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Ibn Saud with his army

Paper

The Rise of a King and the Birth of a State

The Development of Saudi Arabia in the Context of World War I

Robert Swanson

ARABIA—A LAND WHERE THE *HAJJ* BRINGS ADHERENTS OF THE world's second largest religion to the holy sites of Mecca and Medina and where crude Arabian black gold lures investors hungry for oil to its shores. A place of prophets and jihadists, sheiks and ulema, kings and shepherds, Arabia was an Ottoman subsidiary that failed to capture the imperial interest of the European Great Powers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹ The eruption of World War I initiated the Ottoman Empire's final struggle for survival and embroiled Arabia in the international conflict. Four years of war ended with the Ottoman's formal surrender aboard the British flagship *Agamemnon* on the 28th of October 1918.² The Paris Peace Conference brought the final death blow to the Empire as the victors immediately began carving the Middle East into various mandates and spheres of influence. Saudi Arabia however, in an era of subjection and imperialism, became a sovereign state in the face of European domination. There naturally arises the question how the Saudis were able to achieve this feat, when so many other states with larger populations, more advanced economies and stronger militaries failed to remain independent. Saudi independence came primarily because of the strong

1. Mahmoud M. Ayoub, "Islam: Faith and History", 56–57.

2. Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed The World* (New York: Random House, 2003), 368–69.

leadership abilities of Ibn Saud who used the effects of World War I on the region to his advantage to carve out a personal kingdom for his family. He capitalized on the end of the Ottoman presence in the region, the increased British interest in a formal alliance, and European disinterest in managing the ‘unprofitable’ interior of Arabia after the war.

To understand the creation of Saudi Arabia it is critical to understand the rise of the Saudi tribe nearly a century prior. Before the creation of the Saudi state in 1927 the Arabian Peninsula was a collection of fractured and inter-warring sheikdoms, emirates, tribes and provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Though the interior of the peninsula never came under full Ottoman control, the Ottomans did dominate the region of Hijaz, located along the Red Sea coast, and the Hasa region located on the Persian Gulf coast. These provinces contained the most fertile regions of the peninsula, as well as the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, making them attractive targets to the rising powers of the interior looking to gain greater economic resources and tax inflow from the *Hajj* pilgrimage.

During the latter half of the 18th century the Saud tribe of the Najd was one of the most serious threats to Ottoman provinces of Hijaz and Hasa. From 1744–1818 the Saud tribe under the leadership of Muhammad ibn Saud, the family head and Amir of Dir’iyyah, and Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, a Muslim religious reformer who created the extremely conservative Wahhabi sect, launched a successful war bringing the entire northern half of the peninsula under Saudi control.³ This unified Arabia gave the Saudis the ability to threaten the Ottoman Empire’s fertile provinces of Mesopotamia and its lucrative trade routes. Raids by the Saudis into Mesopotamia lasted from 1801 to 1812 and ranged as far as Karbala in Iraq and Aleppo in Syria. The increase in raids not only proved luxurious for the raiders, but also indicated the growing Ottoman inability to defend their borders, further destabilizing the region.⁴

In 1811 the Ottoman Sultan, Mahmud II, responded to the raids and instability by sending Governor Muhammad Ali with his Egyptian army into the desert wastes in pursuit of the Saudis.⁵ Bloody fighting raged until 1818, when Ali’s forces under the command of his son Ibrahim crushed the Saudi-Wahabi Emirate completely,

3. Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (New York; Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13, 16.

4. Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 17–21; T. R. McHale, “A Prospect of Saudi Arabia,” *International Affairs* (Royal institute of international Affairs 1944–), vol. 56, no. 4 (Autumn 1980), 625.

