the U.S.S. *Quincy* in February, that he would “take no action...which might prove hostile to the Arab people.”<sup>133</sup>

As the fighting came to an end in Europe, American policy over Palestine began to favor the Jews over the Arabs. At the Potsdam conference in July, Truman encouraged Churchill to remove the immigration restrictions<sup>134</sup> Before Churchill could respond, his Conservative Party lost the general election. Attlee responded, informing Truman that no statement could be made without further study.<sup>135</sup> At the end of August, Truman’s policy became more specific. He requested that the British government allow 100,000 Jews into Palestine. At the time, the British allowed only 1,500 immigrants per month. He provided both moral and strategic reasons for Britain to modify its policy. First, the victims of the Holocaust deserved the opportunity for a new start and many of them wished to do so in Palestine. Second, Truman argued the stability of Europe depended on solving the problem of displaced people.<sup>136</sup> He also had another, more cynical reason for advocating on behalf of the Jews. Historians disagree about the extent to which electoral politics influenced Truman’s policy, the fact that only once since 1880 had a President won the election without winning New York (with its large Jewish population) certainly

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<sup>133</sup> Both letters were written in March, and were published in the *New York Times*, 19 October 1945, p. 4.

<sup>134</sup> Memorandum by President Truman to the British Prime Minister (Churchill), 24 July 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, pp. 716-17.

<sup>135</sup> Memorandum by the British Prime Minister (Attlee) to President Truman, 31 Jul 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, 719.

<sup>136</sup> President Truman to British Prime Minister (Attlee), 31 August 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, 738.

made the Zionist line easier for Truman to follow. One Jewish lobbyist claimed, “let me have the Jewish vote of New York and I will bring you the head of Ibn Saud on a platter! The Administration will sell all seven Arab states if it is a question of retaining the support...of the Jews of New York alone.”<sup>137</sup>

Attlee managed to convince Truman not to publicly announce his request regarding Jewish immigration. However, in mid-September Senator Gillette leaked this information to the American press. This led to an outcry from the Arab nations who believed the Americans were pressuring the British government on behalf of the Jews without consulting the Arabs. Ibn Saud used this occasion to take advantage of a political blunder Truman had made in August. In a press conference, Truman stated that he could find no record of President Roosevelt making any assurances to Ibn Saud regarding Palestine. The King responded by having both his letter from March, 1945, and Roosevelt’s response published. According to the British Annual Report for 1945, “Considerable kudos accrued throughout the Middle East from the publication of these documents, and from a consequential message sent to the King by President Truman, assuring him that the President’s policy was identical to President Roosevelt.”<sup>138</sup>

The American Minister to Saudi Arabia, William Eddy, wrote a memorandum outlining the dangers to the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia if the pressure for greater Jewish immigration into Palestine continued. Eddy expressed Ibn Saud’s frustration that the Zionist lobby in the United States, 5,000 miles away, had more sway over American policy than himself and the other Arab leaders, for whom the

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<sup>137</sup> Quoted in Cohen, *The Great Powers and Palestine*, 48.

<sup>138</sup> Annual Report on Saudi Arabia for 1945, in *B DFA*, IV-B-1, 363.

problem was local. He went on to warn, “if the growing suspicion should be confirmed that the U.S. Government is flirting with a Palestine policy friendly to political Zionism...United States enterprises in Saudi Arabia will be seriously handicapped.” A continued pro-Zionist policy could create complications over the airfield in Dhahran and the armed forces personnel working there, or endanger the Aramco concession.<sup>139</sup>

In November, Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin made a speech outlining the problem of Palestine to the House of Commons. The speech opened by addressing the grievous conditions of European Jewry. He gave a brief summary of challenges facing Britain in Palestine, attributing the dual responsibility to the native population (the Arabs) and the Jews, dictated by the original mandate, as the primary source of the trouble. He also linked the problem to India on account of the sympathies of India’s Muslims for the Palestinians. In light of these difficulties, he announced the creation of an Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. The committee would investigate the situation in Palestine and in Europe, receive counsel from Arab and Jewish representatives, and make a recommendation to the British and American for future policy.<sup>140</sup> This study appeared to be a way for Britain to navigate a middle course between the interests of the Arabs and the interests of the Americans. Wm. Roger Louis summarized Bevin’s motivation: “He believed that men of common sense investigating the problem would quickly conclude

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<sup>139</sup> Memorandum by the Minister to Saudi Arabia (Eddy), Temporarily in the United States, to the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson), 26 October 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, pp. 790-91.

<sup>140</sup> Extract from House of Commons Debate, 13 November 1945, in *B DFA*, III-B-10, pp. 417-19.

that a small territory such as Palestine could not possible provide solution to the Jewish refugee problem.”<sup>141</sup>

Ibn Saud did not react well to the announcement of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. The announcement came on the day before beginning of the Hajj ceremonies. As mentioned previously, Ibn Saud believed the White Paper of 1939 represented the final word on the matter of Palestine. Several days before the announcement, he gave a speech to a large group of pilgrims sympathizing with the British problems and assuring them that Britain would protect Arab interests.<sup>142</sup> The Saudi Foreign Minister brought up the conflicting policy of the White Paper and the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry in his discussion with the American Chargé in Saudi Arabia, despite the fact that the White Paper represented only British policy.<sup>143</sup> Although Ibn Saud felt betrayed, Bevin and the Foreign Office could take solace in the fact that because commission included the United States, it did not increase American interests at the expense of the British.

In December, the United States Congress passed a resolution supporting the Committee. The resolution conceded that the creation of a Jewish State should not “prejudice the civil and religious rights of Christian and all other non-Jewish communities in Palestine.” However, it went on to state the Jewish immigration had led to “improvement in agricultural, financial, hygienic and general economic conditions” in

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<sup>141</sup> Wm. Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 390.

<sup>142</sup> Annual Report on Saudi Arabia for 1945, 364.

<sup>143</sup> The Chargé in Saudi Arabia (Sands) to the Secretary of State, 16 November 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, 824.

Palestine.<sup>144</sup> This allusion to the superior capabilities of the Jews to improve the land echoes the beliefs of Winston Churchill and other British Zionists. Ibn Saud responded to the resolution by claiming that the Zionists must have tricked Congress, as “so august a legislature would not wittingly pass resolutions so unjust and so contrary to democratic principles.”<sup>145</sup> Flattery aside, Ibn Saud’s argument illustrates some of the frustration felt by the Arab nations over the Palestine issue. They could not understand how the two most powerful and vocal proponents of democracy could so blatantly disregard the will of the majority of the residents of Palestine, while allowing itself to be manipulated by the Zionists. Many of whom, could reasonably be described as terrorists.<sup>146</sup>

Ibn Saud raised the issue of democratic principles again while meeting with an official from the British Foreign Office in February, 1946. He claimed the British betrayed him by abandoning the promises of the 1939 White Paper and the Americans betrayed the principles for which they entered World War Two. The king cleverly sought to drive a wedge between London and Washington by suggesting that the United States intended to eventually disengage with the Palestine question, leaving the British along in trying to resolve the problem. He also warned the officer that if Britain revoked the 1939 White Paper, His Majesty’s Government might find itself fighting the next war without the crucial support of the Arabs. This thinly veiled threat transitioned perfectly to his next point: the benefits gained by the Soviets from a divide between Britain and the

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<sup>144</sup> Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State: Concurrent Resolution on Palestine, 79<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, December 17 and 19, 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VII, 842.

<sup>145</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 31 December 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, 844.

<sup>146</sup> Ibn Saud raised the issue of illegal Jewish action in Palestine with the American Minister in December, citing illegal immigration, distributing arms, and committing acts of terrorism. While not all Zionists were engaged in such activity, he had justifiable concerns. The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 16 December 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945 vol. VIII, 841.

Arabs.<sup>147</sup> Ibn Saud's arguments gave both ideological and strategic reasons to avoid altering the 1939 White Paper. They demonstrate the level of understanding of American and British Foreign Policy he possessed. In attacking the Americans, he criticized the ideological inconsistency. Many in the United States saw the plight of the Jews as a moral issue because of the Holocaust, but Ibn Saud hoped to convince them that dispossessing the Arabs of Palestine was not in line with American ideals either. British foreign policy, less influenced by domestic opinion, saw Palestine in strategic terms. For Whitehall officials, Ibn Saud showed the political ramifications of a pro-Zionist position.

The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry began its work in January. They opened their investigation in New York with a series of hearings. After receiving evidence in the United States, they moved on to London and then the continent. Finally, in March, they visited Cairo for a week to solicit the opinions of the Arab nations. The Committee issued their final report in April. The two key findings regarded immigration and future governance. The report called for the immediate immigration of 100,000 Jews and stated that Palestine should be governed as a bi-national state. After reviewing the report, Bevin asked the State Department not to release the report until the two governments could meet and discuss the findings. After an initial rebuttal, Bevin again met with State Department officials to make his case more forcefully. He stated that the British were willing to allow 100,000 Jews to enter Palestine, but not immediately. He feared the Jews were organizing for military action. According to him, the immigrants currently being allowed to enter were screened by the Jewish Agency for military capabilities. If the situation continued to digress the British might be forced with

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<sup>147</sup> Mr. Smith to Mr. Bevin, 11 February 1946, in *BDF*, IV-B-6, 391.

withdraw from Palestine, creating a vacuum which the Soviets might fill. He also stated the British government would appreciate the presence of some American troops to help provide stability.<sup>148</sup> Bevin did not mention concern that the Americans would abandon the British in Palestine, but there can be little doubt this thought was on his mind. Interestingly, his arguments line up almost exactly with those made by Ibn Saud to the British a month-and-half earlier.

