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REVOLT IN ARABIA, 1916-1919:  
CONFLICT AND COALITION IN A TRIBAL POLITICAL SYSTEM

Ronald Colman

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ABSTRACT .

REVOLT IN ARABIA, 1916 - 1919:  
CONFLICT AND COALITION IN A TRIBAL POLITICAL SYSTEM

RONALD L. COLMAN

An analysis of the interaction of political actors at a specific historical juncture serves to reveal the nature of the political system which provides the context for the event. While the immediate task of this study therefore is to explore the origins and causes of the Arab Revolt of 1916, the work is also an examination of tribal politics which may have implications beyond the historical and geographical limitations of Sharif Husayn's uprising. Attempts to explain the revolt as a stage in the development of Arab nationalism or within the context of British imperialism in the Middle East have failed to examine the real political and economic objectives of those who participated directly in the movement. By seeking both the antecedents and the consequences of the revolt outside the region, these approaches have made assumptions about the regional political system of Arabia which are contradicted by the evidence. The Sharif's leadership for example has been taken as a given, while a closer examination of his following in fact reveals a protracted process of negotiation with the tribes who fought for him. The coalition of shaykhs was as conditional as it was temporary, and there were serious challenges to his authority from every level of the traditional power structure. It will be seen that the Hijaz was actually part of an acephalous and segmented political system which was maintained by the opposition and tension between its parts rather than by any unifying principle. By determining the interests of actors at every level of this



system and by tracing the relationship between them, it is possible to determine the "rules" of alliance formation among the tribes and amirs, and to extract several specific patterns of conflict and coalition which emerged in the Arab revolt. In sum, the study has a three-fold objective: to determine the goals of the political actors involved in the revolt, the strategies by which they hoped to achieve these aims, and the process of interaction between them.

In the Sharif's relationship with the Hijaz tribes as in his interaction with the amirs on his borders, the operative principle was one of centrifugation. By contrast to the centralizing impulses of the modern nation-state, the Arabian system was composed of a multiplicity of competing units each striving to maintain its own autonomy and each claiming to exercise absolute authority within its own domain. Given the zero-sum conception of power which pertained, alliances between these units were necessarily based on opposition to a common enemy rather than on any intrinsic bond which united them. This demanded a flexibility and maneuverability on the part of each unit which rendered the system inherently unstable and allowed for joint action only while it was to the mutual advantage of both parties in the alliance. There was therefore no "Arab" interest as such in relation to Ottoman rule in the Peninsula. Rather, an external infusion of material resources from Great Britain enabled Sharif Husayn to mediate disputes among feuding tribes and to secure their temporary cooperation against the Turks. When the benefits ceased to accrue, the tribal coalition fell apart producing a paradoxical situation in which the basis of the Sharif's internal support was weaker at the conclusion of his revolt than when it was launched. Furthermore, a unifier of tribes within his own domain would strenuously resist regional attempts at unification if these threatened his own independence.

Local opposition among the clans and tribes was therefore paralleled by conflict among the amirs of the Peninsula, and Great Britain's attempt to suspend rivalries at that level was the functional equivalent of the Sharif's mediating role in the Hijaz. In considering the goals and strategies of the several units and the nature of their interaction at the time of the revolt, it is therefore convenient to divide this study into two parts. The first looks inward at the political structure of the Hijaz itself, while the second part considers the position of that amirate in the context of the regional political system of the Arabian Peninsula as a whole.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following acronyms are used in the footnotes. A full explanation of the sources and their location is given in the bibliography.

F.O. Foreign Office

I.O. L.P. & S. India Office, Legal, Political and Secret files

A.B. Arab Bulletin (produced by the Arab Bureau, Cairo).

S.A. Sudan Archive (private papers of Sir Reginald Wingate and Brig.-General Gilbert F. Clayton)

Secretary, etc. Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign and Political Department.

The first number represents the series, the second is the volume and the third is the section or part, where applicable. Thus, F.O. 686/6/2 represents Foreign Office, series 686 (Jiddah Agency papers), vol. 6, pt. 2.

Individual file numbers are generally not given, except in the F.O. 882 (Arab Bureau) series. F.O. 882/3, AP/17/14 represents Foreign Office, series 882, vol. 3, file AP (Arab Policy), 1917, item no. 14.

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## CHAPTER ONE

## IDEOLOGY AND INTEREST IN THE ARAB REVOLT

On June 10, 1916, the Sharif of Mecca, Husayn ibn 'Ali, declared his independence from Ottoman authority and ordered his forces to besiege the Turkish garrison in the town. More than two years previously, Husayn's second son, 'Abdallah, had approached Britain for assistance in launching an uprising, but had been rebuffed. When the Ottoman Empire entered the world war on Germany's side, however, British officials renewed their contacts with Mecca and let it be known that they would now encourage an Arab struggle for liberation. Early in 1915, Faysal, the third son of the Sharif, spoke to members of the secret Arab nationalist societies in Damascus who had formulated a list of demands regarding the independence of the Arab countries. In July, the Sharif presented these proposals to the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, thus initiating an intensive series of negotiations conducted over an eight-month period. The Husayn-McMahon correspondence, as it is known, produced a military alliance, as a result of which Britain promised military aid and financial support for an Arab uprising, but it also left political issues clouded and the territorial boundaries of the liberated areas unresolved.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J.C. Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East, A Documentary Record, Vol. 2, 1914-1956, New York, Octagon Books, 1972, pp. 13-17 (Husayn-McMahon correspondence); Sir Ronald Storrs, Memoirs, New York, Putnam, 1937, p. 135 and pp. 122-123 ('Abdallah's earlier requests); George Antonius, The Arab Awakening, The Story of the Arab National Movement, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1938, p. 157 (the secret societies); also John Marlowe, Arab Nationalism and British Imperialism, A Study in Power Politics, London, Cresset Press, 1961, ch. 2; probably the best analyses of the Anglo-Arab negotiations are Elie Kedourie, In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and its Interpretations, 1914-1939, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976; and Briton Cooper Busch, Britain, India and the Arabs, 1914-1921, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971.



On this chronology of events there is little disagreement, and the story of the revolt itself has been told in several contemporary histories.<sup>2</sup> However, coming at a crucial turning point in Arab relations with the European powers and at a time of nationalist awakening, containing at the same time the seeds of a bitter dispute which is still raging, this period has been the subject of heated debates for three generations. The British negotiations with the Arabs in the war are to this day linked to the unresolved Palestine question and invoked as evidence of "betrayal" and broken promises.<sup>3</sup> Other writers argue that the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916 was not in fact a dishonest and inconsistent deception of the Sharif, but simply "more precisely specified" the limitations to Arab independence already indicated in the Husayn-McMahon correspondence.<sup>4</sup> Nationalists might view the Sharifian family either as the first active partisans of a cause which had hitherto been the preserve of intellectuals, or else as sell-outs by their acquiescence in the postwar dismemberment of the Arab world.<sup>5</sup> Historians who write from the perspective of British strategy on

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<sup>2</sup>The classic is T.E. Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom, A Triumph, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, Doran, 1936.

<sup>3</sup>Antonius, op. cit., p. 305; Zeine N. Zeine, The Struggle for Arab Independence: Western Diplomacy and the Rise and Fall of Faisal's Kingdom in Syria, Bayrut: Khayat's, 1960, pp. 71-72.

<sup>4</sup>P.M. Holt, Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, 1516-1922, A Political History, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1966, p. 274.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Marlowe, op. cit.; "...the Sharifian family were regarded as the principal beneficiaries, while Arab nationalists were regarded as the principal victims of the postwar settlement...." This is also the position of Hisham Sharabi, Nationalism and Revolution in the Arab World, Princeton, N.J., Van Nostrand, 1966, who sees the revolts of 1919, 1920 and 1925 as the first popular nationalist uprisings (in Egypt, Iraq and Syria), pp. 45-46. He specifically excludes the events of 1916 from his definition of "al-thawrah," pp. 101-102.

the other hand often regard Husayn as little more than a puppet of Allied interests and the most suitable available candidate to serve British designs against the Turks. Thus, while Howard Sachar tells the story as the by-product of British war strategy, George Antonius and Hazem Nuseibeh see the revolt as "a new milestone in the ideological development of Arab nationalism."<sup>6</sup> Other writers, who have taken statements of intent at face value, have viewed the revolt as a religious protest against Ottoman violations of Islamic law,<sup>7</sup> or even as the brilliant machinations of an eccentric Englishman.<sup>8</sup> Nor are these positions always argued dispassionately. Husayn is both a vain "megalomaniac"<sup>9</sup> and a self-sacrificing champion of the Arab national cause,<sup>10</sup> an "upstart monarch"<sup>11</sup> and a genuine spokesman for the Arab nation.<sup>12</sup> Apparently hard facts have been inter-

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<sup>6</sup>Howard Sachar, The Emergence of the Middle East: 1914-1924, New York, Knopf, 1969, esp. Ch. 5; Hazem Zaki Nuseibeh, The Ideas of Arab Nationalism, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1956, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup>C. Ernest Dawn, Ideological Influences in the Arab Revolt, in James Kritzeck and R. Bayly Winder (eds.), The World of Islam: Studies in Honour of Philip K. Hitti, New York, St. Martins Press, 1960.

<sup>8</sup>Stanley and Rodelle Weintraub in the introduction to Evolution of a Revolt: Early Postwar Writings of T.E. Lawrence, University Park, Pa., Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968, and Anthony Nutting in Lawrence of Arabia, The Man and the Motive, New York, C.N. Potter, 1961, are among the many writers who tell the story from Lawrence's perspective, and often see him as "the Revolt's brains, organizing force...and military technician." (Lawrence, 1968, p. 11.)

<sup>9</sup>Major N.N.E. Bray, Shifting Sands, London, Unicorn Press, 1934.

<sup>10</sup>Nutting, op. cit., pp. 294 and 297-298.

<sup>11</sup>A.T. Wilson, Loyalties Mesopotamia: 1914-1917, A Personal and Historical Record, London, Oxford University Press, 1930, p. 160. Similarly, Sachar, op. cit., p. 129, calls Husayn a "minor Bedouin potentate."

<sup>12</sup>H.I. Katibah, The New Spirit in Arab Lands, New York, published privately by the author, 1940, pp. 60-61.

preted so differently and colored so variously that there is a need for a searching reexamination of the events of these years in the light of new evidence which has become available.

