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British Policy Towards King Hussein of Hijaz after the Arab Revolt

"All Warfare is based on deception…"
Sun Tzu

Abstract

The post-war British territorial strategy which re-demarked the new boundaries of the Middle East, the mandates, the post and major treaties, had contributed to the decay in the authority of King Hussein of Hijaz.

This study raises the question of the damage of the unclarity and duplicity of the British dialogue with Hussein on his long-term leadership in Hijaz. One could argue that, although Hussein did not have a clear vision about the nature of his leadership, Great Britain misled him in believing that he could be a pan-Arab leader. In fact, Great Britain came out of the Great War with an extended territory and a new map for the Middle East.

Introduction

The aim of this study is to outline the decisions, the non-decisions and the omissions of the major post war treaties and to retrace their effect to the first instance, where King Hussein lost strategically important territory in the Middle East. The creation of the mandates of Syria, Palestine, Transjordan and Mesopotamia removed these areas from possible inclusion in Hussein's aspired Arab Confederacy. Thus, British Middle East policies during and after the Great War weakened the political bargaining power of Hussein, and precipitated the decay and finally the decline of Hussein's authority in Hijaz. Such decline was part of an extensive and confusing diplomatic political causality, which resulted from the war and was reinforced by major treaties and international conferences such as the Paris Peace Conference, the Treaty of Versailles, the San Remo Conference, the Cairo Conference and the Treaty of Sevres. All these diplomatic events and agreements undermined the political credibility of Sharif Hussein and accelerated the decline of his rule in Hijaz.

In the series of post-war conferences and treaties, the conditions which were negotiated by or between Britain and King Hussein differed substantially from the predictions made by McMahon to Hussein in their (well documented[1]) wartime correspondence. If the Hussein/McMahon Correspondence in 1915 could reasonably be interpreted to offer a Hashemite pan-Arab Kingdom, it is pertinent to analyze the process by which Britain

[1] See Elie Kedourie, *In The Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

managed to achieve a reinterpretation of the seeming promises of these documents. An examination of the post-war diplomatic negotiations and treaties reveals the conflicting political pressures and forces upon Britain, which contributed to deny Hussein his controversial pan-Arab leadership.

One could argue that the fate of Middle Eastern boundaries was linked inherently to a new general post-war attitude, namely that the territories of destroyed empires were now to be the spoils of war, distributed according to the tried and tested diplomatic reflexes of empire. "The fact of war meant that the map of the world was open for redrawing… once the future had been rendered easily persuaded, then the precise share of the spoils claimed by Britain was dictated by a mixture of reflexes to told problems – the route to India, the defence of Egypt and the canal – and to all- important new one, oil".[2]

It is therefore clear that this study raises the questions of how Hussein came to be denied pan-Arab leadership in this period where Middle Eastern Territories were being formally internationalized. How did Great Britain go into the Great War in a wholly defensive spirit, and somehow emerged with a largely expanded Middle East empire whose subsequent dissolution thereafter was to be bitterly contested?

British Policy for Hijaz after the Arab Revolt

While Hussein's contribution to British war-time strategy was crucial at the outbreak of the Great War, one major way in which Britain betrayed Hussein was through the shift of its political ideals which shaped its post-war foreign policy. In essence, Britain's diplomatic policy had reverted to what it was before the war: non-intervention in Arabia.

After World War I, the British aimed to maintain the divisions of power in the Arabian peninsula, with Hussein controlling Hijaz, Ibn Saud dominating Nejd and keeping Ibn Rashid as third and balancing power. This would maintain the "equilibrium of Arabia".[3] However there were two events which radically altered plans conceived during the latter part of the war. The first was the diplomatic bartering and power broking surrounding the Paris Peace Conference. Secondly, a major change in the machinery of British government dealing with the Middle East affected the channels of communication and reduced powers of both – the India Office and the Foreign Office. While Whitehall actions and policy remained fragmented and confused, rivalry over which leader to support was bound to continue. Moreover, the very terms of the Paris Peace Conference and the creation of the mandates of Syria, Palestine, Transjordan and Mesopotamia removed these areas from possible inclusion in a larger Arab confederacy. Sir Mark Sykes verbally (and secretly) urged Cabinet on 6th July 1916, after one year's observation "the Government of India is incapable of handling the Arab question… the British officials in India are themselves influenced by [a] pro-Turkish atmosphere. The Arab movement, as such, is disliked in India", and more pertinently: "It is useless to ignore the jealousy which subsists between Simla and Cairo. This is an old long-standing feud… a cause of constant irritation".[4] Even at this point Sykes called for a single unified control of

[2] Max Beloff, *Britain's Liberal Empire*, London: Macmillan, 1987 p. 182.