President Truman continued to ignore Bevin's request and announced on the evening of April 30 the Committee had unanimously approved his call for 100,000 Jews to be admitted into Palestine. He went on to state "that the Committee recommends in effect the abrogation of the White Paper of 1939 including existing restrictions on immigration and land acquisition to permit the further development of the Jewish National Home."<sup>149</sup> Truman did not mention the Committee's recommendation that Palestine be governed as a bi-national state. The report angered Ibn Saud and he blamed the Americans for its conclusions. Many Saudis believed the British members of the committee opposed the admittance of 100,000 Jews but the Americans forced it on them.<sup>150</sup> The Saudi Government increasingly believed throughout 1946 that pressure from the United States dictated British policy in Palestine.

In May, Ibn Saud passed a letter to the American Minister responding to the committee findings. The king stated that no further cooperation between the United States and Saudi Arabia was possible in the current political climate. American policy

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<sup>148</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of European Affairs (Matthews), 27 April 1946, in *FRUS*, 1946 vol. VII, pp. 587-88.

<sup>149</sup> Acting Secretary of State to the Secretary of State, at Paris, 30 April 1945, in *FRUS*, 1946 vol. VII, 589.

<sup>150</sup> The Chargé in Saudi Arabia (Sands) to the Secretary of State, 6 May 1945, in *FRUS*, 1946 vol. VII, 595.

towards Palestine led him to question the whole basis for the involvement of the United States in the Middle East. Ibn Saud argued that despite his respect for the United States based on past dealings, he felt betrayed. He surmised that those in his country who have no experience with the United States must feel even angrier. The letter ended by stating, “the Arab nations will shortly determine a Palestine policy for themselves,” rejecting American and British involvement in the solution.<sup>151</sup>

The report of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry received harsh responses from all of the Arab nations. They met twice to formulate a collective response, once in Egypt in May, and again the next month in Syria. These meetings resulted in the drafting of a memorandum to the United States and Great Britain, which threatened an oil embargo on both countries and an encouragement to Arab volunteers to go and fight in Palestine. Tension among the Arab nations prevented them from formally sending the memorandum, although they did pass it along to the British government unofficially.<sup>152</sup> In addition, it became apparent enforcing the committee’s findings might require American military assistance, which Truman was unwilling to provide. Truman and Attlee agreed to study the ways in which the recommendations could be applied, and momentum for the report soon passed.

A new plan emerged in the summer of 1946 which briefly had the support of both Britain and the United States. In January 1946, the Colonial Office advocated the establishment of provincial governments. Initially the Foreign Office objected to the

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<sup>151</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 28 May 1946, in *FRUS*, 1946 vol. VII, pp. 615-16.

<sup>152</sup> Avraham Sela, “Britain and the Palestine question, 1945–48: The dialectic of regional and international constraints,” in *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East*, eds. Michael J. Cohen and Martin Kolinsky (London: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 229-30.

plan, believing it to be “partition” under a different guise. By the summer, however, it seemed a potential alternative to the Anglo-American Committee report, which provided few specifics as to the future governance of Palestine. A new American committee, led by Ambassador Grady, embraced the provincial scheme. One of Bevin’s biographers, Alan Bullock, summarized the benefits of the plan by stating: “the advantage of the Morrison-Grady plan, as it became known, was that it could be taken as a step either to partition or to a bi-national state.”<sup>153</sup> Truman himself was quickly becoming frustrated with the pressure placed on him by the Zionist lobby. Although some moderate groups embraced the idea of partition in the summer of 1946, the more extreme Zionist elements strongly opposed it. In a moment of frustration with the Jewish Lobby, Truman told his cabinet, “Jesus Christ couldn’t please them when he was here on earth, so how could anyone expect that I would have any luck?”<sup>154</sup> Jewish pressure finally forced Truman to abandon his initial support for the provincial plan. The impending Congressional elections in the fall of 1946 certainly played a role in Truman’s decision.<sup>155</sup>

As Anglo-American policy planners considered the future of Palestine, the situation in the mandate became progressively unmanageable. In June, militant Zionists sabotaged railway workshops in Haifa and kidnapped six British officers. The next month, they set off a bomb at the King David Hotel, which hosted several British agencies. Over 90 people died in the bombing and many more were injured.<sup>156</sup> Palestine was quickly becoming an unmanageable situation. The political officials, however,

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<sup>153</sup> Bullock, 296.

<sup>154</sup> Quoted in Bullock, 298.

<sup>155</sup> Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers*, 131.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 83, 90.

limited the capability of the British army to respond to increasing terrorism, hurting the morale of the forces. This frustration grew throughout 1946 and included the highest level of the British military. The chief of the Imperial General Staff, Bernard Montgomery, criticized British policy in Palestine as “appeasement,” perhaps one of the dirtiest words in the lexicon of British foreign policy.<sup>157</sup> While domestic policy dictated Truman’s decisions over Palestine, rising levels of violence increasingly controlled Attlee’s policy. Throughout the second half of 1946, the possibility of British withdrawal from Palestine entered the discussion of the mandate’s future with greater regularity.

In the fall of 1946 the British hosted a conference in London to discuss the future of Palestine. Despite the invitation to participate, the Jewish Agency chose not to attend. This left only the Arab nations and the British government. Bevin opened the conference September 16 by laying out five principles necessary critical to any peaceful solution. These included protection of minority rights, some Jewish immigration, and movement toward a peaceful and independent Palestine.<sup>158</sup> The Arab States, including Saudi Arabia, responded to the British proposals three days later. They accepted most of the British statement, with the exception of continued Jewish immigration. They wanted all Jewish immigration halted and any future immigration to be controlled by the future Palestinian government.<sup>159</sup> Over the next week, the delegates from both nations worked create more specific plans, but neither side appeared willing to budge on the main obstacle: Jewish immigration. On October 2, the London Conference adjourned to allow

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<sup>157</sup> Louis, “British Imperialism,” 14.

<sup>158</sup> The Chargé in the United Kingdom to the Secretary of State, 17 September 1946, in *FRUS*, 1946 vol. VII, 696.

<sup>159</sup> The Chargé in the United Kingdom to the Secretary of State, 23 September 1946, in *FRUS*, 1946 vol. VII, 698.

the British government time to consider the proposals that were made and to consult with the Jews. Although the conference resumed in the early months of 1947, the same basic impasse blocked any progress from being made.<sup>160</sup>

Prior to the end of the conference, Ibn Saud transmitted a message to President Truman through the regional director of Transcontinental Western Air. According to the TWA official, the king wished to keep the contents of the letter secret from both Prince Faisal and the Saudi Minister in Washington. The message contained a request for American assistance in building a railway crossing his country. It also expressed the king's dissatisfaction with British policy in the Middle East. He felt them to be selfish and suggested they might be covertly pro-Jewish. He affirmed his commitment to developing deeper ties with the United States and his hope for ongoing friendship, despite their disagreement over Palestine.<sup>161</sup> Ibn Saud's remarks regarding the British may not have been anything more than part of an attempt to receive more aid from the Americans. However, the letter does demonstrate the secondary role that Palestine played in the king's outlook. His role as an Arab leader required him to side with the Palestinians vocally, but despite the decidedly pro-Jewish policy being followed by Truman, he would not allow the conflict to destroy his relationship with the United States. The British reached similar conclusions regarding Ibn Saud's priorities. In their annual report for 1946, they found that while he cared about events in Palestine, he was more interested in the events in Iraq and Transjordan and the activities of his Hashemite rivals.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers*, 213-17.

<sup>161</sup> The Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State, 1 October 1946, in *FRUS*, vol. VII, 748.

<sup>162</sup> Annual Report on Saudi Arabia, 26 January 1947, in *B DFA*, IV-B-4, 70.

The decision to delay the conference upset President Truman. He informed the British October 3, that “in view of the deep sympathy of the American people for these unfortunate victims of Nazi persecution,” meaning of course only the Jewish victims, “I find it necessary to make a further statement at once on the subject.” Truman’s statement, released October 4 over British objections, again called for the immediate transfer of 100,000 Jews from Europe into Palestine, using the coming winter as a concern to create urgency.<sup>163</sup>

Truman’s statement angered both the British and the Arabs. Attlee sent Truman a harsh reprimand expressing “great regret” that Truman refused granting “even a few hours grace to the Prime Minister of the country which has the actual responsibility for the government of Palestine in order that he might acquaint you with the actual situation and the probable results of your action.”<sup>164</sup> Attlee’s tone in the letter sounds more like a parent scolding an irresponsible teenager than the dialogue between two heads of state. The chastising also served to remind Truman that whatever the solution to Palestine, it was the British who would be responsible for enforcing it, making them much more invested in solving the problem.