5. William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 6E (Boulder, CO; Westview Press, 2016), 67.

destroying its capital at Dir'iyah and sending the Saudi Amir Abdullah Saud to be beheaded in Egypt.⁶ The destruction of the Emirate was critical in two key developments in Ibn Saud's later conquest of Arabia. The first product was a Saudi animosity towards the Ottomans, which resulted in the Saudis' having no qualms about dealing double handedly with them and using their resources to the Saudi advantage. Another product of the Emirate was the Saudi alliance with the Wahhabi movement, which proved critical in the successes of Ibn Saud. This alliance provided Ibn Saud with the *Ihkwan*, or religious, soldiers as the base of his army, who were essential in conquering Arabia. The alliance also helped keep the populace loyal to the Saud family as the country was gradually united under a solitary religious banner. However, for the next hundred years the Saudis and the rest of Arabia remained relatively unimportant in Middle Eastern politics. This changed with the capture of Riyadh from the rival Arabian Rashid dynasty of the Ha'il region on January 15th, 1902 by fifty men under the daring command of Abd Al-Aziz ibn Abd al-Rahman ibn Faisal Al Saud, or more commonly known as Ibn Saud.⁷

Of Ibn Saud, one writer stated, "[he] was either the greatest Arab since the Prophet Muhammad, according to some, or an appalling despot, according to others. He was either a brilliant or a diabolical bandit—or possibly both . . ."⁸ J.B. Phillips, a British officer who associated with Ibn Saud said, "He had achieved his objective entirely by his own strong will and unshakable confidence in his destiny . . ."⁹ Dr. Stanley Mylrea, of the America Mission, said of his first meeting with Ibn Saud in 1914,

He was indeed a notable personality, of commanding height—well over six feet—and beautifully yet simply dressed . . . He impressed me immensely. Every line of him, face and figure told of intelligence, energy, determination, and reserves of compelling power. It was a good face too which bore witness to his reputation as a man of deep piety and devotion. It was not the face of a profligate upstart, but the face of a man who had disciplined himself and knew what it was to fast and to pray . . .¹⁰

6. Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 22.

7. Barbara Bray and Michael Darlow, *Ibn Saud: The Desert Warrior Who Created the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (New York; Skyhorse Publishing, 2010), 95–103.

8. Ian Sansom, "Great Dynasties of the World: The House of Saud," *The Guardian*, (18 March 2011).

9. J. B. Philby, "Riyadh: Ancient and Modern," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Spring 1959), 131.

10. C. Stanley and G. Mylrea, *Kuwait Before Oil* (unpublished, 1951), 66–68, as quoted in Paul L. Armerding, *Doctors for the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 2003), 30.

Nations rarely are the product of one man's will, but perhaps Saudi Arabia is one of the exceptions. With his strong leadership and diplomatic shrewdness Ibn Saud transformed the desert sheikdoms of Arabian into one unified state. Ibn Saud told one *hajj* pilgrim of his elder sister's counsel to him as a child, "Thou must revive the glory of the House of ibn Saud . . . thou must strive for the glory of Islam. Thy people sorely need a leader who will guide them in the path of the holy Prophet."¹¹ Saud spent his life creating the image of a strong ruler who could fulfill that vision. He physically looked the part of a leader; tall, strong and charming and he was articulate and persuasive.¹² He also appeared to possess a great deal of the highly valued Bedouin attribute of *hadh*, or luck and the gift of self-aggrandizement.¹³ But, maintaining an unruly realm requires far more than charm and luck as Saud demonstrated throughout his life.

To deepen his subjects' allegiance to him, he created the image of a generous and wealthy ruler. He did this through generous gifts to citizens and by providing social support such as food, money, lands, and medical care which made the people dependent on him for their prosperity.¹⁴ He once said speaking to an American doctor in 1917, "I see you think of those under you. It is the same with me. Even a ruler is the servant of his people."¹⁵ However, he also demonstrated strong leadership by exacting harsh penalties against those who refused to submit to his will or who sought to usurp his throne. Examples of this include the beheadings of political opponents who rebelled against him and by punishing groups, such as the *Ikhwan* who refused to exactly follow his orders.¹⁶ His notoriety as a strong ruler furthered his political influence in the regions of Hasa and Hijaz and lessened the resistance among these regions as they were conquered.

As the first decade of the 20th century closed, the residents of the Hasa region were increasingly frustrated with excessive taxes and government corruption under Ottoman rule. Ibn Saud capitalized on this frustration by offering strong leadership and domestic stability to the region. Many of the citizens readily welcomed the young Emir and his forces in 1913.¹⁷ Prior to Saud's arrival

11. Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Mecca* (New York; Simon and Schuster, 1954), 178.

12. Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 105, 338.

13. Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 105.

14. Photos in Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*.

See also Armerding, *Doctors for the Kingdom*, 36; Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 384.