[3] John S. Habib, *Ibn Saud's Warrior of Islam: The Ikhwan of Nejd and Their Role in the Creation of the Saudi Kingdom*, Leiden: E.J. Bill, 1978.

[4] Verbal report to Cabinet on 6 July 1916, in „Policy in the Middle East: the Arab Question", CAB 17/176.

Arab questions by one department, the Foreign office. In March 1915, about six months prior to the Cabinet decision, allowing for the creation of the Arab Bureau, the Foreign Secretary had already decided that "political control of the Hijaz and its ports should be under Cairo".[5] The highest-ranking official in the Middle East at the time was the High commissioner at Cairo. The incumbent during the Crucial period of the Arab Revolt was Lt. Col. Sir A.H. McMahon. He was replaced in 1918 by General Sir Reginald Francis Wingate. The Arab Bureau was a temporary war-time creation which began its work in the spring of 1916. The necessity of such an organization had been recognized by the Director of Military Intelligence of the Egyptian army, and its primary function would be to "co-ordinate Middle East intelligence and to spread propaganda while countering the effect of hostile propaganda".[6] On 23rd December 1917 in an unsigned *aide-mémoire* form the Cairo Residency, McMahon offered a consistent resume of his previous policy: Britain's concept of her obligations as undertaken prior to the Arab Revolt, "is that we guarantee to keep a ring defined approximately in these negotiations within which Arab's autonomy shall have free play. We did not guarantee the pre-eminence of the Sharif, or another, within this ring: although the King considers that our conduct of these negotiations through him implied our willingness to see his pre-eminence a fact".[7] It must be stressed that Britain had never embodied her promises to King Hussein in any single document signed by both parties. Rather an understanding was evolved through the Hussein–McMahon correspondence. (The Hussein–McMahon correspondence provided a formal record of British guarantees, and expressed the extent of Britain's explicit commitments to, and specific conditions of the alliance during the Arab Revolt and post-war period.) One could argue that the Hussein–McMahon correspondence was in some sense the great non-treaty of the treaty era: a prior claim to uncertainty in a new era of uncertainty. However, it is also true that Britain certainly took an advantage of the absence of a formal agreement in order to extricate itself from internal Arabian affairs, and no doubt paradoxically benefited from the inferences implied in the correspondence. Britain avoided clarifying certain points and eschewed the ensuing risk of disappointing Hussein as long as his support was required. It was certainly true that one of Britain's strategic goals in supporting Sharif Hussein during the Arab Revolt was the creation of a religious authority vested in the Sharif as Caliph, in order that he could challenge the religious authority of the Ottoman Caliph. This policy would "abolish the threat of Islam by dividing it against itself, in its very heart" as McMahon noted; and would prevent a united Jihad against the allies.[8] However, as early as 1917 the British High Commission in Cairo realized that British policy instigated at the beginning of the revolt must be re-evaluated.

Officials in Cairo realized that British policy as designed and linked to the revolt must be reconsidered, and by defining British interests in the Arabian Peninsula, a post-war policy could emerge. These interests were:

"(a) the security of the annual Pilgrimage.

(b) the immunity of the Peninsula from foreign occupation, or penetration beyond the terms of agreement [i.e. the Sykes–Picot Agreement of 1916]…

[5] Telegram on 31 March 1915, Political Resident, Aden to Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Station, FO 141/610/3666.

[6] FO 141/436/7658, Confidential Print of 17 May 1920.

[7] Note by Cairo Residency staff, 23 December 1917, CAB 27/23.

[8] Report by McMahon entitled „The Politics of Mecca", 17 February 1916 in L/P&S 10/525.

(c) the preservation of peace and the promotion of trading facilities on the borders of autonomous Arabia and the outlying settlements (e.g. Aden) and the regions under control.