Ibn Saud also informed Truman of his displeasure, although in a more fitting tone for a letter to a head of state. Ibn Saud reminded Truman of the previous correspondence between himself and Roosevelt and emphasized that the Arabs hold the only valid claim to the land of Palestine. He described the hypocritical action of the Jews, accusing them of using “the name of humanitarianism” to further their claims not only to Palestine, but

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<sup>163</sup> President Truman to the British Prime Minister (Attlee) 3 October 1946, in *FRUS*, vol. VII, pp. 701-03.

<sup>164</sup> The British Prime Minister (Attlee) to President Truman, 4 October 1946, in *FRUS*, 1946 vol. VII, 705.

to bordering Arab nations. As he had previously, Ibn Saud appealed to the ideological foundation of the United States. He expressed confidence, “that the American people who spent their blood and their money freely to resist aggressions, could not possibly support Zionist aggression against a friendly Arab country which has committed no crime.” He concluded with assurances of his desire for Saudi-American cooperation and repeating his alignment of the cause of the Palestinians with justice and equality.<sup>165</sup>

Further correspondence between Truman and Ibn Saud followed, the full details of which are not of critical importance. In December, the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Faisal, visited Washington to discuss the situation in Palestine with President Truman. Some general themes emerged from the correspondence and the meeting between Truman and Faisal. First, both sides made great effort to assure the other of the importance of their friendship. As stated earlier, neither side wished the Palestine issue to cause permanent damage to the growing alliance. Second, both the Saudis and Americans argued for their position on humanitarian grounds. Truman repeatedly stated the events of the Holocaust made the creation of a Jewish state necessary, a position he most likely believed. The Saudis did not disregard the events of the Holocaust, but claimed that creating a Jewish state in Palestine made amends for one wrong by committing another. Both Ibn Saud and Faisal talked about the violent acts being committed by the Jews as evidence of the injustice of creating a Jewish state in Palestine.

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<sup>165</sup> The King of Saudi Arabia (Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud) to President Truman, undated, transmitted 15 October 1946, in *FRUS*, 1946 vol. VII, pp. 708-09.

They also noted the hypocrisy in American policy: pushing for increased immigration into Palestine while not allowing more Jews to come to the United States.<sup>166</sup>

British policy at the end of 1946 continued to be unclear. Despite multiple conferences, commissions, summits, and studies, the basic facts regarding the Palestine Mandate remained unchanged. The United States continued to push for the now almost arbitrary number of 100,000 immigrants and remained unwilling to provide any support in stabilizing Palestine. The Arab nations continued to oppose any new Jewish immigration. Nothing happened in 1946 to alter the necessity for both American and Arab cooperation to maintain the British global position. While the outside influences stayed constant, the situation in Palestine deteriorated. By the end of the year, the British Chiefs of Staff believed they could stabilize the situation if they only had to fight one side. But if they cracked down on the Jews, Zionist groups in the United States increased their pressure on the American government who in turn pressured the British government. If they tried to enforce a solution on the Arabs, they took the risk of destroying their relationship with Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>167</sup>

As the London Conference collapsed in early February, 1947, Bevin made one last attempt to reach a compromise. His proposal allowed for 4,000 Jewish immigrants a month for two years (total of 96,000), the establishment of provincial governments while remaining a solitary, united state. This plan contained sections supported by each group: Jews, British, and Arab. However, both the Arabs and Jews rejected the plan, as did the

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<sup>166</sup> The correspondence and memorandum of the meeting are printed in *FRUS*, 1946 vol. VII, pp. 714-20, 729-31.

<sup>167</sup> Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 444, 450.

British Chiefs of Staff who felt Bevin's proposal would make it impossible to maintain the needed strategic presence in Palestine.<sup>168</sup>

On February 15, the British government informed the United States and the Arab nations of their decision to refer the problem to the United Nations. Bevin explained the failure of the London Conference and the quagmire created by the whole issue.<sup>169</sup>

Referring Palestine to the U.N. provided several possible solutions favorable to the British. They hoped the prospect of a U.N. settlement might create an element of uncertainty the Arabs and Jews wished to avoid, encouraging them to accept some form of the Bevin Plan.<sup>170</sup> The problem was to be sent without any accompanying recommendations, which provided another positive opportunity for the British.

Regardless of what the United Nations determined, the British could argue in the future that they had little part in it. Collective responsibility meant no responsibility. Finally, making Palestine no longer a solely British concern alleviated growing domestic problems. Popular opinion in Britain supported demobilization of the British armed forces.<sup>171</sup> The occupation in Germany and Palestine made this very difficult. In mid-1947, ten per cent of the British military was in Palestine, an area the size of Wales. As Wm. Roger Louis puts it, "there was one soldier for every eighteen inhabitants."<sup>172</sup>

Although this tension had its greatest impact on the decision made at the end of 1947 to evacuate the troops from Palestine, the government recognized that sending the issue to the United Nations represented the quickest path to demobilization.

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<sup>168</sup> Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers*, pp. 217-20.

<sup>169</sup> "Failure of the London Conference," 15 February 1947, in *B DFA*, IV-B-4, pp. 184-85.

<sup>170</sup> Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers*, 226.

<sup>171</sup> Bullock, 231.

<sup>172</sup> Wm. Roger Louis, "British Imperialism," pp. 19-20.

No published documents show the immediate response of Saudi Arabia regarding the decision to refer Palestine to the United Nations. In April, when the U.N. met to create a Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), the Arab delegation appealed for the body to immediately create an independent state. The U.N. rejected this request and the Committee was formed to examine the problem.<sup>173</sup> The Arabs made a similar overture to the United States and Britain in July.<sup>174</sup> That same month, Ibn Saud transmitted a message to Truman reacting to the British decision. The message clearly shows if the British hoped to avoid responsibility by passing the problem to international community, they failed. Although the king pledged to participate in the U.N. investigation to whatever extent requested of him, he and the rest of the Arab “regard[ed] Great Britain as primarily responsible for Zionist aggression against tranquil Arab country (sic).”<sup>175</sup>

At the end of August, UNSCOP presented a majority and minority plan. The majority plan called for partition of Palestine in Arab and Jewish states, with Jerusalem being a separate entity. The plan called for Britain to continue its presence in Palestine for two years to facilitate the transition. The minority plan supported a bi-national state, with Jerusalem as the capital. The conclusion of UNSCOP led the British cabinet to decide in September to withdraw its forces from Palestine. Doing so disassociated them with the plan for partition and responded to the increasing concern that the UNSCOP plan would lead to increased violence. Some elements of the cabinet discussion on September

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<sup>173</sup> Aldamer, pp. 139-40.

<sup>174</sup> Saudi Arabia: Annual Report for 1947, in *B DFA*, IV-B-6, 43.

<sup>175</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Childs) to the Secretary of State, 23 July 1948, in *FRUS*, 1947 vol. V, 1131.

20 sound similar to current debate over American policy in Iraq. According to Louis, Bevin believed “only by imposing a definite time limit would there be any hope of forcing the Arabs and Jews to make arrangements for their own political future.”<sup>176</sup>

In November the U.N. adopted the UNSCOP report by a vote of 33-13. Both the United States and the Soviet Union voted in favor, while the Arab states joined several others in voting against. Britain and nine other states abstained.<sup>177</sup> In the first months of 1948, American policy seemed to waiver between a pro-Arab and pro-Jewish policy. The Soviet newspaper *Pravda*, commented: “the United States policy over Palestine...[has] proceeded on a series of zig zags, now in favour of the Jews to satisfy the domestic role, now in favour of the Arabs at the prompting of United States oil monopolies and military circles.”<sup>178</sup> Although dialogue continued between Saudi Arabia, Britain, and the United States, nothing substantive emerged during this period. However, when the British withdrew their forces at the end of May American policy made its final twist and the United States immediately recognized the newly declared state of Israel. In the end, the issue of Palestine in Anglo-Saudi and American-Saudi relations became one of perspective, not policy. Generally, the British policy toward Palestine favored the Arabs, although the need for the cooperation of the United States tempered their ability to act on their own interests. The foundation of the Anglo-Saudi relationship had always been security. Ibn Saud needed the assistance of a foreign nation to protect his sovereignty, and the British provided this in exchange for a influence in Arabian affairs.

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<sup>176</sup> Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 474.

<sup>177</sup> United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State, 29 November 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947 vol. V, 1291.

<sup>178</sup> Quoted in Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 514.

The decision to pass the mandate to the U.N. appeared to Ibn Saud as an abrogation of Britain's commitment to defend the Arab states. If the British failed to stabilize Palestine, a task with which they had been charged by the international community, how could they be relied upon to defend Ibn Saud from possible threats? American policy, while disagreeable, demonstrated their power. The king believed pressure from Washington to be the principal motivator for Britain's action in Palestine. Regardless of the validity of this idea, the events in Palestine after the war furthered Ibn Saud's belief his countries security rested in an alliance with the United States.