15. Armerding, *Doctors for the Kingdom*, 35.

16. Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 349.

17. Jacob Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1986), 70, 86.

in the Hijaz region, the region was dominated by the Hashemites under the leadership of Sharif Hussein. With the decline of the Ottoman Empire Hussein increasingly worked with British agents (such as Lawrence of Arabia) to increase his own independence. Hussein during the First World War presumptuously declared himself “King of all Arabs” and openly accept British help in rebelling against his Ottoman masters.¹⁸ However, the Sharif was vastly unpopular among the locale due to corruption and extortion that was directly linked to himself.¹⁹

Initial opposition of Hijazites to the Saudi conquest centered on fears of Wahhabi extremism, however fears subsided as Saud maintained tight control of the Wahhabi leaders thus preventing them from enforcing too much the stricter Wahabi religion. Saud displayed his shrewdness in winning over the newly conquered inhabitants by restoring order and prosperity through strict enforcement of the laws, such as harsh punishments against criminals who assaulted pilgrims, such as chopping off their hands. He also made improvements to the transportation system of Hijaz to support larger numbers of pilgrims. The greater security provided for pilgrims by strict implementation of the law and improved infrastructure increased the numbers of pilgrims and as a result, increased the flow of cash into the region. The stability and economic revival from pilgrims soon quieted dissenting voices against his rule as the economy began to make a slow rebound after years of decline.²⁰

As Ibn Saud quieted voices of opposition within his own territories, he also used his diplomatic shrewdness to negotiate his way to independence. Throughout his life, Ibn Saud manipulated and played regional Great Powers against each other to secure the best deal for Saudi Arabia. His initial tutelage of manipulating Great Powers came after his family moved to Kuwait.²¹ His teacher, the local Sheik Mubarak, was exceptionally proficient in statecraft and used it to play the Great Powers off one another by maintaining contact with the British,

18. Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, 139.

19. McHale, “A Prospect of Saudi Arabia,” 625; Timothy J. Paris, *Britain, the Hashemites and Arab Rule: The Sherifian Solution* (London; Frank Cass, 2003), 144–45; As quoted in McHale, “A Prospect of Saudi Arabia,” 625 footnote 4.

One American consul stated of King Hussein, “[he] feels himself to be so sure of his position, so far removed from the consequences of public opinion that no excesses are too great for him to consider, provided they are money getters. He lives to rob and the organization of the Hejaz Kingdom is a gigantic scheme for the wholesale fleecing of pilgrims.”

20. McHale, “A Prospect of Saudi Arabia,” 627.

21. Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 59–60.

while at the same time professing loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan.²² This tutelage under the old sheik profoundly impacted Saud's style in diplomacy and his way of negotiating with Europeans.

Ibn Saud style mimicked his former mentor as he professed his loyalty to the Sultan, while sending repeated overtures to the British pleading for their recognition. His first appeal for British support was sent in May of 1902 and was out of hand rejected by the British India office who advised the Kuwaiti intermediaries to do nothing to encourage Saud or to associate with him.²³ Yet, Ibn Saud seemingly understood global power politics better than most Europeans gave him credit for. While seeking to negotiate with the British, Saud also met with Russian diplomats to galvanize the British into action. This was done with full knowledge of the Great Power rivalry between Britain and Russia that had increased over the expansion of Russian influence from the Caucasus into the Middle East. Saud met with Russian officials who, "had promised him guns and money . . ." to convince the British, his preferred patrons, to accept his offer, but to no avail.²⁴ Saud made at least eleven offers of alliance and subservience to the British before the outbreak of World War I.²⁵ Later, after the Ottoman threat had been eliminated and his own power increased, Saud refused to comply with British policy in the region without guarantees for his own sovereignty. He later negotiated with American Oilmen and sold them a concession to search for oil, which has since made Saudi Arabia one of the wealthiest nations in the world. His shrewdness enabled him to avoid binding treaties with any major power while still receiving benefits from all of them. He received British guns and ammunition, Ottoman money, and American gold to build up and profit the Saudi state.

Despite Ibn Saud's strong leadership and diplomatic shrewdness, his talents would have been useless if the Ottoman Empire had not collapsed during World War I. For hundreds of years the Ottomans used the distinct carrot and stick methods of keeping the local sheikdoms in line with the Empire's goals,

22. Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 88.

23. Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, 51.

24. Abd al Rahman, *Abd al-Rahman to Kembal*, 5 *Safar 1320 [May 14, 1902]*. As quoted in Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, 51. In one letter to British officials Ibn Saud implored, "I beg to inform you about the Russian Consul at Bushire who had come and asked me to write him a letter describing the ill-treatment I have received from the Turk . . ."; Kemp, *Kemp to Rear-Admiral Drury, March 14, 1903 (1903)*. As quoted in Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, 52.

25. Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, 50.

including the Saudis. The carrot method of pensions and imperial preference played a huge role in Arabia. After Ibn Saud captured Riyadh, he assured the Sultan that he was a loyal vassal of the Sultan through diplomatic overtures and letters. As a result of his efforts, Ibn Saud received a subsidy from Istanbul and was given a high degree of autonomy to manage his own affairs as a ruler of Arabia. Yet, Saud was not alone in receiving help from the Ottomans. The Rashids of Ha'il (another region located in the interior of Arabia) retained their power into the early 20th century because of their connection with Istanbul.²⁶ Also the Hashemites in the Hijaz region came to power directly because of the Ottomans. However, when local sheikdoms rebelled, the Ottomans resorted to the stick method of enforcing cooperation through military occupation. As events prior to World War I would show, the Ottoman military presence in the region was weakening. This allowed Saud to exercise greater autonomy and continue his relationship with the British despite Ottoman protests.

In spite of warnings from the Saud's rivals the Rashids, the Ottomans allowed Ibn Saud to build his forces unhindered to avoid wasting men and material which they didn't have to spare putting down an insurrection. This policy of allowing regional rulers to grow and harass their neighbors was part of a larger strategy of keeping the rulers of Arabia favoring Ottoman authority in power while preventing a solitary kingdom from emerging.²⁷ But, by 1904 at the behest of the Rashids, and because of their own concerns with Saud's annexation of the Ottoman province of Hasa, an Ottoman force of over 2,000 men were sent under the direction of Colonel Hasan Shukri to subject Saud.²⁸ Saud's forces emerged from the brutal battles that followed as the clear

26. London Standard, *The Fighting in Arabia* (London, 6 March 1902), 5. This British Newspaper contains a small glimpse of what rewards were given to those who submitted and supported the Sultan: "In connection with the reports of recent fighting in Arabia, and of the attempt by a descendant of the old Wahabi Ameer of Nejd to overthrow Ibn Rashid, it may be noted that the Constantinople Correspondent of the *Politische Correspondenz* learns, from a Turkish source, that Ibn Rashid arrived recently at Zobeir, near Basra, where [where] he was received by a Turkish battalion with Military honors . . ."

27. Ibn Rashid, *Wratistlaw to O' Connor, in O' Connor to FO, March 20; Ibn Rashid to the Grand Vezir, 21 Dhu al-Qa'da 1319 [March 2, 1902]*. As cited in Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, 49. Original quote by Ibn Rashid, "[the British are] seeking to establish themselves in portions of Arabia which dominate the Ottoman possessions of Hasa and Qatif by means of Mubarak and Ibn Saud."

28. Alexi Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London; Saqi Books, 1998), 217. Prior to a string of battles outside Riyadh, Colonel Shukri informed Saud that, "His Majesty the Great Caliph heard about the sedition in Najd directed by foreigner's hands [referencing

victors and sent the remaining Ottomans fleeing back to Mesopotamia shattered and shocked.

In the aftermath of the victory, British agents amusedly recorded, “Ibn-Sa’ud seems to have been somewhat alarmed at the completeness of his own success against the Ottoman troops . . .”²⁹ Ibn Saud, most likely foresaw his kingdom’s inability to sustain another Ottoman invasion. To deescalate the tensions, Ibn Saud quickly resubmitted to the Sultan’s authority as indicated in a telegram sent by his father, “Only the local authorities . . . have misrepresented this weak slave to the Caliph, making him appear a traitor and a rebel. I am submissive to every order and command of the Shadow of God . . .”³⁰ This subversion to the Sultan illustrated Saud’s awareness that though the Ottoman Empire was significantly weaker than it had been when it crushed the Saudi Emirate a hundred years prior, it was still a powerful force that was determined to not lose any more territories to interloping tribesmen and Europeans.