It is not that historians have failed honestly to present all the evidence at their disposal or even that they are deliberately pushing partisan positions, although some of the best writings on the period are unashamedly polemical in their intent. Rather the problem arises the moment we stray from an objective accounting of fact and enter the precarious realm of cause and motivation. Was Husayn impelled to revolt by a genuine desire for Arab liberation and national independence or was he an ambitious petty ruler seeking to expand his power and extend his dominion? Should we perhaps look for the real reason for the revolt in London rather than Mecca? If it was an outcome of British strategy and manipulation, should we discount the Arab movement, as Lowell Thomas does, as an "artificial and not an innate and natural force"?<sup>13</sup> It is in making causal judgments on the origins of the revolt, and in speculating on the motivations of the principal actors in the drama, that serious differences of opinion have arisen. An examination of the two principal schools of thought on the subject will reveal the purpose and direction of our present inquiry.

#### Nationalism and the Arab Revolt

Writers who have been concerned to trace the development of Arab nationalism have frequently allowed the historical context which they have chosen to generate an implicit judgment on the cause of the Sharif's movement. Thus Antonius sees the revolt as a stage in the process of a national

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<sup>13</sup>Lowell Thomas, With Lawrence in Arabia, quoted in Nuseibeh, op. cit., p. 54.

Arab awakening, which began with Christian missionary activity and a literary revival in Syria. It became political in the various reform movements after the seizure of power by the Young Turks in 1908, and conspiratorial in the secret societies prior to the war, before exploding into an actual uprising in the Arabian Peninsula and then shifting its focus back to the Fertile Crescent with Faysal's assumption of power in Syria in 1919.

Nuseibeh goes so far as to call the Arab Revolt the "fifth phase" in the development of Arab nationalism, that of direct political experience as a popular movement and living force in the consciousness of the people.<sup>14</sup> "The living and inspiring history of the Arab Rebellion of 1916," he writes, "was as worthy a title deed as any to nationhood."

This interpretation of the revolt's purpose in fact follows closely Britain's official wartime propaganda. However, it has also succumbed to the same fallacies, and thereby denied fundamental aspects of both the theory and the history of Arab nationalism. When Sir Mark Sykes urged Faysal to "appeal to the pride of the Arabs in their own race," in order to rouse their support for a free "Arab Nation, one in Blood, one in Tongue, one in Mind," he was confusing ethnicity with nationalism.<sup>15</sup> And, pressing a "pro-Arab" policy on the War Committee, Sykes spoke lyrically of the bonds of language "and an intense sense of race or breed" which served to unite the Arab peoples in their common struggle for liberation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Nuseibeh, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

<sup>15</sup>Foreign Office correspondence, Public Record Office, London, (F.O.) 882/3, p. 161, Sykes to Faysal, Foreign Office, Mar. 3, 1918; and F.O. 882/2, pp. 90-91, AL/17/14, Foreign Office to Cairo, Sykes' message to Arab officers of the Arab Legion.

<sup>16</sup>India Office, Legal Political and Secret files, India Office Library, London, (I.O.) L.P. & S./10/598, Sykes to Meeting of the War Committee, 10

However, unifying factors such as language, race, geography, religion, common customs and traditions, and even a sense of political entity, do not in themselves constitute nationality. Rather, as Hans Kohn points out, they are the raw materials which may be mobilized in the cause of nationality.<sup>17</sup> In order to determine the applicability of this term to the Sharif's revolt, and to distinguish it from Arab rebellions in centuries past, we must attempt to define the concept "quamiyyah,"<sup>18</sup> or nationalism, as it is used in the Arab world today. If the Arabs have moved from a religious solidarity based on Islam to a sense of secular national identity, as Antonius and others have argued, then it is necessary to examine the nature of the force that has separated the Arabs from their coreligionists in Turkey and Persia since the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.

Most historians agree that modern nationalism came to the Middle East from Europe, and Kohn has defined its distinguishing characteristic as "a living and active corporate will."<sup>19</sup> Indeed the history of nationalism in Europe was paralleled by the growth of mass participation in politics and by attempts to mobilize the "popular will" in public life. Accord-

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Downing Street, July 6, 1916. Zeine, op. cit., p. 149, similarly states that the Arabs' language and religion had maintained their "nationalism" and "national consciousness" throughout their long history.

<sup>17</sup>Hans Kohn, "The Nature of Nationalism," American Political Science Review, Mar. 5, 1941, p. 1011.

<sup>18</sup>"Qaum" refers to Arab nationalism as a whole, while "watan" refers to nationalism within a single country, as for example, Egypt or Syria.

<sup>19</sup>Hans Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, A Study in its Origins and Background, New York, Macmillan, 1951, p. 10; for an excellent definitional inquiry into the nature of nationalism, see Jev Gollin, Language and Nation in the Arab World, ch. 1, unpublished manuscript, Columbia University.

ing to Kedourie, nationalism exists as long as it is continually reaffirmed by Rousseau's "general will," Kant's "autonomous will" or by what Rénan calls the nation's "daily plebiscite."<sup>20</sup> Because "nationalism is a state of mind permeating the large majority of a people and claiming to permeate all its members...",<sup>21</sup> it is distinguished from ibn Khaldun's concept of 'asabiyya which refers to the "group feeling" only of the ruling house.<sup>22</sup> The cyclical process of the growth and decline of 'asabiyya, which brings about dynastic change, does not touch the mass of "subjects." And because nationalism is an "act of consciousness" rooted in the people and a product of the "popular will" rather than the "divine will," it is essentially a secular construct.<sup>23</sup> As Sylvia Haim points out, it was al-Kawakibi's separation of the temporal and spiritual powers of the Caliphate and his parallel demand for government according to the will of the people, that allowed for the conception of a "purely secular politics" which was the prerequisite for nationalism.<sup>24</sup>

It might be objected that this definition, deriving as it does from the European experience, takes insufficient account of conditions in the Arab world and of the role of Islam in creating a sense of Arab unity

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<sup>20</sup>Elie Kedourie, Nationalism, 3rd ed., London, Hutchinson, 1966, p. 81.

<sup>21</sup>Kohn, "Nature of Nationalism," p. 1014.

<sup>22</sup>Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, An Introduction to History (1377), translated by Franz Rosenthal, one vol. edition, abridged and edited by N.J. Dawood, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1969.

<sup>23</sup>Kohn, Idea of Nationalism, pp. 10-13; also Kohn in Nationalism and Imperialism in the Hither East, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932, pp. 60-61 and 260-281, has described the "popular will" as giving rise to a "naive and unrestrained nationalism" capable of rousing the masses to action.

<sup>24</sup>Sylvia Haim, Arab Nationalism--An Anthology, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1962, p. 26.

and nationhood. Certainly it appears that any "purely secular" account of the growth of nationalism is inapplicable to the Middle East. Recognizing this without repudiating the central concept of the popular will and consent, John Marlowe has advanced the view that Arab nationalism occurred at the intersection of two philosophies and two essential ideas. The ruler was both the servant of the popular will, according to the tenets of European liberalism, and the incarnation of the popular will, as argued by Islamic modernists.<sup>25</sup> In both cases ruler and subject were bound by a "political consciousness," which, as Hitti points out, did not exist in Arabia at the time of the Arab revolt.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, not even the structural prerequisites existed for such a bond between the Sharif and his "citizens." In subsequent chapters, the nature of authority and the basis of the Sharif's support in the Arabian political system will be examined in considerable detail. Here a simple correlation of facts will suffice to show that the Hijaz in 1916 could not generate the relationship between a leader and his followers which nationalist theory postulated. In order to enrol his army, Husayn could neither appeal to nor mobilize the populace directly, but negotiated with the tribal shaykhs for their support. Once under arms, the tribesmen served under their own leaders, and it was the latter rather than the individual Beduin who pledged allegiance to the Sharif. In both town and tribe, primary loyalties were to the local shaykh rather than to a central authority. Furthermore, it was not a common goal which bound ruler and ruled in the

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<sup>25</sup>Marlowe, op. cit., ch. 1.

<sup>26</sup>Philip K. Hitti, The Arabs--A Short History, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1949.

political system of Arabia, but an intensely personal bond of kinship and mutual obligation at the local level and a loose alliance for temporary advantage beyond that. Through the commander, Gertrude Bell stated, "the political entity holds, and with his disappearance, it breaks."<sup>27</sup> And it was probably one of the most difficult concepts for the goal-oriented British officials to comprehend, that there might still be bitter personal feuds and disputes among the Arab chiefs even when their objectives appeared to be the same. The fact that ibn Sa'ud in Najd and the Idrisi Sayyid in 'Asir were allied with Britain for ostensibly the same purpose as Husayn, namely the expulsion of the Turks, did not prevent the struggle between these amirs from superseding any possible cooperation between them.

Inherent in the concept of nationalism based on popular will is the idea that a nationalist uprising will also be a social revolution.<sup>28</sup> The Arab revolt, however, was the work of a traditional leader who recruited his forces by traditional means and continued to exercise his power through the established channels of authority. Hardly the embodiment of a revolutionary assertion of the popular will, the Sharif's first government was rather a perpetuation of the ancient oligarchical rule. In addition to his sons, Husayn appointed five Meccan notables to the ministry, including only one newcomer, Sa'id 'Ali Pasha, as Minister of War. The Majlis, or Legislative Assembly, consisted of six representatives of the Ashraf (the Sharifian clans), one member of the Haram (the Holy Place) and four repre-

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<sup>27</sup>Arab Bulletin, secret publication of the Arab Bureau, Cairo, for the Foreign Office, (A.B.) 38, Jan. 12, 1917, p. 16. Wilson B. Bishai, Islamic History of the Middle East, Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1968, pp. 362-368; Hisham Sharabi, *op. cit.*, p. 17, also states that in Islamic politics, consent is not the basis of sovereignty, but Islamic law, and he points out that personality is the determining feature of traditional politics in Arabia.