Providing these interests are adequately safeguarded we have no desire to intervene in the internal politics of the Peninsula".[9] Other components of policy were the conclusion of a treaty with King Hussein. For his part the King attempted to confuse the issue of what guarantees were implied in the correspondence, or perhaps he was himself confused; for instance he re-wrote his original demands from the 1915 negotiations on 28th August 1918, and sent these to Sir Wingate as a list of supposed British commitments. The King requested explanations of British concessions and was threatening to resign. It was on receipt of this fresh call for negotiations from King Hussein that Sir Reginald Wingate wrote the most sympathetic plea on his behalf to Balfour in September of 1918. Emphasizing the precariousness of Hussein's position, Wingate stressed not only the current British dependency on Hussein's allegiance, but also inferred that there were long-term and deeper "moral obligations… incurred by us towards him", Wingate then made a suggestion for a new policy directive to clear up all the misunderstandings; this was no less than His Majesty's Government support of Arab unity in central and southern Arabia. This support could be achieved by "an alliance between the Arab chiefs under the leadership of one of them", although each chief would be autonomous. He further proposed "that HMG considers King Hussein to be the best fitted to assume the leadership of the Alliance, and would welcome him in that capacity".[10] Indeed, it is symptomatic of policy conflicts that only two days after the Foreign Office printed for circulation to other government departments the arguments discussed by Wingate in September 1918, it is also published details of the Sykes–Picot arrangement, outlining the political dominance of Syria and Mesopotamia between France and Britain.[11] While formerly Britain had endorsed the creation of a Hashemite pan-Arab Kingdom, the post-war ideal of self-determination was Britain's priority after the Paris Peace Conference. This was in conformity with its changing strategic requirements and a desire to satisfy its leading allies. This change of policy was partly due to the financial strain of the war, and partly because Britain wanted to moderate the activities of France. Thus, its post-war negotiations had to accommodate the appeal to public opinion of Woodrow Wilson's Universal Philosophy of international relations. President Wilson's belief that the war would only have been justified by a transformation of the international system, was to have its effect upon the futures of pan-Arabism and on the political authority of Hussein itself, particularly through its connection to the mandate system.

Some British officials had even considered offering Palestine to the United States as an inducement with regard to the fate of Colonial territories. Lord Derby offered one strand of British Political opinion on the issue of self-determination when he wrote to Balfour in 1918 "Are we to give up Arabia, Palestine, and the German colonies? And are we to give Ireland, Egypt and even India such governments as the people there can be said to want?"[12] Thus, Britain related Hussein's greatly diminished post-war popular backing to the principle of local self-determination and viewed this priority as militating against his bid for pan-Arab power. Clearly, British foreign policy after the Great War was directed towards non-intervention

[9] Note, residency, Cairo, 23 December 1917, CAB/27/23.

[10] Sir Reginald Wingate to Mr. Balfour, 21 September 1918, CP of 5 November 1918, FO 141/557.

[11] Printed on 7 November 1918, see FO 141/766/70.

[12] Derby to Balfour, 8 July 1918, Balfour papers, B.M. add 49743.

in Arabia. Thus, in response to Hussein's political ambitions, the War Office recommended at this time formal negotiation with Hussein, "to give effect to control of the eastern littoral of the Red Sea." It also advocated "the desirability of retaining the Caliphate under British auspices," with perhaps Baghdad as the seat of the Caliphate.[13] In 1918 the Foreign Office reorganized its administration of Middle Eastern affairs, a step which was necessary because an independent state of Hijaz, which had full treaty relations with Britain, must now be treated as a foreign country, not as a dependency. The Arab Bureau was wound down officially in September 1920.[14] By that time its duties had greatly exceeded its original mandate and it was then conducting quasi-governmental business on behalf of Hussein. Its closure left Hussein in an unstable position with regard to British support, and essentially in the administrative vacuum although the British Consul was re-established in the Hijaz as the first line of communication to the Foreign Office.

The administration of British Middle Eastern affairs was not truly unified until 1920, when separate Middle Eastern Department was set up to supervise the various conquered areas.[15] A Cabinet review, the Masterton–Smith Committee, addressed the wide-ranging difficulties of interdepartmental overlapping and duplication of effort, and considered the massive task of administering the newly mandated territories of Iraq, Mesopotamia and Palestine.[16] The committee decided, that the Foreign Office was best suited to handle the overall responsibility for the British mandated territories, and a new department was duly created within the colonial Office in 1921 with specific responsibility for Middle Eastern relations. However, responsibility for the Hijaz, was shifted to the new Foreign Office Eastern Department (mentioned in the Foreign Office list from 1921) which replaced the former Eastern and Egyptian Department.[17]

Prior to the formal Paris Peace conference of 1919, British officials attempted to work out agreements and proposals within the Cabinet.