However, for the Ottomans, the Saudi rebellion was only part of a string of larger problems vexing them. The Ottomans, in an effort to exercise greater control over the interior of Arabia, sent an expeditionary force to stand between the Saudis and Rashids. But, by the end of 1905 that force had dwindled to almost nothing as conflicts in the Balkans and Yemen diverted troops from Arabia. This allowed Ibn Saud to regain his autonomy and rebuild his military force until the start of the Great War.³¹ After the outbreak of the World War I and the Ottoman alliance with the Central powers in October of 1914, the Caliph issued a call to *jihad*, or holy war, followed by a proclamation of the Sultan for Muslims to rise against the Allies.³² With this proclamation the Sultan

Ibn Saud’s contact with the British]. Therefore he sent me here to prevent bloodshed and a foreign intervention in the Muslim country.” Ibn Saud responded, “We do not accept your advice or recognize your suzerainty.”

29. John Gordon Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia* (Calcutta; Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), 1148.

30. Abd al-Rahman, *Abd al-Rahman to Sultan, January 28, in Townley to FO, January 31, 1905* (1905). As quoted in Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, 63.

31. al-Rahman, *Abd al-Rahman to Sultan*. As quoted in Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, 70; Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 129–30.

32. Mehmed V, as quoted in Julia Clancy-Smith and Charles D. Smith, *The Modern Middle East and North Africa: A History in Documents* (New York; Oxford University Press, 2014), 102. The text says, “In the face of such successive proofs of wanton hostility . . . we turn to arms in order to safeguard our lawful interests . . . let the victory be sacred and the sword be sharp of those of you who are to remain in life.”

also sent a notice to Saud demanding he send an army to defend Mesopotamia against the advancing British and rise as a true Muslim.

Ibn Saud, who viewed the Ottoman Turks as religious heretics and as the destroyers of his family's kingdom, avoided commitment by stressing general problems in Arabia and his rivalry with the Rashids as motives why he could not send his troops.³³ The Ottomans, unable to control the Emirs of Arabia, and facing rebellions in the Hijaz, continued to send money to Saud hoping to encourage him to raise an army and defend Mesopotamia. In return they received excuses from the young Emir. The fall of Mesopotamia into the British's hands ended Ottoman imperial presence in the region and with it the petitions for Saud to rise to greater action and defend the last Islamic Empire. World War I diverted essential Ottoman forces needed to subject and control Ibn Saud and Arabia. The Great War also led the British to seek an alliance with Ibn Saud, after fourteen years of denials and treat him as an equal ruler of Arabia with King Hussein of Mecca to consolidate their position in Mesopotamia.

The British repeatedly rejected Ibn Saud's offers of an alliance prior to the war. The delay in recognizing Ibn Saud and his territories came out of fear of causing tensions with the Ottomans. As one author notes, "From the British point of view, their [the British's] rupture with the Ottomans over Kuwait was sufficient reason to avoid an additional fight over an area [referring to the Nejd] that lay beyond the sphere of their immediate interests."³⁴ The British, uninterested in an alliance with the rising emir, primarily wanted to avoid sending additional troops and money to protect the British protectorates of the Persian Gulf, such as Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait against the Ottomans. However, with the coming of war, the British Office suddenly became very interested in the Emir of Riyadh and sent diplomats to encourage an Anglo-Saudi alliance.³⁵ Saud's military prowess and success in conquering large swaths of territory gave the British valid reason to be concerned for the safety of their force from India marching on Mesopotamia, as well as the coastal sheikdoms of the Arabian Peninsula under British protection. Even more worrying for the British was the safety of the Iranian oil fields to the north that helped to fuel the British navy. Furthermore, as the first year of the war progressed, the quick victory that all the Great Powers had envisioned was nowhere in sight forcing the British to reevaluate their options.

33. Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 129; Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, 133.

34. Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 51.

35. Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 114.