### CHAPTER 3: THE ANGLO-SAUDI RELATIONSHIP AFTER THE WAR

The situation in Palestine developed simultaneously with many other interactions between Saudi Arabia, Britain, and the United States. After the Second World War, British and American planners shifted their focus to consider how to best fight a war against the Soviets. Anglo-American strategy assigned the defense of the Middle East to Britain, perhaps without questioning whether or not the British possessed the resources to defend the region. London's new strategy of empire through cooperation led to the granting of independence to Transjordan and a new treaty with Iraq. Ibn Saud considered both of these countries to be part of the Hashemite dynasty, although Iraqi governments operated in constant turmoil since Faisal II inherited the throne at age four in 1939.<sup>179</sup> Tension between the Saudis and the Hashemites played a major role in Anglo-Saudi relations in the post-war period. The issue of Saudi Arabia's borders in the southwest and with Transjordan also reemerged after the war, after lying dormant since the 1930s. All this transpired in the midst of a discussion in the Labour government over the future British role in the world. While these debates evolved, the British continued to compete with the United States for influence in Saudi Arabia.

At the end of 1945, the United States won two conflicts over the British in the struggle for dominance in Saudi Arabia: the right to build a base at Dhahran as well as a radio-telegraph station. However, the British did not give up on the hopes of remaining the dominant western power in Saudi Arabia in 1946, a fact not lost in officials in Washington. When Ibn Saud refused an American loan offer in March, the State

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<sup>179</sup> Arthur Goldschmidt Jr. and Lawrence Davidson, *A Concise History of the Middle East*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition (Boulder: Westview Books, 2006), 303.

Department suspected that the British may have encouraged him to do so. In reality, he refusal was based on the terms of the loan, which required more oversight of the Saudi economy than Ibn Saud was willing to permit. In addition, the loan explicitly called for the payment of interest, a practice not allowed in Islam. The United States responded by endeavoring to find a way around these practical objections. In August the two sides reached a satisfactory deal.<sup>180</sup>

Despite their suspicion, the United States did not attempt to obstruct a proposed British Military Mission to Saudi Arabia. This was largely due to the assignment of the Middle East as a British area of strategic responsibility in the face of Soviet aggression. In July, the State Department gave its approval to London for the mission, which began in 1947.<sup>181</sup> The British did not believe the mission would be very effective, from a purely military standpoint. The annual report for 1946 stated, “few less rewarding tasks can be imagined that that of inspiring with military virtues the ragged urban types who compose the regular Saudi army.” Despite their condescension toward the Saudi forces, the report went on to state the belief “the political value of the mission may be very great. To Ibn Saud, no doubt, its presence represents...a counterweight to American economic influence.”<sup>182</sup> In 1946, Ibn Saud appeared to continue to hedge his bets by refusing to make either the United States or Britain his sole ally.

Immediately after the war, Ibn Saud sought to divide the aid he received from the west into military and economic spheres. The United States became his primary source for economic aid. In June 1946, TWA began its service to the airfield in Dhahran. Four

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<sup>180</sup> Aldamer, 108-111.

<sup>181</sup> The Department of State to the British Embassy, 3 July 1946, in *FRUS*, 1946 vol. VII, 745.

<sup>182</sup> Annual Report on Saudi Arabia, 1946, in *B DFA*, IV-B-4, 67.

months later, Ibn Saud asked the United States for assistance in building a transnational railway.<sup>183</sup> In the summer of 1947, the United States reached an agreement with Saudi Arabia to construct a pipeline to ship oil from the eastern part of the country to the Mediterranean. Throughout the negotiation process, which began in 1945, the British tried to block construction of the pipeline. The pipeline would allow American companies to bypass the Suez Canal, reducing the profits of the Suez Canal for the British.<sup>184</sup> In 1947, he told a British official his relationship with the United States “were based upon financial considerations and the development of his country.”<sup>185</sup> His refusal of the American Military Mission in 1945 confirms this division. Meanwhile, he looked to Britain for military aid. This began to change in 1946 as he felt marginalized in British strategic thinking. The United States, however, continued to enforce an arms embargo to the Middle East until 1949, preventing Ibn Saud from developing closer strategic ties with Washington as early as he would have preferred.

Before discussing the post-war increase of American engagement in Saudi Arabia during the late 1940s, the religious influence on Ibn Saud’s foreign relations requires examination. As seen in the loan negotiations in 1946, the Islamic identity of Saudi Arabia influenced the king’s decisions. During his rise to power, Wahhabist doctrine provided some measure of legitimacy. The spread of Wahhabi values provided religious justification for political control.<sup>186</sup> The conflict between modernization and traditional Islamic values continued in Saudi Arabia throughout the twentieth century. In the case of

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<sup>183</sup> The Ambassador in Egypt (Tuck) to the Secretary of State, 1 October 1946, in *FRUS* vol. VII, 748.

<sup>184</sup> Vassiliev, 329.

<sup>185</sup> Mr. Clarke to Mr. Bevin, Arabia: Audience with King Ibn Saud, 15 September 1947, in *B DFA*, IV-B-4, 87.

<sup>186</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

the loan negotiations, the two sides worded the agreement so that interest payments were not described explicitly as such. However, the presence of foreign company and military officials presented a greater challenge. To justify this, as well as other modernization projects, Ibn Saud had to exert influence on the religious organization. They reached an agreement in which the *ulama* (religious leaders) “confined themselves to being guardians of public morality,” abandoning their role as “mediators between government and governed.”<sup>187</sup> The Saudi government also promoted religious scholars who were sympathetic to the requirements of the modern state. One of the most important examples of this was Abdulaziz ibn Baz. Although strictly speaking Wahhabism banned the allowance of non-Muslims into Saudi Arabia, Ibn Baz declared it acceptable if the foreigners provided training not otherwise available. Ibn Baz also issued the *fatwa* in 1990, approving the use of American forces in defending Saudi Arabia and forcing Iraq out of Kuwait.<sup>188</sup> Although the *ulama* often supported the regime, Ibn Saud had to be conscious not to push things too far.

As the United States and Britain began making plans for a possible war with the Soviets, Britain took primary responsibility for formulating the defense of the Middle East. Although in the 1950s British planners came to rely on the use of nuclear weapons to slow a Soviet invasion, nuclear weapons did not become the foundation of British war plans until 1952. According to Michael Cohen, immediate post-war plans maintained “the traditional strategic conception of an imperial system based upon India, with the

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 36.

Middle East as its natural fulcrum.”<sup>189</sup> While British military leaders and the foreign and colonial offices recognized the Soviet menace, not only did Prime Minister Attlee believed the United Nations could maintain peace, he rejected the strategic necessity of the Middle East. In February 1946, he issues a report to the Chiefs of Staff criticizing the concept of “navalism.” He argued the proliferation of air power would make continued dominance of the Mediterranean through sea power impossible.<sup>190</sup> While some historians have argued Attlee’s report led to the primacy of air power in British defense planning, Michael Cohen points out that British planners recognized the possibility of using aerial bombing to offset Soviet conventional superiority as early as 1943.<sup>191</sup> Not until January 1947 did strategic planners convince Attlee of the importance of the Middle East.

In February, the Labour government announced that it would withdraw from India. This decision eliminated one of the original motivations for British involvement in the Middle East. By this time, however, strategic thinkers had already begun to see the value of the region in terms of its air bases, so impetus for remaining in the region remained. The most important air base for the British bordered the Suez Canal. In April 1946, the Chiefs of Staff (COS) explained to the Defence Committee the importance of the Middle East bases and particularly of Suez. Only bombers launched from the Middle East could reach Soviet oil fields. Bases in Iraq and Palestine were indefensible, due to their proximity to the Soviet Union, while Kenya was too far away to stay in range. In

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<sup>189</sup> Michael J. Cohen, *Fighting World War Three from the Middle East: Allied Contingency Plans, 1945–1954* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 64-65.

<sup>190</sup> Richard J. Aldrich and John Zametica, “The Rise and Decline of a Strategic Concept: the Middle East, 1945–1951” in *British Intelligence, Strategy, and the Cold War*, ed. Richard J. Aldrich (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 241-42.

<sup>191</sup> Cohen, *Fighting World War Three From the Middle East*, 76.

addition, Egypt “[was] the only country whose communications and industrial facilities are adequate to support heavy and sustained bomber operations.”<sup>192</sup> In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Egypt and the Suez Base became the center of British strategic thinking.

Iraq and Iran possessed strategic value because of their oil resources. The transformation of warfare during World War Two raised the importance of oil as a strategic commodity. Although the British knew they could not hope to hold Iraq and Iran against a Soviet invasion, they feared if they abandoned their positions there the Soviets would fill the power void their withdrawal would create without even having to fight.<sup>193</sup> By maintaining their informal imperial role, the British could sabotage the oil fields at the start of war to prevent the Soviets from gaining access to them.

Beyond the strategic concerns of base rights and oil, the pro-Empire members of the Labour government also hoped investment in the Middle East would provide much needed economic stimulus. In the fall of 1945 the government established the British Middle East Office (BMEO) to oversee development projects in the region. Wesley Wark described the objectives of the BMEO:

The governing philosophy was that the BMEO should be established to steer Middle East economies in the direction of improved economic performance, the redistribution of wealth (peasants not pashas), and, especially important from the British perspective, the wise use of the enormous sterling credits that had been accumulated by the region’s governments during the war. Not only would Great Britain’s troubles as a debtor nation thereby be eased, but in the long term a great market would be created.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Quoted in Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945-1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 28.

<sup>193</sup> Cohen, *Fighting World War Three from the Middle East*, 72.