<sup>28</sup>Sharabi, *op. cit.*, p. 12.



sentatives of the secular population. It was presided over by the head of the noble Quraysh family who by hereditary right held the keys of the Ka'ba.<sup>29</sup> Even if we do not predicate the formation of a new national entity on the breakdown of the tribal system, a nationalist revolt would certainly make a clean break with the rule of the foreign "oppressor" and would attempt at least symbolically to represent the population as a whole. An examination of the background of the members of the new government, however, shows most of them to have been office holders under the Ottoman Government or religious dignitaries, while several were family members or close personal friends of the Sharif. One Arab observer described the Sharif's government as a "family affair,"<sup>30</sup> and certainly its composition indicated no awareness of a concept of "popular sovereignty." Neither the tribes nor the townsfolk were granted, nor it must be emphasized did they seek, a new national representation at Mecca. For them, sovereignty was still local and parochial.

Sharabi notes that the "well-springs of social and political action" in Arabia were familial, tribal and sectarian, and that the Sharif's medieval rule did not represent a social revolution of any kind.<sup>31</sup> The "so-called national revolt" of 1916, says Kimche, did not "seek the overthrow of the established order," but represented a continuation of traditional political forms.<sup>32</sup> And even Sir Ronald Storrs who expressed considerable

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<sup>29</sup>A.E. 27, Oct. 26, 1916, pp. 386-390. The head of the Quraysh at the time was Shaykh Sharif Muhammad Salih Sha'ibi, aged 70.

<sup>30</sup>A.B. 29, Nov. 8, 1916, p. 416.

<sup>31</sup>Sharabi, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>32</sup>Jon Kimche, The Second Arab Awakening, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970, p. 15.

admiration for the Sharif described his government and state of mind as "closer to the Middle Ages than to the twentieth century."<sup>33</sup> After the war Husayn's rule became, if anything, even more "tyrannical" and "autocratic," with "court favourites [owing] their power and influence to the personal pleasure of His Majesty."<sup>34</sup> None of the definitions of nationalism, it will be noted, implied that democracy was a necessary concomitant of nationhood, and the modern history of the Third World teaches us that populist dictatorships are in fact more frequent outgrowths of nationalist revolutions than liberal democracies. But whether democratic, populist or authoritarian, the nationalist ruler based his claim to leadership on the united and common will of the populace, of which he was the representative. By contrast, Husayn's continuous affirmation of a "united Arabia under one head," saw the bond of union in the newly independent Arab lands at the top only.<sup>35</sup> That the impulse for unity did not come from the masses was clear to one British observer at the time who commented:

The statement of Arab interest errs in ascribing to them a general desire for unity. What they aim at is independence. They will never be united.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Storrs, op. cit., p. 469; and see Richard Aldington, Lawrence of Arabia, A Biographical Inquiry, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1971, p. 273, on Storrs' understanding and appreciation of Husayn.

<sup>34</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, p. 131, AyyubKhan, Cairo, on his two-month stay in Mecca, Apr. 10, 1920; also Elizabeth Moore, Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-1956, London, Methuen, 1965, pp. 47-48.

<sup>35</sup>F.O. 686/39, pp. 226-230; and F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 24 ff., both being Colonel E.C. Wilson's account of an interview with Husayn, at British Agency, Jiddah, July 18, 1918.

<sup>36</sup>F.O. 371/2767, Capt. Hall to Sir A. Nicholson, Admiralty, Jan. 12, 1916. For the centrality of unity in the definition of Arab nationalism, see Antonius, op. cit., pp. 248-249, 287 and 303-304; and Khairalla Khairalla, Les Regions Arabes Liberees, 1919, quoted in Kohn, Nationalism and Imperi-

But the composition of the Sharif's government, the tribal authority structure of the Hijaz, and the actual allegiances of both Beduin and townsmen, indicate that the concept of popular will or consent linking ruler to subject was conspicuously absent from the political system of the Hijaz. Ottoman government in Arabia had been according to ancient methods, unwritten laws and tribal justice,<sup>37</sup> and nothing that happened during the Arab revolt changed this situation.

Finally, in attempting to locate the points of transmission of nationalist ideas from Europe to the Middle East, Antonius, Haim and others are probably correct in tracing the origins of Arab nationalism to the influence of European missionaries in Syria.<sup>38</sup> "Most Middle Eastern countries," noted Halpern, "learned the language of nationalism in French and English rather than through their own tongue."<sup>39</sup> By contrast, it should be noted that the Hijaz was remote from these European influences, and although Antonius states that the ideas spread from Syria "even to the Arabian Peninsula,"<sup>40</sup> the evidence does not support his assertion. Of the 25 delegates and 200 Arab observers at the first Arab Congress held in Paris in June 1913, just three years before the outbreak of the revolt, not one was

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alism, p. 117, footnote 60; see also chapter five of this study. For the inapplicability of this concept to temporary tribal union, see Lawrence, Seven Pillars, p. 74, and A.B. 32, Nov. 28, 1916, p. 483, report by Lawrence.

<sup>37</sup>A.B. 24, Oct. 3, 1916, pp. 318-322.

<sup>38</sup>Zeine, op. cit., Ch. 3, pp. 46-52, challenges Antonius' emphasis on the role of the missionaries, but does not deny that the ideas of nationalism had their origins in Europe and that Syria was the birthplace of Arab nationalism.

<sup>39</sup>Manfred Halpern, The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 199.

<sup>40</sup>Antonius, op. cit., p. 90.

from the Peninsula. There was no pan-Arab secret society in Mecca prior to the war as there were in Bayrut, Damascus and Baghdad, nor any sign of nationalist agitation.<sup>41</sup> It is most unlikely therefore that the first "direct political experience" to establish "the principle of Arab nationality as a foundation of political life,"<sup>42</sup> should take place in that corner of the Arab world most isolated from the new currents of thought and hundreds of miles from the epicenter of prewar nationalist agitation. Indeed the distinction between a modern sense of nation and a traditional pride of race is particularly clear here, Lawrence reporting that Arab racial feeling increased in inverse proportion to the degree of exposure to European ideas. The coast of Syria, he said, had "little if any Arabic feeling or tradition" while the remote desert tribes had a powerful sense of Arab race.<sup>43</sup> The fact that a rebellion took place in the Hijaz at a time when the ideas of modern nationalism had begun to permeate another part of the Arab world, does not in itself establish a direct link between the two phenomena. No statement, action or proclamation from Sharif Husayn has been produced to show that he was "moved by the current of revolt in the Arab world"<sup>44</sup> until the moment that he actually launched his uprising. If we are looking for a theoretical reason for the outbreak of revolt in Arabia rather than Syria, we will find greater help in the writings of ibn Khaldun nearly 600 years earlier. In the traditional politics of the Middle

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<sup>41</sup>A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 481.

<sup>42</sup>Nuseibeh, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

<sup>43</sup>A.B. 44, Mar. 12, 1917, p. 113.

<sup>44</sup>Francesco Gabrieli, The Arab Revival, New York, Random House, 1961.

East, he observed, a senile and decaying empire begins to crumble and dis-integrate first at its farthest extremities, and in its most far-flung provinces where its weakness is most apparent, while the center remains intact until the final collapse of the whole dynasty.<sup>45</sup>

Philosophically, structurally and historically, the Arab revolt was clearly no expression of Arab nationalism, and the links which now exist between the concept and the event have been created retrospectively. "The idea of Arab nationality for which they are told they are fighting," concluded the Director of Military Intelligence in Cairo at the end of the war, "fails to arouse any burning sense of enthusiasm."<sup>46</sup>

Because it was based on a concept that bore no relation to the political reality of Arabia in 1916, the nationalist interpretation of the revolt is necessarily replete with internal inconsistencies. William Yale for example assumes a direct connection between the nationalists in the Fertile Crescent and the revolt in the Peninsula, although he ignores completely the role of the Hijaz tribes, who fought the revolt. In actual fact the Syrian and Mesopotamian nationalists had been dispersed in the Ottoman army and driven underground by Gemal Paşa so that very few had any connection with the revolt in either its conception or its execution. Yale feels no further need to elaborate on the motivations of Husayn and his sons that to say that they "were nationalists," although this is contradicted somewhat by his later statement that the family of the new pro-Ottoman Sharif, 'Ali Haydar, was much more liberal and Europeanized than that of Husayn. Since it is generally accepted that the growth of Arab

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<sup>45</sup>Ibn Khaldun, op. cit., pp. 250-252 and pp. 128-129.

<sup>46</sup>A.B. 107, Dec. 6, 1918, p. 367.

nationalism was closely linked with the influx of European ideas it becomes absurd to explain pro and anti-revolt stances by describing the Idrisi Sayyid of 'Asir as an "Arab revolutionary nationalist" but his neighbor Imam Yahya in Yemen as "too medieval" to be considered a nationalist.<sup>47</sup> And if the Sharif's revolt was a "war of national liberation," how can we reconcile this with Glubb's assertion that "the majority of [Arab peoples] remained loyal to the Ottoman connection throughout the First World War," with the outright opposition of the Arabs of Jabal Shammar, Yemen, Cyrenaica and South Persia, with the verbal denunciations of Egyptian nationalists, the apathy of the Mesopotamians, and the abstention of most of the Fertile Crescent?<sup>48</sup>

#### The Arab Revolt and British Imperialism

There is also a substantial literature which views the revolt in the light of the history of British involvement in the area. This approach

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<sup>47</sup>William Yale, The Near East, A Modern History, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1968, pp. 187, 202-203, and 257-258.