On the other hand, the Cabinet generally agreed not to concur in King Hussein's pretensions, and shortly after this decision, downgraded his significance. "It was fairly clear that Hussein might have some spiritual authority, but not political – even though it might be necessary to subsidize him from Mesopotamian revenues in his capacity as keeper of the holy places".[18]

Thus, concerning its stand on the Arabian chapter of the peace treaty with Turkey, the Foreign Office sent an alternative draft to the delegation at Paris in August1919, which did in fact suggest treating King Hussein as an "Arab chief and merely primus inter pares among the Emirs of the Arabian Peninsula".[19]

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[13] From secret note, War Office, 6 July 1917: observations by the director of military intelligence on Sir Reginald Wingate's Despatch No. 127 of 11 June CAB 227/222.

[14] FO 371/5596.

[15] FO 141/436/7588, Confidential Print 17 May 1920.

[16] See *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, 31 January 1921 L/P&S/11/93.

[17] There was also the Levant Consular Department which was not a diplomatic department. British Consular representation in Jeddah was channeled through the British Ambassador in Constantinople, and correspondence and reports are located under „Turkey" in Foreign Office papers.

[18] From Eastern Committee 43 minutes, 16 December 1918, CAB 27/24. Cited in Busch, B.C., Britain, India and the Arabs, 1914–1921, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971.

[19] Despatch No. 5485 of 18 August 1919, FO 371/4234.

In fact, the delegation did not want to attribute Hussein with any greater status, Balfour explained in a reply to Lord Curzon: "We are committed to treating the Hijaz as an independent state, and we may be charged with inconsistency when a different attitude appears more consistent with our own interest".[20]

The Controversy over The Mandates

The most fundamental factor obscuring the finalization of a British-Hijazi treaty was Hussein's constant disapproval of the mandate system, despite the benefits which accrued to his sons. (For example, Faisal was installed initially as King of Syria, and Abdullah as Amir of mandated Transjordan.) Hussein's opposition to the mandate system undercut the legitimacy of Britain's acquisition of desirable territory, which thus eroded British support for him, and it also undercut Britain's personal legitimacy, because the fact that Hussein's sons headed these territories, rendered his opposition politically incompatible with their new power.

In order to maintain his religious legitimacy as Sharif of Mecca, Hussein had little option but to oppose the Palestine mandate and the planned homeland for the Jews,[21] particularly in order to try to salvage the credibility lost after 1917, when he had appeared passive on the issue of the Balfour Declaration. Towards the end of his rule, Hussein increasingly and emphatically opposed British plans for Palestine, stating that he wished Britain to support legitimate Arab rights including political and economic rights, not merely the civil and religious rights as Britain proposed.[22] Although his initial lukewarm response to the Balfour Declaration proved difficult to justify, Hussein expended much effort in promoting debate of the Palestine issue:

"With a tenacity which ended by grating on the Foreign Office nerves, he kept protesting… he was not moved by narrow or selfish motives, … his attitude was dedicated solely by the conviction that there could be no peace for the British, Jews or Arabs in Palestine so long, as the latter had come to suspect the ultimate aim of Zionism was to establish a Jewish state in their midst, and at the expense of their national aspirations".[23]

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[20] Balfour to Curzon, 26 August 1919, FO 371/4234.

[21] In re-analyzing British promises to Hussein regarding Palestine, the Foreign Office concluded that at best the British government had been ambiguous about what Palestine was to become. The British High Commission's vagueness was not intended as a caption, but was nevertheless exploited later by other British officials. This re-analysis recognized that the British High Commission in Cairo in his „Hijaz Rising Narrative" of November 1916 appeared „to assign Palestine to the Arabs under the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, while noting the reservation of French interest". This secret history of the Arab Bureau stated in particular: „What has been agreed to, therefore, on behalf of Great Britain is: (1) to recognize the independence of those portions of the Arab speaking areas in which we are free to act without detriment to the interest of France. Subject to these undefined reservations, the said area is understood to be bounded – west by the Red Sea and the Mediterranean up to about latitude 33 and beyond by an indefinite line drawn west of Damascus, Hamma, Homs and Aleppo" (FO 37/1/175635).

[22] Regarding the Palestine issue, Brigadier Clayton noted in 1924, following a talk with Hussein, that Hussein wanted any discussions on Palestine to be kept in private to avoid criticism and opposition, and agreed with Hussein that he could not afford the resultant Muslim criticism and possible abuse should accede to the Anglo-Hashemite Treaty as it stood. Clayton thus suggested dropping Article 2 altogether (G.F. Clayton memo, 23 January 1924 L/P&S/10/881).

[23] George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, New York: Putnam, 1938, p. 334.