<sup>194</sup> Wesley K. Wark, “Development Diplomacy: Sir John Troutbeck and the British Middle East Office, 1947–50,” in *British Officials and British Foreign Policy, 1945–1950*, ed. John Zametica (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1990), 233.

In regard to Saudi Arabia, the British lagged behind the Americans in pursuing “development diplomacy,” which is the use of advisory and training missions to cultivate informal influence. An American company held the largest oil concession in the country. This interest helped foster closer ties in communication and civil aviation, discussed in the first chapter. Unfortunately for London, Ibn Saud decided to link his economic fortunes to the United States, limiting the potential for growth within his kingdom. Additionally, Saudi Arabia remained a secondary concern to the British from 1945–1951. This did not mean London would not try to compete with Washington for influence, but it laid the foundation for why the British would ultimately lose out to the Americans in 1951. Britain’s close ties with other nations in the region ultimately led to the deterioration of Anglo-Saudi relations.

Until the rise of Gamal Nasser, Ibn Saud viewed the Hashemite family as his greatest political rivals in the Middle East. Traditionally, the Hasemites benefitted from a close alliance with the British. During World War One, officials in London picked to Hussein ibn Ali, the Grand Sharif of Mecca and the head of the Hashemite family, instead of Ibn Saud, to lead an Arab revolt against Ottoman rule. In 1925, Ibn Saud defeated Hussein and took control of the Hijaz. However, by this point the British had already given control of two countries on Ibn Saud’s northern border, Iraq and Transjordan, to Hussein’s sons Faisal and Abdullah in the early 1920s. Faisal died in 1933, passing the throne to his son Ghazi, who died in 1939. The next in line to become king was Ghazi’s son Faisal II, who was only four. A regency was established, in which

Nuri al-Said received significant political authority.<sup>195</sup> Abdullah remained King in Transjordan until his death in 1951. Ibn Saud remained suspicious of the Hashemite neighbors and their dealings with the British until his own death.

As part of the reformation of the Middle Eastern empire after World War Two, the British granted Transjordan independence in 1946. Transjordan held strategic importance because of its position between the oil fields in Iraq and Persia and the military bases in Palestine and Egypt. It literally served as the land bridge between Britain's strategic and economic interests in the Middle East. The Foreign Office hoped by granting independence to Transjordan to satisfy Arab nationalism before it became ardently pro-British. After receiving independence, Abdullah agreed to allow British advisers to help him manage his country in exchange for a promise that no Jews would be able settled in his kingdom.<sup>196</sup> Although many in the Middle East and in Britain saw Transjordan for what it was, a client state, the arrangement served its purpose.

Transjordan's independence resurrected an issue between Saudi Arabia and the former mandate that had remained dormant since 1925. At that time, Ibn Saud vied for control of the port of Aqaba and the area surrounding it, which had been under the control of Hussein after his defeat at Mecca. The British did not want to give him access to the Sinai and Palestine, so they reached an agreement for Aqaba to be incorporated into Abdullah's kingdom. Ibn Saud's desire for British goodwill led him to accept the deal.<sup>197</sup> The treaty contained a clause that rendered itself void once Britain no longer governed the Transjordan mandate. In January 1946, after being informed of Britain's

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<sup>195</sup> Goldschmidt, 303.

<sup>196</sup> Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, pp. 348-49.

<sup>197</sup> Leatherdale, 50.

intention to grant Transjordan independence, Ibn Saud stated he would reopen his claim to Aqaba.<sup>198</sup> He also pushed for a revision of the borders that would allow for a direct territorial connection to Syria. The British conceded that his claim to Aqaba had merit, as Aqaba had traditionally been incorporated into the Hijaz. The demand for a connection to Syria, however, had little foundation. Ibn Saud also felt that the British decision to grant Transjordan independence reneged on agreements between himself and London.<sup>199</sup> As has been established previously, security concerns made up the core of Saudi Arabia's relationship with the west. As long as Britain maintained influence over Ibn Saud's neighbors, he had little to fear from Hashemite irredentism, whether real or imagined. When the British conceded control to Transjordan in June 1946, Ibn Saud felt his security to be threatened.<sup>200</sup>

In the latter half of 1946, Abdullah stated "the primary goal of his new Kingdom's foreign policy [was] to be the establishment of a Greater Syria."<sup>201</sup> This confirmed Ibn Saud's suspicions regarding the Hashemites. Abdullah's vision for Greater Syria incorporated Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Transjordan, and northern Saudi Arabia. In January 1947 during Crown Prince Saud's visit to Washington he raised the issue with Secretary of State James Byrnes. Byrnes promised Prince Saud that the United States remained committed to Saudi "territorial integrity and political independence." However,

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<sup>198</sup> Lord Killearn to Mr. Bevin, 19 January 1946, in *B DFA*, IV-B-1, 400.

<sup>199</sup> Annual Report on Saudi Arabia, 1946, in *B DFA*, IV-B-4, 69.

<sup>200</sup> From an outside perspective, Ibn Saud's concerns seem difficult to justify. Iraq received nominal independence over a decade earlier and there had been only minimal tension between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Both independent Iraq and Transjordan relied heavily on British advisors, and it seems unlikely they would directly challenge Saudi sovereignty. It is impossible to say whether Ibn Saud believed his own rhetoric or whether he exaggerated the threat in an attempt to get more from the British and later the Americans.

<sup>201</sup> Quoted in Aldamer, 123.

the United States also avoiding engaging in regional conflicts, like the one between the Ibn Saud and Abdullah.<sup>202</sup>

Having failed to receive adequate security guarantees from the United States, Ibn Saud raised the issue again with the British. He sent Bevin a letter, requesting that Britain take a firmer stance against the Hashemites, particularly in light of new plans for increased political and military union between Iraq and Transjordan. The King claimed that Saudi Arabia could deal with the problem more aggressively, but their concerns for the interest of Britain and their desire to maintain cordial relations had thus far prevented them from doing so. He concluded by asking the British to publicly state their opposition to any change in the political structure of the Middle East.<sup>203</sup> Bevin responded to Ibn Saud in June and assured him not to worry about Transjordan and Iraq. The letter expressed regret at the tension between the Saudis and the Hashemites, but claimed that Ibn Saud need not worry about his territorial integrity as Abdullah had no ambition to take over any part of Saudi Arabia. Bevin also rejected Ibn Saud's argument regarding impending union between Transjordan and Iraq, stating the recent treaty did not differ greatly from the Saudi-Iraq treaty in 1936.<sup>204</sup>

Ibn Saud was determined to gain the explicit backing of a western power against his rivals, so he approached the United States again at the end of 1947. Earlier in the year the two countries reached the previously described agreement for an oil pipeline, and construction had begun in the northern part of Saudi Arabia, near the Transjordan border. Ibn Saud tried to use this to gain more leverage with the United States. This time when

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<sup>202</sup> Hart, 44.

<sup>203</sup> His Majesty King Ibn Saud to Mr. Bevin, 24 April 1947, in *B DFA*, IV-B-4, 437.

<sup>204</sup> Mr. Bevin to His Majesty King Ibn Saud, 6 June 1947, in *B DFA*, IV-B-B, pp. 437-38.

he expressed his concern about the Hashemites, he made sure to note that the area most threatened also happened to be the area through which the pipeline passed. Some attacks had already occurred, and he feared that unless the United States provided him with arms more would follow.<sup>205</sup> The United States once again rebuffed the King. Although in the response the Acting Secretary of State pledged to defend Saudi Arabia should one of its neighbors invade, the State Department believed this to be highly unlikely. Finally, the letter concluded that as long as Palestine remained a security risk, the United States would continue its policy of not exporting arms to the region, despite its close friendship with Saudi Arabia.<sup>206</sup>

In January 1948, the British attempted to solve the problems in their relationship with Saudi Arabian caused by the Hashemites by proposing a new treaty to Ibn Saud. The treaty they offered differed very little from the one signed previously with Iraq.<sup>207</sup> The King rejected the treaty for several reasons, the similarity with the Anglo-Iraqi treaty being the first. Additionally, he felt the treaty to be too abstract. Since the Treaty of Jeddah in 1925, Saudi Arabia and Great Britain enjoyed a very positive relationship based on tradition and mutual interests. There was no need for a treaty dedicating both nations to “friendly relations.” Ibn Saud wanted either concrete assurances of defense against Hashemite aggression, or weapons to defend his nation.<sup>208</sup> The King’s requests represented not only his security concerns, but also his need for the support of the *ulama*.

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<sup>205</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Childs) to the Secretary of State, 4 December 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947 vol. V, 1337.

<sup>206</sup> The Acting Secretary of State to the Legation in Saudi Arabia, 12 December 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947 vol. V, pp. 1339-40.

<sup>207</sup> Aldamer, 144.

<sup>208</sup> Memorandum dated 20<sup>th</sup> Rabi’ ul Awwal (31<sup>st</sup> January 1948) received from His Majesty King Ibn Saud, in *B DFA*, IV-B-6, 39.

Publicly, he needed definite benefits from his relationship with Britain and the United States to ensure their support. Ibn Saud felt the similarity between the treaty offered to him and the treaty signed with Iraq ignored the special, religious nature of his kingdom. He believed his country to be substantively different from Iraq and Transjordan, both predominantly secular regimes.