<sup>48</sup>Sir John Bagot Glubb, A Short History of the Arab Peoples, New York, Stein and Day, 1969, p. 258; also Bernard Lewis maintains that during the war "most Muslim Arabs were still for the Turks." See The Arabs in History, London, Hutchinson, 1966, p. 174; Philip Graves, The Life of Sir Percy Cox, London, Hutchinson, 1941, pp. 209-210 (on Mesopotamia). Although the revolt of the South Persian tribes was unrelated to the events of the Hijaz, it shows that the manipulation of the Arab nationalist idiom was not the monopoly of one side in the conflict. In fact the German agent Wassmuss embraced the "Arab cause" in his instigation of the rising against the British as enthusiastically as did Lawrence. See Sachar, op. cit., p. 54. Also Christopher Sykes, Wassmuss, "the German Lawrence", London, Longmans, Green and Company, 1949, pp. 209-210. The term "war of Arab liberation" is used by Antonius, op. cit., p. 212, to describe the Sharif's revolt.

is generally found in books with such titles as "Britain and the Arabs" and "British Imperialism and the Middle East." Here the discussion centers on the imperial system of communications and the importance of protecting the Cairo to India route, and usually sees England's relations with the Arabs as secondary to its dealings with the great powers.<sup>49</sup> During the war the British need for Arab assistance is therefore viewed as a function of the military threat to Suez, and to a lesser extent of the fear that a war with the Caliph of Islam might have a profoundly negative effect on Britain's Muslim subjects in Egypt and India.<sup>50</sup> An intricate accounting of the history of British negotiations with the Arabs shows the connection between earlier British strategy in the area and postwar Allied interests. Attempts to define "British interests" are therefore central, and writers like Kedourie and Busch have explored in great detail the divisions among British administrators in dealing with the Sharif.<sup>51</sup>

If our aim is to understand the roots of the Arab revolt, however, there is a further problem which this school of thought shares with the nationalists, for the conception of the uprising is seen primarily as the interaction between only two actors--Husayn and Britain. Whether from the nationalist or imperialist perspective, it is the outcome of the long series of negotiations, requests, promises and assurances that were exchanged be-

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<sup>49</sup>Kohn, Nationalism and Imperialism, p. 12; Monroe, op. cit., p. 11; Kedourie, op. cit., and his England and the Middle East, The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1921, London, Bowes and Bowes, 1956; Glubb, Britain and the Arabs, A Study of Fifty Years, 1908 to 1958, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1959; Sir Reader Bullard, Britain and the Middle East, from Earliest Times to 1963, London, Hutchinson, 1964.

<sup>50</sup>Monroe, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>51</sup>Kedourie, In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth, and Busch, op. cit.

tween the two parties. Since the approach is historical, it relates the interchange both to its antecedents and to its consequences, and thereby brings in the third actor--the Turks. Thus Yale states categorically: "The foundations upon which this revolt was built were laid during the five years between 1909 and 1914," that is, following the brief honeymoon between the Young Turks and the Arabs after the 1908 coup.<sup>52</sup> Almost without exception, writers in this tradition carry the narrative forward into Syria and Iraq as they examine the nature of the postwar settlement and evaluate the extent to which the wartime agreements were honored.

However, the "British-inspired and mainly British-led" revolt as a chapter in the history of England in the Middle East,<sup>53</sup> generally takes insufficient cognizance of internal forces, or sees them as a mere reflection of the policy of the European powers. The participation of groups which were not crucial to the context of the Anglo-Arab agreements, are neglected. Scant attention is paid either to the tribes of the Hijaz on whose shoulders the brunt of the uprising initially fell or to the active involvement of the principalities and independent tribal confederations of the Peninsula. But neither Husayn and his sons, nor an idealistic band of Englishmen in Cairo, nor white-collar officials at Whitehall could by themselves have created a revolt. "Leader" is a relative term which loses its meaning when considered independently of followers, a concept recognized by Max Weber when he defined the "charisma" of a leader according to the response of his followers. An analysis of the nature of tribal involvement in the revolt is therefore crucial. Similarly, few historians discuss the active

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<sup>52</sup>Yale, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>53</sup>Marlowe, op. cit., ch. 2.



participation of the Idrisi Sayyid of Sabya who raised 'Asir against the Turks or the passive support of Ibn Sa'ud in Najd, or the opposition to the revolt, whether active by Ibn Rashid in Hail or passive by Imam Yahya in Yemen. Almost without exception contemporary historians have concentrated on Faysal's northern campaign, which was certainly the most significant both from the Arab nationalist perspective and for British interests. But the Sharif, as leader of the Arab movement, did not necessarily share this perception. While Faysal was pushing northward and Lawrence was attracting attention with his daring exploits at 'Aqabah, what was 'Abdallah doing, with much the larger army? In Chapter Eight especially, we shall attempt to uncover the "other" revolt which was far more directly concerned with the internal politics of Arabia. But most importantly for our purpose, this approach mistakenly treats "the Arabs," as Ibn Sa'ud himself complained, "as if they were a compendious whole,"<sup>54</sup> and thereby overlooks crucial internal rivalries among the amirs, the tribes, and even within the Meccan power structure itself. Thus, the revolt in the Hijaz appears almost as an aberration, for both its antecedents and consequences have been sought outside the region. Because it has been divorced from the Arabian political system, little attempt has been made to follow through the historical consequences of the revolt within Arabia itself, and even less to trace its origins in the existing political processes of the Peninsula.

Despite their often differing conclusions, both the nationalist and imperialist approaches err in the same respect, in their attempt to make the

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<sup>54</sup>F.O. 371/2776, Ibn Sa'ud to Cox, July 20, 1916, pp. 96-100 of printed series, no. 152; and F.O. 371/2769, Cox to Arab Bureau, Cairo; Basrah, Sept. 9, 1916.

actions of men fit a predetermined ideological framework. Instead of seeing the actors in the revolt as individuals and groups pursuing their own interests, these writers have tended to dehumanize them by tailoring their actual motivations to an historic theme which has its own invisible laws of operation. Thus, in seeing the revolt as an "outgrowth of an intellectual awakening in the nineteenth century," William Yale entirely overlooks the concrete political and economic objectives of the participants at the time of the uprising.<sup>55</sup> The development of nationalism, the loyalty to Islam, or the pursuit of fixed imperial strategy are too often taken as givens, rather than as ideological options which are constantly available to the actors.

#### Goals and Strategies in the Arabian Political System

We have stated what the Arab revolt was not, and in doing so we have implied what our own purpose must be. Explicitly, the objective of this study is to trace the roots of the Arab revolt to the political system which spawned it. By examining the interests, motivations and interaction of those groups directly involved in the revolt, it will be possible to determine not only the "cause" of the event itself, but also the nature and characteristics of the Arabian political system which was its context. To this end we have followed M. Ginsberg's definition of a cause as "an assemblage of factors, which, in interaction with each other, undergo a change and are continued into the effect."<sup>56</sup> Thus rather than divining whether the revolt was Arab nationalist or British imperialist, whether it

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<sup>55</sup>Yale, op. cit., p. 187.

<sup>56</sup>M. Ginsberg, "Social Change," The British Journal of Sociology, vol. 9, (1958), p. 220.

was religious or secular, modern or traditional, we shall try instead to trace the network of actual relationships among the actors and to show how the changes brought about by their interaction at this point of time produced an uprising. The role of ideology in this analysis, while still important, changes its function from that of an organizing framework governing the actions of people, to a set of competing options which may be drawn on by real actors to explain and justify their motivations. It is an anthropological rather than historical approach, for the real linkages are among the actors themselves rather than historically bound to an overall process such as the development of nationalism or British imperial strategy. Thus change is understood, not by a study of the diffusion of values and traditions, but by examining actual social phenomena in the present and by formulating the problem itself with regard to process-in-time. The change in this case is the revolt, and its cause as defined by Ginsberg may be at least partially explained by such an analysis.<sup>57</sup>

This formulation requires a distinction between ideology as a strategy, and the intrinsic values of a political system which emerge from an examination of the interaction of group interests and the nature of the power structures within that system. In an examination of several revolutions, Barrington Moore has shown that values do not exist as an independent

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<sup>57</sup>I am indebted to Professor William Dalton, formerly of Teachers College, Columbia College, for introducing me to the literature on this methodology. Particularly, Abner Cohen, Arab Border Villages in Israel, A Study of Continuity and Change in Social Organization, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1965, pp. 174-176; and Emrys Peters, The Tied and the Free, A Study of Lebanese Village Society, make this extended case-study approach explicit in their ethnographies. See also Dalton's unpublished study of Sawkhnah oasis in Pezzan province, Libya. The word "partially" here is deliberate, for the data analysis in this method can never be exhaustive and the conclusions are therefore necessarily imperfect.

causal factor, but reflect the interests of particular actors which must be determined by historical analysis.<sup>58</sup> This will be one of the primary objects of our study as we examine the often conflicting interests, and therefore values, of tribes, amirs, nobles and townsmen. By contrast, the notion of an "Arab cause" was a strategy, the rhetorical bridge across which British and Arab leaders found it convenient to communicate in order to achieve variant goals. Whether the emphasis was put on "the expulsion of the Turks" and throwing off "the Turkish yoke" as by the British, or "the independence of the Arab countries" as by the Arabs,<sup>59</sup> the statements at their face value do not necessarily reflect the values of the actors. It would be misleading to suggest that Husayn and the British were ruthless cynics manipulating an ideology to their own narrow ends. Rather in any situation of negotiation, it is necessary for the two parties to have in common a basic concept, however vaguely defined, which allows for such cooperation as in both their interests. Thus in our own time, the concept of *détente* acts as an umbrella (albeit with significant leaks) under which that degree of cooperation is possible between the Soviet Union and the United States which is to the advantage of both parties.<sup>60</sup> While the benefits of cooperation outweigh those of conflict, the myth will be maintained however illusory it may seem when there is a real clash of interests. In

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<sup>58</sup>Barrington Moore, Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World, Boston, Beacon Press, 1966.

<sup>59</sup>Sir Henry McMahon, letter to Sharif Husayn, Oct. 24, 1915, and Sharif Husayn, letter to Sir Henry McMahon, July 14, 1915, quoted in Hurewitz, Diplomacy, vol. 2, pp. 14 and 15.

<sup>60</sup>See Walter Laqueur, The New York Times Magazine, Dec. 16, 1973, pp. 27 ff, for an analysis of the maintenance of the concept despite a reality of conflicting interests.

the nineteenth century and into the twentieth the notions of a "balance of power" and a "concert of Europe" fulfilled a similar function for the European powers. Unfortunately, the construct of an "Arab cause" has been taken out of this context and transformed into a real explanatory variable of the action for which the notion was in fact conveniently created. It has become in retrospect the "reason" for the revolt.

Husayn in fact was singularly adept at manipulating several ideologies as they suited his interests. Thus to the English the Grand Sharif spoke as "the ruler of the Arab Nation."<sup>61</sup> In his first official proclamation to the Muslim world, however, he justified the revolt as a "victory for the religion of Islam and the Moslem state."<sup>62</sup> And to the tribes of the Hijaz, for whom neither Muslim solidarity nor Arab nationhood was a sufficient rallying cry, Husayn spoke with a different voice again. There he negotiated as a traditional Arabian amir using tribal support to expand his influence in the Peninsula in exchange for protection, local autonomy, arms, money and supplies. Again, this does not imply that he had no independent values. On the contrary, it humanizes him, by seeing him not as a puppet of historical forces beyond his control, but as a real leader pursuing his interests while surrounded by a complex network of other interests which were either compatible or in competition with his own.