One major incentive for British officials who promoted Zionism, was satisfying a significant proportion of the American electorate. In fact, it was the conservative wing in British politics that was the most favorable to the Zionists.[24]

Another mandate, with which Hussein began to concern himself with after 1917 was that of Mesopotamia. He argued that Iraq should be acknowledged as his territory by right,[25] rather than as separate state ruled by Faisal. In 1924 the Foreign Office acknowledged:

> We have pledged ourselves to King Hussein that Mesopotamia shall be «Arab» and «independent», subject to special measures of British control. There is no controversy about this control: it is accepted by King Hussein, by the people of Mesopotamia, and by all the British authorities that are concerned in the settlement of the Middle East.[26]

Given this policy, the Foreign Office was concerned when Captain Wilson proposed isolating and cutting off Mesopotamia from the Arab national movement, which it believed "would clearly be a breach of faith with King Hussein".[27] Yet it did not support Hussein's personal claim to power in Northern Arabia, for instance, concerning Syrian mandate which he particularly claimed; on the grounds that the Arab Revolt had been inspired by the encouragement and backing of Syrian groups.[28] In the autumn of 1918, Faisal received the submission of the Syrians and their acceptance of Hussein as their sovereign, with the title "Emir-al-Muminin".[29] Hussein's reply reflects his presumption that he would ultimately control that area. That is, he consigned the Syrians to Faisal's care until such time as he could "himself attend to their affairs".[30] Thus, as Wingate noted, Hussein had "in no degree abated his original pretentions concerning Syria…" Apparently, Wingate continued, "he still nourishes illusion that through the good office of his Majesty's government he may be installed as, at any rate nominally, overlord of greater part of the country".[31] Britain's strategy for resolving the issue was to stress the new international emphasis on popular consent, arguing that there was no evidence that any Arab nationalist movement at grass-roots level existed: "there is no political affinity with Syria

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[24] Beloff, *Britain's Liberal Empire*, p. 261.

[25] See series of correspondence between King Hussein and British agent at Jeddah from 3 September to 3 October 1918, FO686/39.

[26] See Foreign Office discussion regarding telegram from the Chief Political Officer, Baghdad, n.d., but c. July 1917 FO371/3386.

[27] See Foreign Office Memorandum on telegrams Nos. 10973 and 1109 from the Chief Political Officer, Baghdad, FO 371/3386, n.d. but *c*. 1918.

[28] The Arab Syrian Committee in London wrote to him in February 1918, as „supporters of the Arab community and the Hashemite banner". (Arab and Syrian Committee in London to the King of the Hijaz, n.d. c. February 1918, FO 371/3399). It must be noted that there was also equal opposition to the Hashemites in Syria: in 1918 Syrian opinion was „averse to close connection with Arabia as represented by the King of Hijaz and his sons." (GHQ, Egyptian Expeditionary Force to Foreign Office, 21 September 1918) FO 371/3399.

[29] Wingate to FO, 13 October 1918, FO 371/3384.

[30] Hussein's continuing possessive interest in Syria was evident in his campaign against the French; he petitioned the League of Nations in 1921, arguing, „the idea of the mandate in Syria will be synonymous to colonization". (Hussein to League of Nations, 2 July 1921, CO727/2).

[31] Sir H. Wingate, Cairo 29 November 1917, FO 371/3057.

or the Hijaz".[32] Extensive anthropological evidence collected by Gertrude Bell was produced in support of this, detailing the local tribes' limited political horizons.[33] In addition to such arguments, the unpopularity of Faisal's rule gradually undermined Hussein's claim to Syria: "French domination is not liked by the Syrians, but they would prefer to have that rather than revert to the late conditions".[34] Hussein's claim to support from groups in Syria were thus eroded. Furthermore, these claims had exerted considerable pressure on Anglo-French relations, which further alienated Britain from supporting an expansion of Hussein's post-war authority.

Hussein's complete opposition to the mandate system affected his ability to conclude an explicit treaty with Britain specifying the extent of his powers. Significantly, the appointments of Faisal and Abdullah as heads of mandated territories split the Hashemite dynasty and enforce a bloodless shift of internal allegiance: giving Hussein's sons the security of British backing was an ideal mean of preventing them from working against Britain's new security agenda. His sons, placed in opposition to their father on security issues, would be sustained in power only as long as they supported Britain's position.