In April 1948, the British again met with Ibn Saud to convince him of the benefits of the treaty. They told Ibn Saud the treaty proposal came from two motives: the protection of the common interests of Saudi Arabia and Britain, and their desire to convince him they wanted the same sort of relationship with him as they had with the Hashemites.<sup>209</sup> Ibn Saud reiterated the same objections to the treaty as he had in January. In a prolonged metaphor in which he described the treaty as a ship, he argued, “if any Government responsible to an electorate were to make a treaty with His Majesty’s Government on lines similar to the Iraq Treaty, or that recently concluded with Transjordan, storms of popular indignation would destroy the ship, and since His Majesty’s friends were in it, what was the use of that?”<sup>210</sup> Certainly Ibn Saud as a sovereign monarch did not truly answer to an electorate, but he could not do anything which might inflame widespread dissent, particularly if the dissent originated with the *ulama*. The bi-lateral treaty negotiations fell apart. Early in 1949, the possibility of a new tri-lateral treaty involving the United States emerged, however Washington quickly informed both the British and the Saudis of their unwillingness to participate in such an agreement.

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<sup>209</sup> Mr. Trott to Mr. Bevin, 17 April 1948, in *BDF*, IV-B-6, pp.43-44.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

While Britain failed to achieve formal influence in Saudi Arabia through treaty negotiations, they continued to pursue informal influence through technical assistance. The British Military Mission (BMM), which began operations early in 1947, provided the greatest potential for growth in Anglo-Saudi relations. The mission provided training for Saudi officers in drill instruction, small arms, minor tactics, and signals communication. It also allowed the British to maintain close contacts within the Saudi military and strong influence over its organization. The British hoped as the Saudis came to rely on British military advisors and equipment, the mission would become indispensable for Ibn Saud and provide them political leverage.

Prior to Crown Prince Saud's visit to London, British officials discussed the way the BMM could be used for their political advantage. The Foreign Office requested that the Joint Planning Staff (JPS) outline their strategic requirements in Saudi Arabia, so that they could be raised with the Crown Prince during the discussion of Britain's recompense for the BMM. They began by defining their key objectives. First, no "potentially hostile power" should be allowed to gain influence in the Kingdom. Second, Saudi oil should be exclusively controlled by the United States and Great Britain. Finally, in the case of a major war based in the country should be opened to allied forces. Beyond the general strategic requirements, the JPS raised two issues of contention. Because by 1948 the British favored the formation of a regional defense plan, reconciliation between Ibn Saud and the Hashemites became even more important. Also, since Britain's new treaty with

Transjordan provided them with base rights, the JPS wished for Ibn Saud to drop his claim to the port of Aqaba.<sup>211</sup>

For all of the British discussion of the Saudi naiveté in terms of foreign affairs, their discussion of the strategic situation in the Kingdom demonstrates a remarkable failure to grasp Ibn Saud's world view. This misunderstanding came to a head in April 1948. The Commander-in-Chief of British Middle East forces visited Saudi Arabia from April 26–30 to discuss strategic matters with the Saudi defense minister and Ibn Saud. During this conference, the British commander hoped to impress upon the King the extreme difficulty in defending the Middle East from a Soviet invasion in order to push him to accept a regional defense plan and cooperation with Iraq and Transjordan. The discussion continually broke down over this point. The Commander-in-Chief recorded his frustration after the meeting:

Everything turned eventually back to his [Ibn Saud] quarrels with the Hashimite States. On this subject, his mind seems obsessed by distrust, hatred and fear of impending aggression by them. This obsession seems to amount to a mental condition against which no factual or logical argument has the slightest effect.<sup>212</sup>

Ibn Saud certainly appreciated the threat posed by the Soviet Union. However, he believed the Hashemite states of Transjordan and Iraq presented a more immediate challenge to his country's sovereignty. British statements regarding the difficulty of defending against the Soviet likely did little to persuade Ibn Saud. Why should he cooperate with his rivals next door to fight someone further away, who they likely could

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<sup>211</sup> JP (48) 6 (Final) Saudi Arabia – Strategic Requirements, 19 January 1948, in *GCC:Defence*, vol. 12, 83.

<sup>212</sup> Annex to COS (48) 112 (O) Report on the Visit of the Commander-in-Chief M.E.L.F. to Saudi-Arabia, 12 May 1948, in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 12, pp. 110-11.

not stop anyway? The British failure to appreciate Ibn Saud's concerns over Abdullah's rhetoric concerning a Greater Syria plagued Anglo-Saudi relations in the late 1940s.

Although the British failed in their attempts to use the BMM to influence Saudi policy toward the Hashemites, the mission did provide them other advantages. One of these was an additional line of communication. Information from the Saudi military could be passed directly to the British military or vice versa, without passing through the Foreign Office. Specific benefits from this new way of sharing information are difficult to ascertain, however, it can be assumed that the benefits of close relationships formed between British and Saudi officers were not lost on the British. They made a conscious effort to insure that from their end, the communication remained positive. In 1948, the Saudi government requested they be supplied with ammunition to be used for training. They made this request through Brigadier Baird, the head of the BMM. The British could not grant the request, due to the arms embargo. Since the refusal was based on political reasons and was likely to be unpopular, the Foreign Office requested that their response be transmitted by the Ambassador, not Baird. Their instructions to this effect noted that this process had been utilized previously. Taking the responsibility of saying "no" away from Baird allowed him to maintain a more positive image in the minds of the Saudi military.<sup>213</sup>

In addition to its political value, the BMM had economic benefits for Britain. Britain's trade deficit became a major problem after the war. The government responded by promoting a major export drive. Arguing for the sale of arms to the Saudis in February 1948, Head of the BMM Brigadier Baird stated, "as a purely business

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<sup>213</sup> E 9985/118/25, J.E. Cable to Major Lessk, 3 August 1948, in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 12, 226.

transaction it would appear to be of assistance to the Export drive.”<sup>214</sup> Another benefit Baird did not raise, but likely would have understood, was the advantage of economy of scale, particularly with military weapons. It is cheaper to build two-hundred jeeps than it is to build one-hundred, in terms of cost-per-unit. Selling military hardware not only brings in funds, it lowers the cost of national defense. Both the United States and Britain took advantage of this benefit during the Cold War. Although the British did not receive maximum possible gains from its role as the sole provider of military training to the Saudis, the BMM remained until 1951 the strongest aspect of Anglo-Saudi relations. The dismissal of the Saudi Military Mission in 1951 represented a significant shift in the relationship, brought on the increasing willingness of the United States to act as the protector of Saudi Arabia and Britain’s continual vision of Saudi Arabia as a secondary concern.

In the summer of 1948 Ibn Saud granted approval for a British reconnaissance mission to evaluate what facilities they would need in Saudi Arabia during a war. The Chiefs of Staff reported to the Cabinet that their needs in Saudi Arabia could be summarized in five categories: defending oil interests, support for the defending the Red Sea, launching an offensive air campaign, defending sea communications, and maintaining the strategic air route. Other facilities already met the latter two requirements. The American operated airfield at Dhahran sufficed for defending the oil interests and launching an air offensive. The inhospitable territory around the Red Sea made the establishment of an airbase exceedingly difficult. The only request from the Chiefs of Staff was an investigation into the possibility of building a small fighter base

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<sup>214</sup> Enclosure in Jeddah Secret Despatch, 5 February 1948, in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 12, 76.

near Mecca, Medina, Riyadh, and Jeddah to defend those cities during a war.<sup>215</sup> Even after being invited by the king to examine the possibility of new strategic facilities, the British saw little strategic value in Saudi Arabia, outside of Dhahran, which the Americans operated.

British defense planners in 1948 developed a plan titled *Sandown* for the defense of the Middle East. *Sandown* established four possible lines of defense against a Soviet invasion of the Middle East. Only the first of these, known as the “outer ring,” provided for the defense of Saudi Arabia. This line began at the Mediterranean, ran through southern Turkey and into southern Iran, and ended at the Persian Gulf. Although believed to be the optimal line of defense, the COS believed the British to lack the capabilities to defend it. The other three lines focused on defending the Palestine area and the Suez Canal. They all began at Aqaba and ran parallel to the Mediterranean to various points further north.<sup>216</sup>

At the end of 1948, the United States and Saudi Arabia entered negotiations regarding the future of the Dhahran Air Base. Ibn Saud expressed his desire for the Americans to remain at Dhahran, but felt he needed more tangible evidence of the benefits of a close relationship with the United States.<sup>217</sup> This prompted Acting Secretary of State, Robert Lovett, to ask Secretary of Defense Forrestal to examine the possibilities of defending the Dhahran Air Base against aggression and providing Saudi Arabia with

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<sup>215</sup> JP (48) 87 (Final), Reconnaissance Party for Saudi Arabia: Report by the Joint Planning Staff, 29 July 1948, in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 12, pp. 245-48.

<sup>216</sup> Cohen, *Fighting World War Three from the Middle East*, 166. Cohen includes maps of the four defense lines on pp. 164-65.