To view ideology as strategy is not to minimize its potential as a unifying force. As ibn Khaldun observed in the fourteenth century, religion in particular has at various times in the history of the Arabian Peninsula

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<sup>61</sup>Husayn in a letter to Sir Henry McMahon in Cairo, in A.B. 53, June 14, 1917, p. 264.

<sup>62</sup>Proclamation translated in A.B. 9, July 9, 1916, appendix 4, pp. 10-11.

succeeded in mobilizing large numbers of tribesmen into a formidable political tool. Indeed, if this study revolved around Najd rather than the Hijaz, the role of Islamic revivalism would be a central focus of our attention. However, we shall see that ibn Sa'ud himself consciously used religion as a weapon for the attainment of political goals just as the Sharif used material and military resources for the same purpose. Problems arise only if we look to religious motivation as a causal factor in its own right. To justify fidelity to the Ottoman caliph 'Ajaymi Sa'dun of the Muntafiq confederation invoked the doctrine of Arab loyalty to the Quran, Islam and the duty of jihad against non-believers.<sup>63</sup> Alternatively, rebellion could be justified against the "aggressors of Islamic law," the violators of women's honor and the "Unionists' atheism," as the Sharif did in his proclamation of independence.<sup>64</sup> And as ibn Sa'ud's Wahhabi adherents accused Husayn of being a kafir, or unbeliever, the latter branded the puritanical movement as "heretical."<sup>65</sup> It is as fruitless to discuss whether ibn Sa'ud or Husayn or 'Ajaymi was the better Muslim as to postulate whether the Sharifian family were "good" nationalists or power-mongers who betrayed the "cause." Our aim, rather, will be to examine for what purposes these religious positions were maintained. And in a broader sense, it is one of

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<sup>63</sup>A.B. 44, Mar. 12, 1917, p. 119, 'Ajaymi Sa'dun in a letter to ibn Sa'ud, dated Jan. 11, 1917.

<sup>64</sup>Supplement to the Proclamation of Independence, Sept. 9, 1916, by Sharif Husayn, in A.B. 25, Oct. 7, 1916, pp. 342-344; A.B. 27, Oct. 26, 1916, p. 392; see also Imam Yahya's call for a jihad against the British, French, Russians and Italians and statement of loyalty by the "Yemenite people" to Islam, in A.B. 40, Jan. 29, 1917, pp. 44-46.

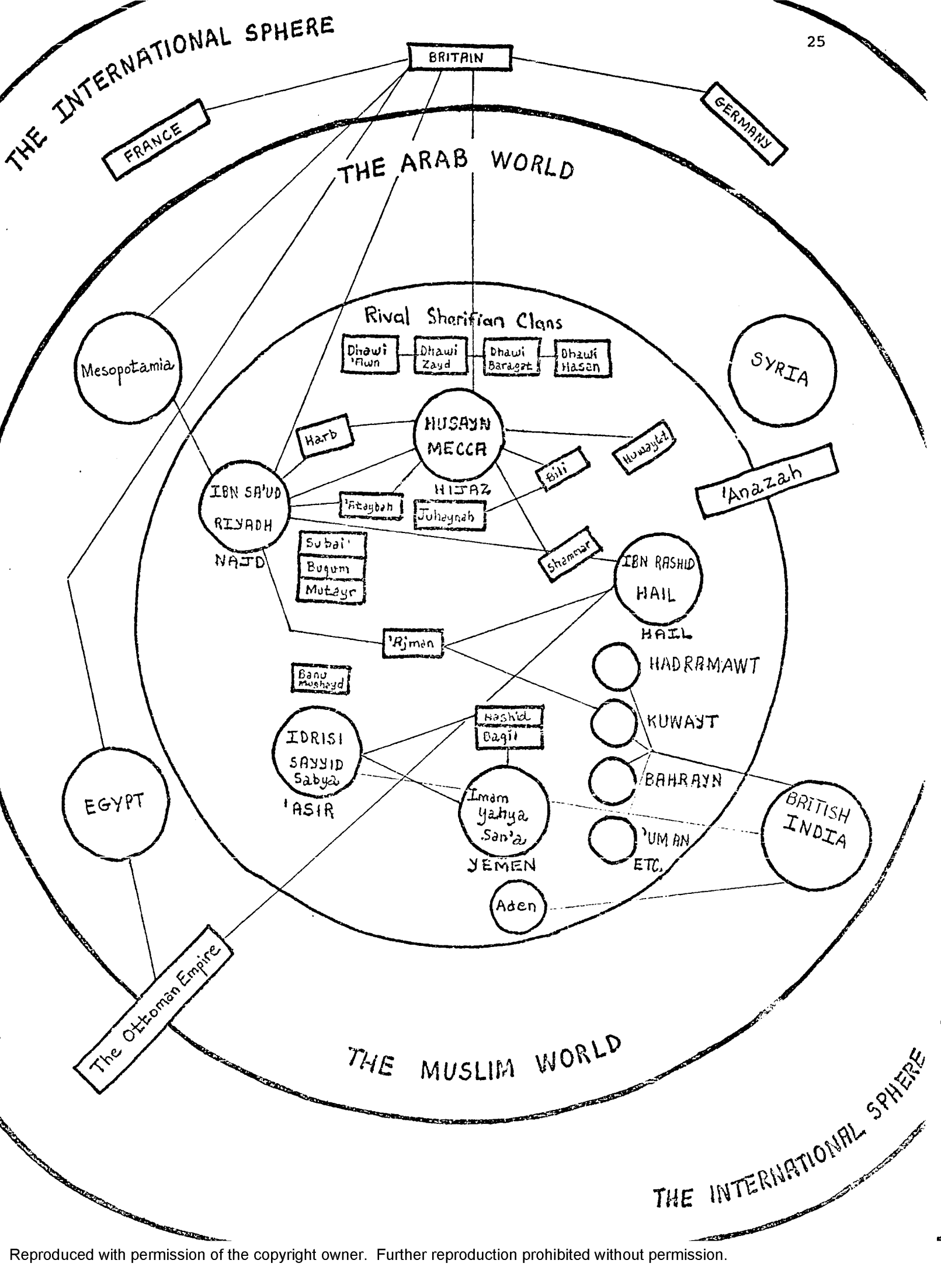
<sup>65</sup>F.O. 371/3054, Lawrence, memorandum, Jiddah, July 29, 1917, report of conversation with the Sharif; F.O. 686/39, p. 261, Husayn to ibn Sa'ud, 26.7.36 (=May 7, 1918).

the functions of this study to establish which strategies were favored by actors in the Arabian political system and to determine what they reveal about the nature of the system itself.

It is necessary at this point to set the boundaries of the system with which we are dealing. An imperfect diagrammatical representation of the several levels of interaction appears on the following page. All the units are connected with each other and the linkages represent either cooperation (e.g. alliance, patronage) or opposition (e.g. blood feud, competing territorial claims). The several units relate to one another on their own levels (e.g. 'Abadilah vs. Dhawi Zayd Sharifian clans, Juhaynah vs. Bili feud), and across different levels (e.g. Husayn and ibn Sa'ud competing for sovereignty over the 'Ataybah tribe, finally with British arbitration). Since the diagram could not encompass all actors, only those with a primary connection with the revolt have been included. It will be seen that there is not one "system" which can explain the revolt of itself. Rather there are many groups operating at different systemic levels. Thus while ibn Sa'ud was outside the system of Hijazi politics, his interaction with Husayn impinged directly on the nature of the revolt. Because British officials operated implicitly on the largest systemic level, the international sphere, they were too quick to ascribe motives to the revolt which a more microcosmic analysis on another plane might have seen as secondary. In the source material we frequently see two such different conceptual frameworks in operation. A British correspondent reported that leaflets dropped from planes were "written with a view to uniting the Arab nation and cause."<sup>66</sup> A more

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<sup>66</sup>A.B. 33, Dec. 4, 1916, p. 499; see also A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, pp. 483-484.





perceptive Arab agent in Mecca on the other hand reported on the intricacies of the conflict between the 'Abadilah and Dhawi Zayd clans and showed the precariousness of Husayn's leadership in his home base, which had hitherto been taken for granted by Britain.<sup>67</sup> If the revolt's leader was in imminent danger of deposition from within, the "unity of the Arab nation" might not be a primary point of focus for the impartial observer.

There are a number of problems with this approach, both theoretical and practical, which will require some arbitrary answers in order to make the study manageable. The first is how to assign weight to the various interactions. Clearly some factors and motivations influence behavior more than others. Thus for example, Husayn's perceptions of ibn Sa'ud's intentions were probably a more influential factor in determining his actions during the revolt than the direct opposition of Imam Yahya and ibn Rashid, which for all its apparent virulence, was not perceived as such a serious threat. Perhaps the most efficient and accurate way of dealing with the problem of assigning relative importance to the various factors is by the statistical use of factor analysis, although even this method is ultimately subjective. In this study we shall attempt to evaluate the salience of a particular issue by comparing the resources devoted to the accomplishment of different objectives. The money, time, effort, words and coercion which an actor applies to a goal will reveal the extent of his preoccupation with it, and its relative value in the scale of his interests.

Secondly, the task of accounting for the interactions of every unit within a given system is not only too large for this study, but ultimately

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<sup>67</sup>A.B. 29, Nov. 8, 1916; and see chapter six of this study.

an impossible objective. It is necessary therefore to define where our emphasis lies and which relationships are being excluded. Our focus will be on the internal politics of Arabia, and British policy will be important for both its planned and unintended consequences within the region itself rather than in terms of its own interests. The British intervention in Arabia had profound consequences for the inhabitants of the Hijaz and the neighboring provinces, and the wider British-Ottoman conflict was sometimes used to give expression to internal Arabian rivalries. Since we are concerned with the strategies of actors within the regional system, it will therefore be important to see how local leaders responded to the British alliance and manipulated it for their own purposes. British interests in the Middle East, however, especially in relation to France and other powers, have been extensively dealt with in the secondary literature, and it is one of the aims of this work to redress the balance and to direct attention back into Arabia itself. Such official documentation as the Husayn-McMahon correspondence, the Sykes-Picot agreement, and the Hogarth assurance, which are invariably associated with the Arab revolt, nevertheless have little relevance for the workings of the Arabian political system, and therefore have almost no place in this analysis. Nor shall I touch what Zeine has called the "extraordinary political muddle and confusion" which marked the attempt to apply the various wartime documents to the settlement resulting from the military victory.<sup>68</sup> Although the final stage of the revolt and the capture of Damascus contributed materially to the diplomatic entanglement between Britons, Arabs and Frenchmen, it is nevertheless a different subject from the causes and nature of the uprising itself. It is necessary

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<sup>68</sup>Zeine, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

to make this distinction clear as historians have often examined the revolt explicitly with a view to explaining the legacy of suspicion and mistrust which resulted from the postwar settlement. Furthermore, the reactions of the Arab and Muslim worlds to the revolt and the effect of their support or opposition on the course of events will be noted only in passing. Finally, it will be necessary to define the time period of our study. Although the bulk of evidence is from the period of the revolt itself, June 1916 to January 1919, it will frequently be necessary for comparative purposes to note changes in the balance of political forces before and after the war, and we shall therefore consider the beginning of 1914 and the end of 1920 as the limits of this work.