The first split (among Hashemites) which emerged after the Mandated areas were established, was the rival territorial claims over Ma'an and Aqaba which developed between Hussein and his son Abdullah.[35]

The second mean by which Britain's use of the Hashemite family in the Mandated areas contributed to Hussein's downfall, was that it prevented his sons from providing military assistance during Ibn Saud's invasion of Hijaz.

The third fissure in Hashemite solidarity was caused by British security needs which conflicted with his sons' plan to offer their father refuge in the Mandated areas after Ibn Saud's invasion.

Thus, the mandate system contributed indirectly to Hussein's downfall during the critical period of Ibn Saud's encroachment on Hijaz, since his sons, as mandate rulers, were paralyzed by the policy of non-intervention when Britain stated that it would "give no countenance to interference in the Hijaz by Transjordan and Iraq".[36] (Admittedly Abdullah

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[32] Memorandum of Telegrams No. 10972 and 1109 from Political Officer, Baghdad, FO 371/3386 n.d. but *c*. 1918.

[33] Bell's well known and numerous reports are in the Arab Bulletin, for instance much information on the fluctuating tribal situation through interviews with Ibn Rumaih and 'Aqaili, on 23 February 1920 in Baghdad (L/P&S/10/390)/ However, there were other contemporary sources: the Ottomans reportedly gathered much anthropological evidence on Hijaz tribes; some of this material was captured from prisoners of war and did not tally with known information, for instance there were said to be many more tribal divisions that previously thought. This material has apparently not be retained in British officials archive (Arab Bulletin, No. 110, 30 April 1919).

[34] See extracts from Jeddah's agent's report for the period ending 9 August 1920, FO371/5243.

[35] During Faisal's brief rule in Damascus, both he and his father laid claim to the areas of Ma'an and 'Aqaba, and after that it became an issue between 'Abdullah and Hussein. B. Shaadran, *Jordan, a State of Tension* (New York: 1959), p. 154–158. Also Gary Toller, the Birth of Saudi Arabia, Frank Cass: London, 1987. p. 223.

[36] Colonial Secretary to High Commissioner for Iraq and Palestine, 30 September 1924, L/P&S/10/3665.

did supply his father with a small force of mercenaries,[37] and after Abdullah gained Aqaba it is thought that he allowed Ali to use the region as surreptitious supply route.)[38] In fact, Faisal and Abdullah's mandate positions contributed to Hussein's final political destruction, because they are related to Britain's decision to treat with Ibn Saud during his encroachment on Hijaz, through Anglo-Saudi negotiations, led by Clayton in October 1924. These negotiations forced the mandate leaders to accept indirect treaty relations with Ibn Saud, against the interests and security of their father's rule, and they were thus forced to accept decisions made jointly by Britain and Ibn Saud on boundaries.

The Anglo-Hijazi Treaty

Both, the political climate created by the post-war international peace conference at Versailles, and the practical need to place diplomatic relations with Hijaz on a formal footing, led to laborious negotiations for an Anglo-Hijazi Treaty of friendship. Yet, when Britain resumed negations.[39] Hussein proceeded to resist the treaty all the way, and negotiations dragged on interminably.

> It must be eighteen months or two years since King Hussein did anything we may have wanted him to do without dissembling… he has except in tiny matters of the most unimportant routine, made every possible difficulty, always, continual obstruction and continual provocation.[40]

From Hussein's point of view, the main obstacle to any agreement was the larger question of the Jewish homeland in Palestine, as well as the specific British desire for his recognition of the Palestine mandate The Duke of Devonshire, the Colonial Secretary, wrote to Lord Curzon on 2 March 1923:

"You know the difficulties with which we have to contend in Palestine. They are not only from local opposition, but from criticism at home, which finds its strongest weapon in the unfortunate McMahon Pledge of 1915. Our idea is that we should now try to pin Hussein down to an Article that would in effect commit him to approve of the steps taken by us to liquidate our war-time pledges. We should then have an effective answer to future critics".[41]

Britain made purely verbal concessions in drafts of the treaty that it was then negotiating with Hussein. The High Commissioner reported to the Colonial Secretary in January 1924, "a solution of the question of the Anglo-Hijazi Treaty might be… the entire omission of Article 2 of the draft Treaty… no allusion being made in this document… to Palestine".[42]

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[37] Bullard to Chamberlain, 30 June 1925, L/P&S /10/3665.

[38] Arnold J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1925, 1926, 1928, 1929, 1932. p. 300.

[39] The numerous drafts of formal treaty were prepared in early 1920s, and one was actually signed by Sharif Ali on behalf of Hussein, but Hussein rejected it, as he had the previous drafts, over many minor changes or disagreements with translation. In 1923, the British Government was still willing to undertake the treaty as numerous memos and inter-office correspondence show (FO371/8939).