<sup>217</sup> The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Childs) to the Secretary of State, 10 November 1948, in *FRUS*, 1948 vol. V, 253.

military equipment and training.<sup>218</sup> This marked a shift in American policy toward Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. Previously, when Ibn Saud requested defense guarantees the United States emphasized the role of the United Nations in defending the sovereignty of nations. This time, they began considering the idea of unilaterally defending Saudi Arabia.

In 1949, the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia grew to new heights. In January, President Truman approved the elevation of the United States legation in Saudi Arabia to the level of an embassy and the promotion of Minister Childs to Ambassador. American representation in Egypt and Iraq received this status in 1946, and the British bestowed this level on their presence in Saudi Arabia in 1947.<sup>219</sup>

Although largely a symbolic gesture, Ibn Saud welcomed anything that elevated his international status.

Ibn Saud continued to pressure the United States to provide military aid. With the lease on the Dhahran Airbase set to expire in March 1949, the King held a significant bargaining chip. Discussions early in 1949 faced the same obstacles as they had in 1947 and 1948. Although an agreement could not be reached before the deadline, the Saudi government repeatedly granted fifteen day extensions until June when the two nations concluded a one-year agreement, pending a long-term solution. After the first such extension, Ambassador Childs met with Ibn Saud and laid out all the obstacles to a closer relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia. These included legal

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<sup>218</sup> The Acting Secretary of State to the Secretary of Defense (Forrestal), 19 November 1948, in *FRUS*, 1948 vol. V, 255.

<sup>219</sup> Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to the President, 4 January 1949, in *FRUS*, 1949 vol. VI, 1573.

restrictions on military aid to countries outside of the western hemisphere that could only be modified with Congressional approval, the continual political instability caused by Palestine, and a tradition of isolationist foreign policy which could only be overturned slowly. All the Ambassador could offer was a new treaty of friendship as a symbol of their close relationship.<sup>220</sup> Ibn Saud refused to be put-off. In a meeting with the Ambassador in May, he again raised the various issues threatening his security. The first two challenges remained the same: communism and the Hasemite dynasties. He added a new problem to the list, however: problems in the Anglo-Saudi relationship. Although he had nothing to back up this claim, he argued that “as US interests had increased in S[audi] A[rabia] interest of U[nited] K[ingdom] had been deflected to Iraq and Transjordan.”<sup>221</sup> Ibn Saud accurately perceived that his Kingdom remained a secondary concern to the British, and the future of his security rested in the United States.

In late May, attitudes in Washington shifted towards closer cooperation with Saudi Arabia. On May 23, Childs transmitted a message back to the State Department complaining about the obstinacy of American policy. He described his primary responsibility over the previous year-and-a-half as “conjuring up fresh excuses and explanations as to why we were unable to respond to the King’s overtures for closer political relations.” Although he recognized the complicated nature of the issue, he summarized his position with a colloquial statement: “We must make up our minds to fish or cut bait.” Childs argued that defending Dhahran and Saudi Arabia fit within

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<sup>220</sup> The American Ambassador (Childs) to the King of Saudi Arabia (Ibn Saud), 2 April 1949, in *FRUS*, 1949 vol. VI, pp. 1585-89.

<sup>221</sup> The Ambassador in Saudi Arabia (Childs) to the Secretary of State, 10 May 1949, in *FRUS*, vol. VI, 1595.

America's interests, and if some overture of this nature could be made to Ibn Saud the King was ready to sign a long term agreement regarding Dhahran.<sup>222</sup> That same day, President Truman sent a letter to Ibn Saud informing him that he had instructed the United States military to begin evaluating the security needs of Saudi Arabia in order to facilitate the negotiations for a long term agreement.

On 30 May, Childs presented an American plan to Ibn Saud, designed to provide for his kingdom's security. This plan included four points. First, a plan had been sent to Congress which would provide military aid to countries of strategic importance to the United States. Saudi Arabia represented the only Arab nation included in this plan. Second, since the first component required the approval of Congress, until this resolution was passed, the American Military would provide send a number of officers to Dhahran to study the requirements of the Saudi Military and provide recommendations for its development. Next, after receiving these recommendations the United States would request the United Nations make a special exception to the Middle East arms embargo, which would allow them to provide this equipment to Saudi Arabia regardless of the situation in Palestine. Finally, the United States would allow some Saudi officers to come to the United States to receive training. The aide-memoire concluded, "with of program of the type outlined above, it is believed that progress can be made in achieving the security which His Majesty so earnestly desires, and in which the United States Government also has a great interests."<sup>223</sup> The American decision to provide military aid

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<sup>222</sup> The Ambassador in Saudi Arabia (Childs) to the Secretary of State, 23 May 1949, in *FRUS*, 1949 vol. VI, 1598.

<sup>223</sup> The Ambassador in Saudi Arabia (Childs) to the King of Saudi Arabia (Ibn Saud), 30 May 1949, in *FRUS*, 1949 vol. VI, pp. 1600-02.

to Saudi represented not only a shift in American foreign policy toward a more international approach, but also the growing importance of Saudi Arabia in strategic thinking. This occurred at the same time as Britain continued to marginalize Saudi Arabia in its defense planning, as seen in Operation Sandown and successive British plans. Truman's promises impressed Ibn Saud and in June the two nations signed a one-year agreement over Dhahran, with the intention of using that year to come to a long-term agreement.

In August, American Brigadier General O'Keefe arrived in Saudi Arabia to evaluate their military needs. He opened the visit by meeting with Ibn Saud, during which the King stated his desire for "relations between his country and US to be more than just friendly, [he] wanted them to be as one country, one government, one soil, [since] all S[audi] A[rabian] economic life now in [the] hands [of the] Americans, his country's welfare [was] our welfare, therefore we are as one." The King requested that the United States provide a military estimate of the strength of Transjordan and Iraq, and then build him an army to match.<sup>224</sup> In October, Congress jeopardized American military aid to Saudi Arabia when it failed to pass the legislation that would have allowed the United States to sell military equipment to nations whose defense was an American interest. Whether or not Ibn Saud was aware of this development is unclear. However, he did not raise the issue with Childs when the two met in November. He instead proceeded on another soliloquy on Britain's unjust treatment of his kingdom. The King described British policy as effectively beginning a "Cold War against him" through their

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<sup>224</sup> The Chargé in Saudi Arabia (Hill) to the Secretary of State, 25 August 1949, in *FRUS*, 1949 vol. VI, 1613.

relationship with the Hashemites. He concluded by asking for some action that demonstrated American willingness to stop the British led encirclement of his country.<sup>225</sup>

The extent to which Ibn Saud exaggerated his fear of British policy to gain more American support is difficult to ascertain. His willingness to continually press the matter after having been rebuffed by both the Americans and the British in 1947 and 1948 illustrate his concern went beyond rhetoric. The United States raised Ibn Saud's concerns with the British in November. Michael Wright, an Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, informed the Americans that Ibn Saud had previously raised this issue with the British and was offered a treaty similar to the one Britain had with Iraq and Transjordan. As discussed earlier, Ibn Saud refused this British offer. Wright went on to state that the Foreign Office was unlikely to approve another such treaty offer, hoping instead that the British military mission might provide "a steadying influence."<sup>226</sup> With the Saudi economy firmly in American hands and Ibn Saud's refusal to accept their treaty offer, London made the BMM the foundation of its relationship with Saudi Arabia. Once the Americans provided military training as well, nothing would remain on which to base Anglo-Saudi relations.

In the first half of 1950, the United States Military, the State Department, and the President all supported providing military assistance to Saudi Arabia. They could not proceed, however, without congressional approval. In March, President Truman sent Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs George McGhee to meet with Ibn Saud and discuss American-Saudi relations. At their first meeting March 19, McGhee reinforced to

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<sup>225</sup> The Ambassador in Saudi Arabia (Childs) to the Secretary of State, 17 November 1949, in *FRUS*, 1949 vol. VI, pp. 1618-20.

<sup>226</sup> The Secretary of State to the Consulate at Istanbul, 30 November 1949, in *FRUS*, 1949 vol. VI, 1623.

Ibn Saud that his kingdom's security remained a major concern for the United States. He also told the King that while the United States believed the Soviet Union represented the primary threat to global peace, it accepted that Ibn Saud also had regional concerns. During this meeting, McGhee made the greatest concession to date regarding the Hashemites when he said, "irrespective of American conclusions as to whether or not Saudi Arabia is menaced by the Hashemites, the fact that Saudi Arabia considers herself menaced is taken into consideration." Later, he went on, "Saudi Arabia knows its neighbors much better than the United States does and the latter does not want to attempt to tell Saudi Arabia in an authoritative way what their [the Hashemites] ultimate designs may be." Despite these assurances, McGhee concluded by explaining the impossibility of providing military aid without the support of Congress.<sup>227</sup>

In April, to show Ibn Saud the United States remained serious about providing military aid, the Army Chief of Staff Collins visited the King and discussed security concerns and the future of the Saudi Military. The following month, the Saudis agreed to grant another extension on the Dhahran Air Base. This appears to demonstrate the effectiveness of both McGhee Collins' visit. Finally in July, President Truman signed into law "An Act to Amend the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949," which allowed the United States to sell military equipment to countries whose security was in the interest of the United States.<sup>228</sup>

The likelihood of American military aid to Saudi Arabia led Britain to reevaluate its own military mission. The Foreign Office concluded that militarily, the mission

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<sup>227</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, 19 March 1950, in *FRUS*, 1950 vol. V, pp. 1131-45.