The questions which are important for this analysis are designed to elucidate the character of the inner two systemic layers of our diagrammatic representation. How did the Sharif succeed in forming an alliance of tribes in the Hijaz and what motivated them to respond to his call to arms? How committed were they to the stated goals of the revolt as defined by Husayn and Faysal and by the British, and what did they themselves have to gain from their participation? What did the interaction of tribe and amir reveal about the processes of coalition and conflict and about the nature of authority structures in the local political system? More briefly, we shall also examine the responses to the revolt of the townsmen of the Hijaz and of the Meccan nobility which was closely linked to the Sharifian ruling clique. What, in short, were the bonds of loyalty and mutual interest within the Hijaz which produced the cooperation necessary for an armed uprising, and what were the areas of tension and conflict which impeded the revolt's progress? Finally, how were the actors themselves transformed by the experience of the

revolt; that is, in cybernetic terminology, what feedback was there from the change in the objective situation into the actual channels of communication and relationship between the participants?

One more area of action which has been equally neglected in the secondary literature is the effect of the regional politics of the Arabian Peninsula on the revolt. What were the ambitions of the various amirs and how did they attempt to use the situation of global warfare to consolidate or expand their political influence? Of prime importance here is the rivalry between ibn Sa'ud and Husayn, which took precedence over the prosecution of the war against the Turks on more than one occasion, although both were allied with Britain. Further we might inquire how ibn Sa'ud's own political struggles in Eastern Arabia with the Shammar, on the one hand, and with dissident groups like the 'Ajman tribe on the other, affected the alignments for and against the revolt. And what was the effect of the conflict between the Idrisi Sayyid of 'Asir and the Imam Yahya of Yemen on their relationship with Husayn? Since the Sharif himself claimed leadership far beyond the borders of the Hijaz, the response of the other amirs of the Peninsula to his political ambitions has a direct bearing on the nature of the uprising. Although the Hijaz tribes and the Arabian amirs form two separate areas of study in this work, it will be seen that they in fact represented two parts of the same political system, and in the second part we shall frequently draw comparisons between regional and local political processes.

The Political and Economic System of the Hijaz

In exploring the roots of the Arab revolt in the political and economic system of the Hijaz, we must first ask what type of system we are dealing with. In his studies of tribal society, E.E. Evans-Pritchard observed that in the absence of a powerful central authority, a political system might be maintained by a "situational balanced opposition of groups."<sup>69</sup> This concept of "segmental opposition," which has since been applied to studies of tribal structure in both Asia and Africa, will be a useful analytic tool for our examination of the Arabian system.

The tribe [writes John Waterbury] was not held together by some common purpose, nor devotion to a single leader, nor even common ancestorship, although that was frequently invoked, but paradoxically, by the tension, friction, and hostility among its component parts. This tension resulted in feuding, occasionally intertribal warfare and a considerable display of hostility, but the net result was the maintenance of tribal structure.<sup>70</sup>

Among the several units of such a system there is a constant process of fission and fusion, of identification and opposition, as alliances are made and unmade according to mutual advantage. In examining these processes in an acephalous system in North Pakistan, Frederik Barth has adopted several of the insights of Neumann's "Theory of Games."<sup>71</sup> And indeed one as-

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<sup>69</sup>E.E. Evans-Pritchard, in M. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (eds.), African Political Systems, London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 296; also Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer, a Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968, p. 150; and Evans-Pritchard, The Sanusi of Cyrenaica, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1949, p. 59.

<sup>70</sup>John Waterbury, The Commander of the Faithful, The Moroccan Political Elite--A Study of Segmented Politics, New York, Columbia University Press, 1970, p. 62.

<sup>71</sup>Frederik Barth, "Segmentary Opposition and the Theory of Games: A Study of Pathan Organization," The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, vol. 89, (1959), pp. 6 and 15.

sumption of that theory lies at the root of this study--that individuals and groups tend to act according to their perceived interests. This does not mean that they will not frequently make mistakes, as we shall see in the Sharif's struggle with ibn Sa'ud. But the survival of units in a segmentary system demands a functional independence and maneuverability, and a willingness to shift alliances if their own interests demand it, which a centralized system does not.

It might be objected that these assumptions will create a bias toward identifying internal segmentation within the Arabian system, while ignoring the divisions which existed in the British administration. Certainly, as Briton Busch has demonstrated, the disagreements in Whitehall, between the Foreign Office and the India Office, and between London, Cairo and Delhi, were a constant feature of British Middle East policy. Was there then, any real difference between factionalism in a nation state and in a tribal society? A closer look reveals an immediate and crucial distinction which serves to clarify the concept of a "segmentary politics." All of the British factions operated under the implicit assumption that there was such a thing as a "British interest," and while they disagreed violently on the definition of that interest, they invariably presented their policy recommendations with reference to the British Government as an entity. Furthermore, there was finally a "British" policy. The decision to grant a certain subsidy to Husayn and a certain one to ibn Sa'ud, to reject the former's regal title, and to adopt a policy of non-interference between the amirs, were made and implemented by the various branches of the administration in the name of "His Majesty's Government," no matter how irksome the policy was to the particular individuals and groups who had to apply it. The presence of a centralized authority does not allow the

separate parts to define their own interests, for they have no existence independent of the whole. It is therefore possible for us to speak of the impact on the Arabian political system of "British" policy and "British" interests and to preserve the systemic distinction we have drawn. By contrast, it is meaningless to speak of an "Arab" interest, or even of an "Hijazi" interest or a "tribal" interest. The Sharif and ibn Sa'ud were not feuding over the definition of an Arabian policy to which both would subscribe, but as separate units each claiming absolute authority in his own domain. The same was true for individual clans and tribes, and even, as we shall see, for rival shaykhs and sections within tribes. It is the functional autonomy of units which requires a willingness to define their interests and to act in accordance with them, and it is the interaction of several units engaged in this process which produces a system of "segmental opposition."

It is not our intention here to examine the principles according to which groups in Arabia chose conflict or alliance in particular circumstances, for that is the task of this study as a whole. The characteristics of the Arabian political system will emerge from the evidence itself, and the chapters are divided and sub-divided specifically in order to draw attention to salient features of that system. What is necessary here is a definitional inquiry into the units of authority with which we shall be dealing and a *dramatis personae* of the principal actors in that movement. Since a revolt by definition brings about a crisis in authority it is of prime importance to determine what kind of polity the rebels wished to establish. According to Lawrence, the Arabs aimed "to occupy all Arabic-speaking lands in Asia" and, says Gabrieli, to create "a great and free Arab state."<sup>72</sup> This view was apparently confirmed by the demands of

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<sup>72</sup>Lawrence, Evolution of a Revolt, p. 105; Gabrieli, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

the Damascus Protocol and Sharif Husayn's own declaration of the "independence of the Arab countries" from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea and from Mersina to the borders of Persia.<sup>73</sup> Stegman on the other hand cautions that whenever Husayn used the term "nation," he was in fact referring to the Hijaz.<sup>74</sup> Writers in the imperial tradition are less specific and mention the achievement of an ill-defined freedom under British patronage, preferring to emphasize the Hijazis' desire to rid themselves of Ottoman rule and to excise themselves from the Ottoman Empire than to delineate the nature of the new Arab entity. But the analyses have rarely viewed the question of political authority from the perspective of those who fought the revolt. It was not the empire, the nation or the province which was the primary unit of authority in Arabia, but the tribe.

Since pre-Islamic times, the tribe has been the basic unit of political organization in the Arabian desert. The tribe generally shares a territorial base but is itself divided into agnatic lineages based on claims to genealogical descent from a common ancestor. Reciprocal ties of mutual obligation for the economic livelihood, security and protection of members of the lineage, are therefore based on a bond of blood relationship. In the Middle East and North Africa, parallel cousin marriage is the most widely accepted way of re-enforcing these lineages, although Emrys Peters has shown that genealogies may themselves be manipulated and manu-

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<sup>73</sup>Letter from Sharif Husayn to Sir Henry McMahon, July 14, 1915, in Hurewitz, Diplomacy, vol. 2, p. 14. On the Damascus Protocol, see Antonius, op. cit., pp. 158-159 and pp. 164-165.

<sup>74</sup>Henry Stegman, "Arab Unity and Disunity," in Benjamin Rivlin and Joseph Szyliowicz (eds.), The Contemporary Middle East, Tradition and Innovation, New York, Random House, 1965, p. 251.



factured "to comprehend contemporary reality" and to confirm political bonds and divisions.<sup>75</sup> There is, as Waterbury observes, a "hierarchy of ascendant internal segments," based on the patrilinear descent group, and increasing in size and scope through the sub-clan, clan, tribe and confederation, thereby allowing for the escalation of disputes among the component units or with rival tribes.<sup>76</sup> This is not the place for a detailed account of kinship relations among the Arabs, a subject on which many good ethnographies have been written.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, too great a definitional specificity and the establishment of too many rules of kinship ties will impede rather than aid our inquiry, for political action in a segmentary system depends on the maintenance of considerable flexibility by the units, to divide, sub-divide and coalesce as political circumstances demand. Waterbury has noted that in Moroccan tribes, the Arabic term qabilah (tribe) is in fact used to refer to a number of levels of the structural hierarchy, its definition being relative to the other units with which it interacts.<sup>78</sup> Thus the Harb in the vicinity of Mecca and Medina may be referred to either

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<sup>75</sup>Emrys L. Peters, "Aspects of Rank and Status among Muslims in a Lebanese Village," in Julian Pitt-Rivers (ed.), Mediterranean Countrymen: Essays in the Social Anthropology of the Mediterranean, Paris, Mouton, 1963, p. 186.