[40] British agent at Jeddah to Forbes Adam, 21 January 1922, FO371/7711.

[41] Duke of Devenshire to Lord Curzon 2 March 1923, FO 371/8437.

[42] Viscount Samuel to R. Hon. JH. Thomas, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 25 January 1924 L/P&S/10/881.

Indeed, Britain did consider references to mandates submitted by Hussein in his version of Articles 2 and 4 (in translation), which suggested that Britain should "recognize the independence of the Arabs in all Arab territories on the Peninsula, Iraq, Transjordan, Palestine and the other Arab territories, with the exception of Aden…" He suggested that any Palestinian state should not oppose sister Arab states.[43] Furthermore, Hussein had announced these changes to the Treaty of Hijaz in *Al-Qibla* (The Hijazi official newspapers) on 29th October 1923, claiming he had made "the Balfour Promise as though it had never been a sentence of death was passed on it".[44] Obviously with this move, Hussein was attempting to embarrass British officials and impair their schemes. Britain's repeated attempts to secure a formal post-war treaty with Hussein proved a source of irritation; he completely refused to co-operate, hindering negotiations at every turn. The British were becoming increasingly annoyed with Hussein: "King Hussein is, at times monstrous, but he is a monster of our own creation. It would be unjust (to him) to assume that his attitude is otherwise than incidentally anti-British. It is anti-Western and anti everything that is not bound up with his Arab Kingdom-and-Caliphate ambitions".[45] In 1924, the treaty was still not finalized, and it was now abandoned because of Hussein's claim to the caliphate. It was in this context of non-co-operation that Hussein abruptly announced his claim to the Caliphate. This claim caused Britain to distance itself from Hussein. One might view Hussein's sudden announcement as an attempt to use an effective spoiling tactic against the British diplomatic process – however, the tactic turned out to be a cardinal blunder. For as Mallet observed, the timing of this proclamation consequently gave the (erroneous) impression to foreign observers that Britain was backing him for the Caliphate, and to dispel this assumption Britain immediately distanced itself from Hussein. Thus, the separate agreement which he was negotiating with the British concurrent to the conference, namely, the Anglo-Hijazi treaty was necessarily abandoned temporarily as Mallet considered:

> It therefore seemed most undesirable to conclude a treaty before the novelty of King Hussein's proclamation had worn off, lest we should be held to be tacitly acknowledging his new dignity. It was therefore decided to wait for further overtures regarding the treaty to come from King Hussein, and to make none ourselves in the meantime.[46]

The British threatened to stop payment of the subsidy to Hussein, and tried to convince him that Ibn Saud and the militant Ikhwan would not invade the Hijaz if there was a formal treaty between Britain and the Hijaz. Britain wearily sustained a secondary agenda of securing the stability of Hussein's post-war state which was undergoing post-war economic, military, and social exhaustion, and was threatened by an invasion by Ibn Saud. However, Hussein found many ways to sabotage the British secondary agenda of support for him, particularly during the period of the Kuwait Conference.

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[43] See King Hussein's proposal: Hashemite Dival No. 1 to the British Prime Minister, Ramsey MacDonald, 2nd Moharram 1343 L/P&S/10/881.

[44] See extract from Al-Qibla, 29 October 1923, FO371/8956.

[45] British Agent in Jeddah to FO, 19 October 1923, FO 686/111.

[46] Memorandum by Mr. Mallet on the Anglo-Hashemite treaty negotiations, 1924, E 4678/29/91 in L/P&S/10/881.

The Kuwait Conference is generally regarded as one of Britain's last attempts to sustain a limited authority for Hussein in Arabia, an authority which related to his specific natural resources of power. One major reason for its occurrence was to establish formally the Nejd-Hijaz boundary. This was a crucial strategic criterion, since Hussein was threatened by no other power but Ibn Saud. Indeed, the establishment of this boundary was– of all factors, social, ideological, religious – a single element which alone would have preserved his rule. Unfortunately, from the beginning, Hussein chose to regard the event as a series of critical challenges to his authority. Unlike his sons, Hussein was not consulted by the British about the possibility of these negotiations for almost a year after they were mooted, and it was on these grounds originally that he refused to send a delegate.[47] His creation was to abstain. The British tried extremely hard to induce him to send a delegate. The High Commissioner was briefed to impress upon Hussein that the chance of settling differences with Nejd could eliminate risks of further Ikhwan attacks into the Hijaz (this came after Faisal Al Dawish led a raid close to Medina).[48] Nothing could have put the case for negotiation so succinctly and prophetically as Britain's pointing out that:

> a settlement of the Nejd-Hijaz issue is more likely to be in favor of the Hijaz when discussed at a conference where there can be much more latitude for give and take elsewhere, whereas if the Transjordan Nejd questions are definitely settled at Kuwait the Kings's frontier will have to be decided on its own merits and may suffer as a result.[49]

The absence of a formal British/Hijazi treaty prevented the British from interference in the final Saudi-Hashemite struggle. When Ibn Saud's troops entered Taif in 1924, Great Britain refused to use air power to defer him, despite numerous requests from Hussein (and later Ali) to intimidate Ibn Saud on behalf of Hussein, as they did to protect Transjordan.

Therefore, beyond Britain's manipulation of Hussein's sons, the major external political factor which precipitated Hussein's downfall was Britain's neutrality during the invasion, and its statement that it would only intervene if both sides spontaneously requested her assistance. This amounted to a direct refusal of help, since obviously, as Ibn Saud's occupation was proceeding favorably from his viewpoint, he was unlikely to request arbitration.[50] Later on, in response to Hussein's request for British aid, on 30th September 1924, they informed him," [The British do]…not propose to be entangled in any struggle for possession of the holy places of Islam… They [The British] intend to confine their efforts to an attempt to safeguard His Majesty's Government's Moslem Subjects".[51] Thus, "Britain's policy of non-intervention in Arabia invariably worked to the advantage of Ibn Saud, with whom the natural balance of power lay".[52]

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[47] FO 317/9097/E1622, interview with King Hussein at Amman, January 21, 1924.

[48] In Autumn 1923 Faisal Al Darwish raided at Ulla, close to Medina. FO to IO, Nov. 5, 1923 (L), No. 4256.

[49] FO to Bullard (British Consul, Jeddah) Nov. 6, 1923 (T), No. 4256.

[50] After the initial Ikhwan raid upon Taif the British reaction was simply to express concern for their own citizens, sending a warning to the Ikhwan commander that precautions must be taken to safeguard the lives and property of British subjects in the Hijaz.

[51] L/P&S/10/1124,P3979,SOSCO to HCI, September 30, 1924.

[52] Clive Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia 1925–1937: The Imperial Oasis*, London: Frank Cass, 1983, p. 27.

Conclusion

The unique strategic and political interests of British Policy after 1916 had a considerable destabilizing effect on the political authority of Sharif/King Hussein of Hijaz. Changes in British Policy occurred in response to the broad, general political forces such as the dynamics of imperial administration in the build-up to war, the war itself, and to the shifting alliances and territorial claims of the period when the war was drawing to a close, including the international consensus on Great Power responsibilities which developed during the Treaty of Versailles. The political dynamics which Britain introduced were the Hussein-McMahon correspondence which began in 1915, the Arab revolt of 1916; the Sykes–Picot Agreement of 1916; the Balfour declaration of 1917; and the British negotiations surrounding the 1922 Peace Conference. These specific policies demonstrated that Britain's role in Arabian political affairs was clearly that of a catalyst.

The removal of the Turks from the region had left a power vacuum, one that Britain did not wish to fill in peacetime. It is even more important to remember that Britain was also involved in a general agreement by the Great Power's policy of creating mandates. For Britain, its good relations with France, and their common issues under negotiation with regard to the Middle East, were far more significant than relations with Hussein after his usefulness has ended. It was far more important for Britain now, to satisfy France's territorial interests than to fulfill its commitments toward Hussein. This was the rationale for non-intervention in post-war Hijaz.

If this withholding of coercive support was to some extent an inducement to Hussein to accept the new territorial division of the Middle East, to enter into finite treaty relations with Britain, Hussein did not take this last chance to salvage his political authority. British strategy had transformed from the hasty and expedient maneuvers of war to the dictates of the long-term stability and security of Great Powers for decades to come.

It has been argued that history has proven that post-war territorial boundaries were largely decided by the early interim agreements which were necessary for the survival of Great Powers.[53]

In Hussein's case, what was sacrificed was the wider sovereignty he had seemingly been promised, "the pan-Arab kingdom". In his eyes, Britain may have been the loser in absolute moral terms of obligation and responsibility; however the Hashemites in Hijaz were the losers for perpetuity.

[53] Beloff, *Britain's Liberal Empire*, p. 182.

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