<sup>228</sup> Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1945 vol. V, 1182.

provided little benefit. The Saudi armed forces achieved only minimal gains the previous two years, and little potential existed for growth in the future. Politically, the mission received mixed reviews. Although they concluded that the mission had not yet provided the desired political influence, withdrawing the mission would likely have negative consequences. Despite these shortcomings, the author of the report concluded, “there is certainly a lot to be said for keeping our foot in the door in a country where foreigners are excluded from so much.”<sup>229</sup> In January 1951, the British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Alan Trott, provided the Foreign Office with his opinion on the matter. He agreed the mission had been unremarkable in its results thus far but should remain a part of the Anglo-Saudi relation. With a tone of British superiority, he dismissed the ability of an American Military Mission to train the Saudis as well as the BMM, although only a few paragraphs previously he conceded the BMM had done little good. Trott stated that Ibn Saud seemed unlikely to dismiss the BMM. However, if such a possibility became likely the British should withdraw the mission before being removed, in order to save face.<sup>230</sup> Trott’s estimation of the King’s intention regarding the BMM appeared accurate throughout most of 1951. The British made several attempts to coordinate the British and American Military Missions, but the United States declined their offers.<sup>231</sup> Despite the lack of cooperation between the two missions, the British received assurances in August from Ibn Saud’s son Faisal that the King did not wish the British Military Mission to

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<sup>229</sup> Future of the British Military Mission, 24 December 1950, in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 12, pp. 451-53.

<sup>230</sup> Trott to Furlonge, 30 January 1951, in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 12, pp. 457-59.

<sup>231</sup> See ES1192/24, GHQ MELF to War Office, 19 July 1951; ES 1192/29, Military Missions to Saudi Arabia, 25 September 1951; ES 1201/26, Burrows to Furlonge, 8 August 1951; COS (51) 526, Military Missions to Saudi Arabia, 13 September 1951; all in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 12.

depart.<sup>232</sup> In November, however, Ibn Saud informed the British that his country no longer required the services of the BMM. He justified this decision by stating the United States “would provide training and arms [sic] units, the British only training.”<sup>233</sup> Since they were clearly being replaced by the Americans, the British saw little reason to stay and made plans to evacuate as soon as possible.

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<sup>232</sup> ES 1201/26, Memorandum of Conversation, 25 August 1951, in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 12, 555.

<sup>233</sup> From Jedda to Foreign Office, 4 November 1951, in *GCC: Defence*, vol. 12, 568.

## CONCLUSION

In the aftermath of World War Two, the economic situation facing the British required them to refocus their imperial energies in the Middle East. Although Attlee initially believed the country would best be served by abandoning its position, he eventually recognized the strategic importance of their place in the region. Following the loss of India, Britain's varying degree of imperial relationships with countries like Egypt, Iraq, Persia, Transjordan, Palestine, and the Gulf States represented its greatest claim to world power status. The desire to recast empire in a more cooperative manner attempted to reduce the costs of maintaining their position and minimize the criticism of imperialism prevalent in the United States and elsewhere. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the rising industrial power of Germany and the United States forced Britain to re-craft its imperial policy and led to the development of the concept of grand strategy. Although couched in different terms, the postwar adjustment to a more "friendly" empire represents a similar type of adjustment seeking basically the same, albeit more limited, objectives.

Britain's policy toward Saudi Arabia from 1941 to 1951 demonstrates how the government sought to maintain their position in light of financial weakness. Unlike other areas of the region, in which the Americans gave the British a free hand, in Saudi Arabia they faced competition for the informal influence upon which the new empire was to be based. For many years, a company from London possessed a monopoly on Saudi Arabia communications. The British sought control of both military and economic missions, to insure their own interests would be protected. They tried to block the construction of an

airport and a corresponding civil air traffic agreement, to protect their dominance in civil air transportation in the region. These “soft-power” concerns provided the British with both specific areas in which they could influence Saudi policy, but also intangible benefits because of the opportunities to build relationships with members of the ruling class. Ongoing interaction provided the chance to develop mutual sympathies, furthering the British cause at minimal expense.

The unwillingness of the Americans to allow the British to pursue this course created an insurmountable obstacle. Although the British desired to maintain a significant level of influence in Saudi Arabia, it remained secondary to its interests in Iraq, Transjordan, and the Gulf States. This had been the case historically, and little had changed to alter British perceptions. When SOCAL won the concession in 1933, the United States made its first move into the Middle East. American-Saudi relations took another step forward with the offering of Lend-Lease Aid to Ibn Saud during World War Two. By the end of the war, the United States recognized Saudi Arabia as an important ally, because of its oil reserves and its strategic location. While the United States conceded defense of the Middle East to the British, strategic planners refused to allow the British to ride roughshod over their position in Saudi Arabia. Washington had two major advantages over London when it came to competing for influence in the Arabian kingdom.

The first advantage was the absence of conflicting interests in the Middle East. Ibn Saud’s suspicion of the British-backed Hashimite rulers in Iraq and Transjordan contributed greatly to his frustration with the British. The king claimed, whether or not

he believed this is difficult to know, the Hashimites were conspiring against him and the British would do nothing about it. When London offered the king a treaty very similar to the one they had with Iraq, he rejected it on the ground that it failed to recognize his kingdom's unique status. Unless the British showed outright favoritism to Ibn Saud, an untenable strategy because of the greater importance to them of Iraq and Transjordan, the king's paranoia regarding his neighbors would continue to divide Anglo-Saudi relations. Ibn Saud knew, however, that even a half-hearted ally was better than no ally at all. He refused to completely sever his ties with the British, until he could be assured that the Americans would not abandon him after the war. In the first years after the war, he accepted aid from both nations and attempted not to upset either London or Washington. When neither country pursued an acceptable policy regarding Palestine, he voiced his displeasure but did nothing to jeopardize the future of his relationship with the West.

Ibn Saud found the British withdrawal from Palestine more objectionable than the American policy because of their abrogation of their position. Because security issues formed the basis for his country's relationship with the west (at least from their view), Britain's decision to renege on a security commitment made the king wary of depending on a possibly unreliable partner.

One of the reasons for Britain's abandonment of Palestine was the country's dire financial situation. London's bleak economic prospects, particularly when compared with the United States, represented the second major advantage for Washington in forming a close relationship with Saudi Arabia. After World War One, Ibn Saud recognized the diminishing status of the Ottoman Empire and sought to build closer ties

to Britain. Similarly, the British Empire entered a clear state of decline at the end of World War Two. The Americans, meanwhile, emerged from the war as one of two superpowers. The only question in Ibn Saud's mind was whether or not the United States could be counted on to remain engaged around the world following demobilization. Ibn Saud had observed the American withdrawal from Europe after World War One. Although no evidence exists to confirm these concerns influenced his policy, it appears a likely explanation for his trepidation regarding linking his future exclusively to the United States.

Following the dismissal of the British Military Mission, London's relationship with Saudi Arabia continued to decline. An ongoing border dispute between Saudi Arabia and Britain regarding the area around Buraimi led to a new low in Anglo-Saudi relations. In October 1953, the Saudi government informed the United States that while they knew they could not "harm the British Empire, [they] could cause some damage to the British...Even a goat, if in danger of its life, would use its horns to defend itself."<sup>234</sup> Although written with the typical dramatic flair, since Saudi Arabia's life was not in danger, this correspondence demonstrated how far the relationship had degraded.

Anglo-Saudi relations had been in decline for several years prior to the dismissal of the BMM, and continued in this trend after the mission had left. This event remains critical, however, because of its public nature and of its ramifications on the future. The British and Saudis had dealt with numerous border disputes throughout the course of their relationship. Never had such animosity been present in the discussion. In previous situations, the British had possessed some type of leverage over the Saudis. The precise

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<sup>234</sup> *FRUS*, 1952-54, vol. IX, 2568.

nature of this leveraged at various types included from economic aid, security guarantees, or training missions. With the United States assuming responsibility for many of these areas, the Saudis could deal with London more aggressively. Some restrictions continued to exist, as the United States would never allow Anglo-Saudi affairs to become a major distraction from the primary threat of the Soviet Union, however these limitations were far greater than when the Saudi depended directly on British support.

From the Saudi perspective, the foundation of their relationship with the West in the twentieth, and continuing into the twenty-first century, has been security concerns. Prior to World War Two, Britain viewed Saudi Arabia as a secondary concern in the Middle East. As the United States entered the region during and after the war, the chance for an ally without conflicting interests motivated Ibn Saud to build closer ties with Washington. For the United States, this relationship involved Cold War security concerns and economic concerns, in terms of Petroleum. Today, this relationship is quickly changing. Whereas during the Cold War, the monotheistic beliefs predominant in both the United States and Saudi Arabia stood in sharp contrast to the officially atheist Soviet Union. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, religion no longer acts as a cohesive force. The threat of terrorism instills concern in many people about whether or not Saudi Arabia remains a useful security partner. Although alternatives to oil as the primary source of American energy remain decades out, if at some point oil becomes less important to the American economy this will further effect US-Saudi relations.

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