<sup>76</sup>Waterbury, op. cit., pp. 62-63.

<sup>77</sup>For an extremely detailed structural analysis of kinship among Beduin tribes, see Emanuel Marx, Bedouin of the Negev, New York, Praeger, 1967; also Talal 'Asad, The Kababish Arabs, London, C. Hurst, 1970; and Professor William Dalton's manuscript on the Arabs of Sawknah oasis in Fezzan, Libya, all give excellent accounts of kinship structure. For an analysis of the survival of tribal institutions in Islamic society, see Wilson Bishai, Islamic History of the Middle East, Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1968, esp. pp. 364-368, and p. 207. We shall also be referring throughout the study to ibn Khaldun's model of tribal revolt and dynastic change, in The Muqaddimah, chapters two and three.

<sup>78</sup>Waterbury, op. cit., footnote †, pp. 63-64.

as a confederation or as a tribe, while the Masruh or Banu Salim Harb are, strictly speaking, tribal sections, although in practice they rarely if ever acted in concert. The degree of internal segmentation varies with different tribes, and the term, which will necessarily be used loosely in the pages ahead, therefore implies no sense of functional unity.

The tribe did not, however, exist in isolation. In order to understand its relation to larger units, such as the amirate, it will be helpful to draw an analogy with the international political system of the present day to which we shall return in chapter three, when we consider the role of coercion in the process of coalition formation. Nations, as the ultimate political units of authority, have the power to make laws which are binding on their citizens, and to compel obedience to their commands. Beyond their borders, relationships among nations are carried on in a Hobbesian state of nature. World organizations notwithstanding, the international sphere is, legally and politically, anarchic. Smaller nations seek protection and security from superpowers while jealously attempting to preserve their autonomy and to manipulate their alliances to their own advantage against adversaries. The superpowers for their part establish their own spheres of influence by virtue of their strength and attempt to command the allegiance and adhesion of smaller nations to their "cause." They do this by a combination of economic inducement, military assistance, political persuasion and coercion. In disputes among the superpowers, the bargaining counters are still the nation-states, which are constantly maneuvering, shifting their options and moving in and out of intermediary relationships such as regional alliances. In the political system of Arabia, the tribes similarly sought protection and assistance from more powerful regional forces, known

as amirates, which in turn depended for support upon outside powers such as the Ottoman Empire and Britain. Several amirs competed for local ascendancy, which could ultimately be achieved by extending their influence over tribes in the contested areas. Economic and political links were as fluid as in the international sphere today, and we shall see in Part Two that the mutual dependencies that existed between tribe and amirate were paralleled in the relationship between the amirate and the external forces which exercised influence in the Peninsula. Rival tribal confederations represented regional alliances and "borders" depended ultimately on the loyalties of particular shaykhs at any given moment to more powerful sources of control.

It is not intended to imply that there is any actual equivalence between the nature of the units in this analogy and those in the Arabian system. But it serves to indicate the distance between the levels of authority which comprise the two parts of this study and to draw attention to the nature of alliance formation in an anarchic system. In particular it draws attention to the functional autonomy of the primary unit in the system, the tribe in our case or the nation state in the international arena. Husayn, as amir of Mecca, had no more direct authority over a Harb tribesman than the Soviet leader today over a Cuban citizen. While he depended for his security on larger regional forces, the tribal shaykh was involved in a continuous struggle to maintain his own independence, which he exercised by virtue of the fact that the rival amirs were equally dependent on the support which they received from the tribes. It is clear therefore that the tribe was not only the political, but also the military and territorial unit of the Arabian system, the essential dynamic of which

was the constant tension between the "local" authority of the shaykh, and the "central" authority of the amir. This same tension existed between the "local" authority of the amir, and the "central" authority of the Imperial Ottoman Government. Our use of the adjectives "local" and "central" throughout this work is therefore relative, and by no means implies the obeisance of one to the other. In this system, "unity" could only mean a temporary alliance for the achievement of the specific and separate goals of each of the participants, and not, as is often thought, a transcendent bond which tied the individual units of authority into a larger whole.

Political processes cannot be separated from the economic imperatives of the system in which they occur, and Barrington Moore has shown that the material base of a society has a profound, if not determining effect on the nature of a revolution in that society. If the tribe was the prime unit of political authority, therefore, it will be equally necessary for an understanding of tribal participation in the Arab revolt, to determine its role as an economic unit. In all major typologies of "modern" and "traditional" society, economic variables are central. Daniel Lerner's core definition of a modern society is one with self-sustaining economic growth.<sup>79</sup> Industrialization is seen as an essential corollary, if not condition, of political modernization, and writers who have described that process invariably draw attention to a transition from a diffuse to a centralized economic as well as political organization. By contrast, a traditional tribal society such as that of the Hijaz is based on a subsistence economy with no internally

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<sup>79</sup>International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, article on "Modernization," by Daniel Lerner.

generated growth.

But valid as the distinctions between "traditional" and "modern" economies are as general descriptive categories, there are clearly also unique features to each economic system. The principal tension and dynamic of the Arabian economy as indeed of the Middle East as a whole, was the relationship between the desert and the sown; between tribe and town. Six hundred years ago, ibn Khaldun drew a clear distinction between the "desert life" and the "sedentary culture," and saw political change as the process of transition from one to the other.<sup>80</sup> At the time of the Sharif's revolt, the mutual suspicion and antagonism between the two elements was still significant enough to be a major influence in determining allegiance to the movement as we shall see in chapter six. The tribes were generally nomadic and subsisted on an economy based on sheep and camels, supplemented by occasional raids on caravans and the extortion of tolls from travellers and traders. At times when the "central" government was relatively strong, it ensured the safety of the roads by subsidizing local shaykhs to protect rather than harrass pilgrims and convoys which passed through their tribal domains. "In the holy cities under the eyes of the officials, peace generally prevails, but on the roads in the deserts, the merciless Bedu is the lord," remarked Ayyub Khan, British agent in Mecca after the war.<sup>81</sup> He added that, although the Turks used to pay much money to the local shaykhs to protect the pilgrim routes, yet "these roads have never been free from plunder and molestation" while "the charities of the

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<sup>80</sup>Ibn Khaldun, op. cit., pp. 136 ff.; see also Gertrude Bell, Syria, The Desert and the Sown, London, Heinemann, 1907; and a memorandum by Bell on the subject, dated June 25, 1917, in F.O. 882/3, AP/17/14, pp. 49-57.

<sup>81</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, pp. 133-134, Ayyub Khan, Cairo, Apr. 10, 1920.

whole Moslem world flow into Mecca and Medina and provide a fairly luxurious living for the privileged inhabitants of these towns." The tribesmen could scarcely lose from this trade. They protected the caravans if they were paid to do so and plundered them if they were not, in addition to providing camels at exorbitant prices for the transportation of pilgrims from Jiddah to Mecca and Medina.<sup>82</sup> Some shaykhs maintained date palms, and certain tribal sections, especially in the coastal regions, engaged in agriculture. Bedu and townsman met in the market place, as in every part of the Middle East where ancient urban centers were surrounded by vast expanses of desert.

But the Hijaz economy had one major peculiarity which distinguished it markedly from the rest of the Peninsula and from the Arab world as a whole. Its principal resource and primary source of income was the hajj or pilgrimage. Since the Hijaz had no exports of consequence, the trade at Jiddah, the main port, was almost entirely dependent on the pilgrim traffic, while the populations of the Holy Cities themselves were sustained by it. In an article on the historical bond between the Hijaz and Egypt, Commander Hogarth pointed out that at the time of the war the Hijaz was even less than a subsistence economy, for it was unable to supply its local needs from internal agricultural sources and was "inherently dependent on subsidies and external purveyors," a reality which had serious implications for the Sharif's independence.<sup>83</sup> When the hajj was suspended at the

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<sup>82</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 51, Murray to Haselfoot, HMS Enterprise, 1917.

<sup>83</sup>D.G. Hogarth, "Hejaz and Egypt," in A.B. 68, Nov. 7, 1917, pp. 439-442; and see F.O. 686/6/1, p. 141, Lloyd, Dec. 22, 1916.

beginning of the war, and whenever it was reduced in size, the Hijaz was unable to support itself and required constant charitable subsidies from the rest of the Muslim world.<sup>84</sup> The amirate was therefore in a particularly vulnerable position, being internally dependent for its political survival on the support of the tribes, and externally dependent on the economic means to ensure that support. If either side of the equation failed, the Sharif was in serious trouble. If he lost the support of the tribes he could not guarantee the safety of the pilgrims, and if his external subsidies dried up, he could not maintain the loyalty of the tribes. The interaction between the tribe and the amir, and between the latter and his "external purveyor," were therefore economically as well as politically two sides of the same system of government. These economic factors were vitally important for the Sharif's revolt, and we shall see that they contributed significantly to his own downfall as he became entrapped in precisely this situation of a double dependency.

Finally, what was the internal political and economic structure of the towns? The major towns of the Hijaz were administered, in common with most urban centers in the Middle East, according to the medieval guild system. Racially heterogeneous, the inhabitants of Mecca, Medina and Jiddah in particular, owed their allegiance to shaykhs according to their profession. These shaykhs, nominated in Mecca by the Sharif and elsewhere by the municipal amir, exercised all judicial, police, social and political functions and had territorial jurisdiction over a section of the town. In Mecca there were thirteen such harahs or quarters, each with its own shaykh al-harah,

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<sup>84</sup>F.O. 371/2773, McMahon to Foreign Office, June 11, 1916; F.O. 882/3, AP/17/14, Bell, June 25, 1917.

its distinctive flag, ten councillors and 20 to 50 watchmen whose duty it was to prevent thefts and watch visitors.<sup>85</sup> Within the harah, there were two classes, the ayal al-khurkah, consisting of notables, professionals and artisans, and the ayal al-harah who were the fighters, workers and slaves. While not linked by blood as in a tribal clan or section, the members of the harah had ties comparable to those of the Beduin. Within each harah there was a mutual obligation and responsibility for assistance and it was said that even a thief never stole in his own harah. And in common with tribal society, fights and disputes between harahs were settled according to the system of blood revenge which will be discussed later. It is noteworthy then that the townsmen were no freer from traditional parochial loyalties than the tribesmen, and were structurally and organizationally even more distant from any hypothetical bond of "Arab" union than the tribesmen because of their lack of even a racial identification. The organizational parallelism, despite sharply divergent interests between town and tribe, is not coincidental. As Waterbury states, society in the Middle East at large

is sprung from the tribe, and, with the possible exception of the great river valleys, norms and modes of social and political behavior have their origins in the tribe.<sup>86</sup>

When we speak of an "Arab" revolt and an "Arab" cause, we must recognize therefore that the very terms are a misnomer, implying as they do a primary identification which did not correspond to the political reality of the Peninsula. In its composition the Sharif's rebellion was tribal,

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<sup>85</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, pp. 83-92, Ihsanullah, Mecca, to British Agent, Jiddah, May 19, 1920, on the organization of Mecca.