The war that began with the idea as a quick war, had turned into a never-ending blood bath. The French and British were gridlocked with the Germans on the Western front, the trench warfare claiming millions of lives for both Germans and the Allies. Russia was losing on the Eastern Front and wracked by internal discord. And probably most significant for Saud, in the Gallipoli Peninsula the fighting was going very badly for the ANZACS who were pinned to the beaches by fierce Ottoman resistance.³⁶ The British who had ignored Ibn Saud and viewed his alliance as nonessential, suddenly discovered the Emir to be a vital asset to them. However, the proud Arabian was wary of them of the British sought an alliance and refused to fully commit himself to action against the Ottomans. It appeared that the simple desert king would not quickly forget the decades of past snubbing. Negotiations, which were progressing at a crawl already, were further slowed when Captain Shakespear, the British officer in charge of negotiations, was killed in the Battle of Jarrab against Rashidi forces.³⁷ Saud mourned the officer's death while continuing to stall in negotiations, preferring to wait till the Ottoman fate was sealed.

As negotiations progressed, instead of Saud committing himself to action as hoped by the British Foreign Office, Saud negotiated a treaty that required only inactivity to qualify for British protection. The British begrudgingly allowed this treaty because they had begun to view another Arabian ruler, King Hussein of Mecca, as a superior ally due to his advantages, "religiously, politically, strategically, and militarily . . ." In December of 1915, Ibn Saud signed the Anglo-Saudi Treaty which not only granted him significant rights and British protection, but also proclaimed him independent and recognized him as the "ruler of Nejd, el Hass, Qatif, and Jubail."³⁸ After signing, the Saudis limited their actions for the duration of the war to strikes against the Rashids, who favored the Ottomans. Throughout this period Ibn Saud and his forces received guns and money from the British, further consolidating Saud's power.³⁹ However, despite the gifts from the British during the war Saud understood the British leadership's

36. Elis Ashmead-Bartlett, *Letter to Prime Minister Herbert Asquith*, as cited in Clancy-Smith and Smith, *The Modern Middle East and North Africa*, 107–9.

37. "Report on the Najd Mission 1917–1918," (London, British Library), as cited in Daniel A. Lowe, *The Death of Captain Shakespear*, Qatar Digital Library (2018), accessed at: <https://www.qdl.qa/en/death-captain-shakespear>.

The death of Shakespear delayed Anglo-Saudi negotiation for a brief period but resumed as Sir Percy Cox arrived in Arabia.

38. Anglo-Saudi Treaty 1915, as shown in Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, Appendix C.

39. McHale, "A Prospect of Saudi Arabia," 627.

preference to King Hussein. Saud worried he would be squeezed out of his territorial ambitions by a British backed Hashemite realm that he would be unable to conquer.⁴⁰

With the end of the war, European interest in the Arabian Peninsula quickly diminished. The lack of oil and other natural resource discoveries by British merchants in Saud's territory led Britain to view the Arabian Peninsula as an unfruitful backwater. One author said of the Paris Peace accords, "The Arabian Peninsula was not mentioned, presumably because no one thought all those miles of sand worth worrying about."⁴¹ As another author noted, "Indeed, little thought was given to Britain's post-war position in Arabia."⁴² The British leadership were content with a divided Arabia, but were split as to which ruler, Hussein or Saud, was more helpful to British policy in the region.⁴³ Undeterred by the British preferment of Hussein, Ibn Saud again led his forces to battle, this time to conquer the Hashemite kingdom of Hijaz.

On June 4th, 1924, Ibn Saud called a war council to discuss the invasion of the Hijaz. His forces, already battled hardened by years of conflict with the Rashids and in Yemen, were all to ready to march and retake the Holy Cities. By October of the same year, Mecca was in the possession of Ibn Saud with Jeddah and Medina both surrendering in December of 1925, leaving Hussein powerless and a king without a state to rule.⁴⁴ Two weeks later, on January 8th 1926, Ibn Saud was declared King of Hijaz and Sultan of Najd, resulting in the unification of all of Arabia under Saudi control, the first time since he ancestors had done so a hundred years prior.⁴⁵ However, it remained to be seen how Hussein's chief ally, the British would respond to the conquest by Saud.

The British, who had become exasperated with Hussein due to his ineffective policies, corruption, and nagging, responded to the conquest by renewing and remaking their treaty with Ibn Saud at his request in November of 1926.⁴⁶ Saud's bold move resulted in the British being forced to accept a renegotiation

40. Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, 164.

41. MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 384.

42. Paris, *Britain, the Hashemites and Arab Rule*, 149. However, at the Paris Peace Conference, King Hussein went and lobbied for his position as king of all Arabs. He instead only annoyed and frustrated the great power leaders.

43. Paris, *Britain, the Hashemites and Arab Rule*, 155–56.

44. Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 229–305.

45. Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 316.

46. David Fromkin, *A Peace To End All Peace* (New York; Avon Books, 1989), 512; Daniel Silverfarb, "The Treaty of Jiddah of May 1927," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3 (July 1982), 276.

to maintain a balance of power in the region. The British, with no imperial plans for Arabia, saw Saud as a stable ally they could manipulate and direct in the future, just as they did with all the emirs and sheiks along the Red Sea and Persian Gulf coasts. In May of 1927, the Anglo-Saudi Treaty was ratified which granted the Saudis freedom from concessions and capitulations by recognizing the Saudi Kingdom as fully independent.⁴⁷

This new Saudi independence allowed Ibn Saud to consolidate his authority, while at the same time offered him the chance to explore treaties with other states at his leisure. It also afforded him the ability to further expand his power as a regional actor. In September of 1932, Ibn Saud renamed his kingdom the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, thus beginning the creation of a more centralized nation-state.⁴⁸ He also opened negotiations with various nations such as Holland, France and Germany during this time period. Yet despite these expansions, the Saudi state suffered from a crippling lack of income in order to support the weight of a nation-state. Social unrest and poverty were beginning to rumble in the desert sands throughout Saud's kingdom. The leader began to look desperately for more sources of incomes that could supplement the meager taxation fees and tribal gifts.

On May 29, 1933, Saud granted an oil concession to a group of Americans at the advice of British officials in order to generate more revenue accepting the Americans' offer of 50 thousand pounds of gold.⁴⁹ Though this concession did stir some development, overall the Arab kingdom's remained slow until 1938 when, while British dignitaries were visiting an American oil site, the Americans struck black gold.⁵⁰ The discovery of oil gave Saud the international importance that his kingdom needed in negotiating with world leaders, such as with the American President in 1945 when Ibn Saud met with Franklin D. Roosevelt on the Great Bitter Lake in the Suez Canal and discussed an alliance and 'friendship' between the states.⁵¹ Furthermore In 1945, Ibn Saud's son Faisal

47. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, *Treaty between His Majesty and His Majesty the King of the Hejaz and of Nejd and Its Dependencies* (20 May 1927), accessed at treaties.fco.gov.uk/docs/.

48. Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 372.

49. Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 370–71.

50. Bray and Darlow, *Ibn Saud*, 399. Princess Alice is recorded writing home, "We British were awful juggins's as we were offered the concession for this remarkably rich oilfield and turned it down as being no good; the Americans came along . . . found oil—and we can't even have any of the share."

51. Taylor, "The First Time a US President Met a Saudi King."

represented Saudi Arabia in the initial meeting of the United Nations and was a founding member of the new international body.⁵² Previous European indifference was replaced by respect as Saudi Arabia began to increase its international presence and regional influence in the ensuing decades.

The Saudi Arabia of today was impacted by World War I in a way that was far different from any other Middle Eastern state. Unlike other regional states that came under the imperial control of the various European Great Powers, Saudi Arabia remained off the map for the global leaders leading the Paris Peace Conference of 1918. The First World War gave the Arabian Peninsula increased importance as the British sought alliances with King Hussein and Ibn Saud and eliminated the most serious threat to Ibn Saud's ambitions for a united Arabia, the Ottoman Empire. This left a power vacuum for the Saud and his kingdom to fill in the region. These factors, along with Ibn Saud's dynamic leadership abilities, led to the formation of the Saudi Kingdom in 1927. The arrival of American oilmen and the alliance of 1945 with the US led to the explosion of Saudi Arabia's economy, allowing it to become one of the key economic and political players in Middle Eastern politics and has allowed their government to export their ideas throughout the world. Saud's kingdom is a testament to the deep impact that the First World War had on the Middle East and of the drive of one man, Ibn Saud, in carving out a personal kingdom in the glaring desert sands.

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52. McHale, "A Prospect of Saudi Arabia," 623.