<sup>86</sup>Waterbury, op. cit., p. 62.



and although in its later stages a determined effort was made to mobilize and train townsmen, peasants and Arabs from the Fertile Crescent, it was the tribes which launched, sustained and constituted the backbone of the movement until the entry into Damascus in October, 1918. Having stated what the political and economic units of the Arabian political system were, we must now ask who they were, and review briefly the main actors in the Arab revolt.

#### Dramatis Personae and the British Sources

When the war between Britain and the Ottoman Empire intruded into the Arabian Peninsula, four other amirates aside from the Hijaz were drawn into the conflict in a manner which impinged directly on the success of the Sharif's movement. Of these, two supported Britain and two remained loyal to the Ottoman Caliphate. Ibn Sa'ud as Amir of Najd in central Arabia signed a treaty with England in December 1915, but took no direct action in support of the revolt, largely because of his enmity with Husayn. His neighbor, ibn Rashid, Amir of Jabal Shammar and head of the powerful Shammar tribe, actively supported the Turks throughout the war, occasionally attacked tribes loyal to the Sharif, and supplied the Ottoman garrison at Medina. In the south, the Idrisi Sayyid of 'Asir, who had been fighting the Turks for years, signed a treaty with England in April 1915 and took limited military action against the Turks, though not in support of the Sharif. And in Yemen, Imam Yahya remained passively loyal to the Ottoman Empire, taking no part in the war except for an attack by his tribes against the British in Aden before the Hijaz revolt. In the Peninsula itself there

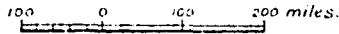
was therefore no semblance of Arab "unity," and it will be necessary in the second part of this study to investigate the regional balance of power in order to determine the motives which impelled these amirs either to support or to oppose the Turks. Other principalities, such as Kuwait, were only marginally significant to the Sharif's revolt and will be mentioned in passing where relevant.

In the Hijaz itself, the Sharif's four sons commanded three tribal armies in the field. 'Abdallah led the southern army, the largest of the three, both in besieging Medina and in countering ibn Sa'ud's activities on the Najd border. 'Ali led the eastern army also in the vicinity of Medina, and Faysal moved north in what is now regarded as the major campaign of the revolt, although it was probably not perceived as such by the Sharif himself. Zayd, the youngest son, served first in the south and was later sent, in response to British pressure, to join Faysal at 'Aqabah. Apart from a contingent of 600 regular soldiers under Ja'far Pasha in the north and a similar number in the south, the combined strength of the Sharif's tribal forces was about 20,000 at any one time, although the numbers fluctuated considerably. Throughout this work I shall refer to Husayn either by his name or as the Sharif, although he later assumed the title of King. The latter designation will be used only when it appears in quotations. The names of Husayn's sons and other notables may also be prefixed by the title Sharif which in fact denotes claimed descent from the Prophet.

The Arab movement was launched and sustained for the first six months by three major tribes in the central Hijaz. Of these the most sig-

# ROUGH TRIBAL MAP OF ARABIA <sup>87</sup>

Scale - 180 Miles = 1 inch

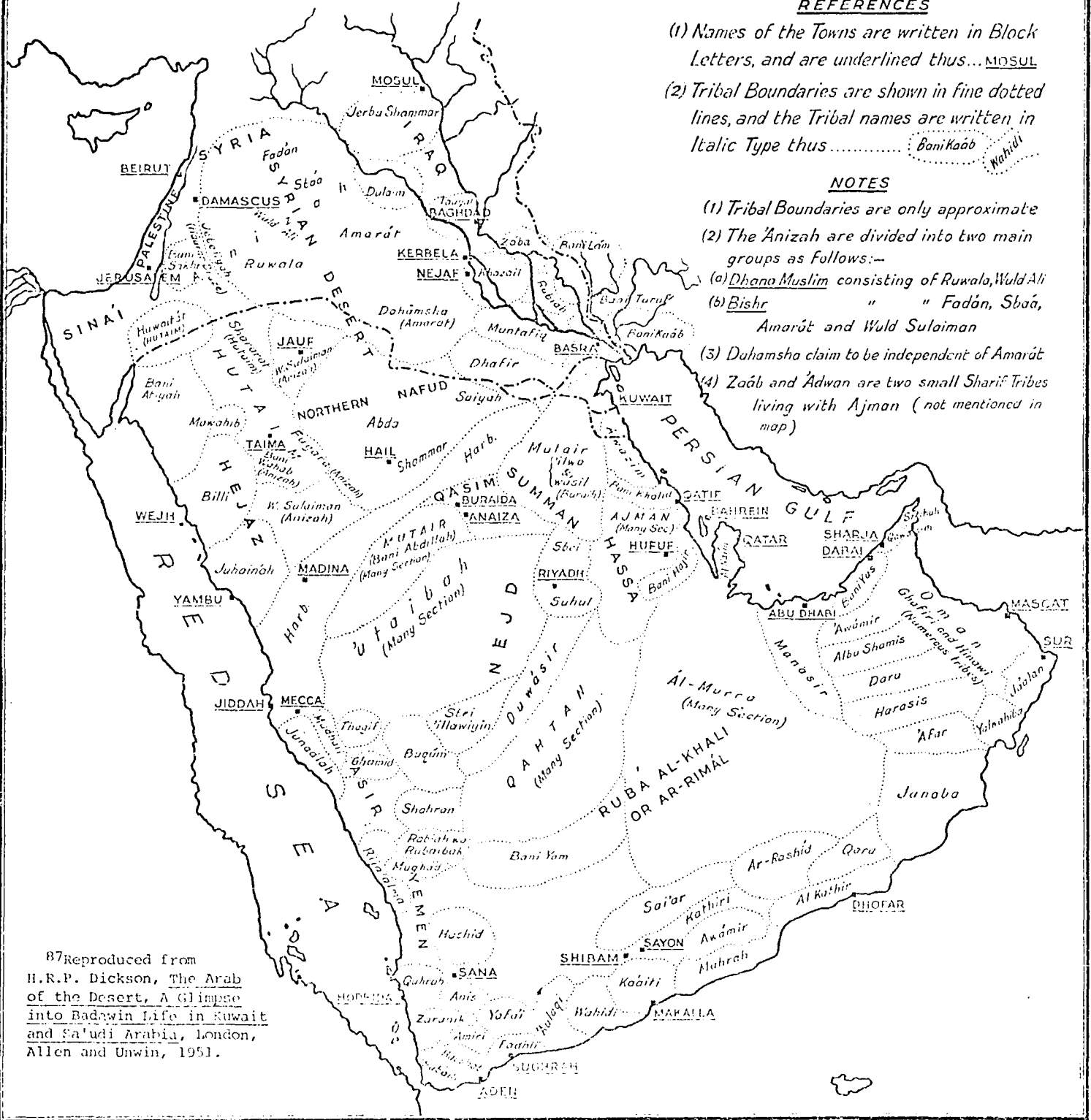


### REFERENCES

- (1) Names of the Towns are written in Block Letters, and are underlined thus... MOSUL
- (2) Tribal Boundaries are shown in fine dotted lines, and the Tribal names are written in Italic Type thus... *BaniKaab* *Wahidi*

### NOTES

- (1) Tribal Boundaries are only approximate
- (2) The 'Anizah are divided into two main groups as follows:-
  - (a) *Dhano Muslim* consisting of *Ruwala*, *Wuld Ali*
  - (b) *Bishr* " " *Fadán*, *Sbaá*, *Amarút* and *Wuld Sulaiman*
- (3) *Duhamska* claim to be independent of *Amarút*
- (4) *Zaáb* and *'Adwan* are two small Sharif Tribes living with *Ajman* (not mentioned in map)



87Reproduced from H.R.P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert, A Glimpse into Bedouin Life in Kuwait and Sa'udi Arabia*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1951.

nificant was the large and powerful Harb confederation in the vicinity of the Holy Cities and reaching to the coast at Jiddah and Rabigh. Slightly to the north was the Juhaynah tribe whose lands stretched inland from Yanbu' as far north as Wajh. And in the eastern Hijaz, with its domains running into Najd was the 'Ataybah tribe whose influence 'Abdallah assiduously cultivated throughout the revolt in the hope of turning it against ibn Sa'ud. That tribe, which posed a formidable barrier between the two amirates, formed the bulk of 'Abdallah's army throughout the war, while the Harb served mainly under 'Ali, and Faysal's initial northern movement was comprised principally of Juhaynah tribesmen. Among these tribes, three important shaykhs should be mentioned here, as their names crop up frequently in the narrative. Husayn ibn Mubayrik, shaykh of the Masruh Harb in the neighborhood of Rabigh, joined the Turks early in the revolt; Dakhil-'Allah al-Gadhi of the Juhaynah was one of the most active chiefs under Faysal; and Sharif Shakir, the appointed amir of the 'Ataybah tribe, was 'Abdallah's right-hand man. As Faysal moved northwards, many of the Bili tribesmen joined him in the neighborhood of Wajh, although they generally remained loyal to Ottoman authority until Faysal captured that town, and their paramount shaykh Sulayman ibn Rifadah stayed with the Turks until he was killed in a train on the Hijaz Railroad. Also at Wajh several other minor tribes pledged allegiance to Mecca, such as the Moahib, 'Aydah, and Fuqarah. But Faysal's greatest success was probably the enrolment of Shaykh 'Awda abu Tayih of the Huwaytat, known as one of the fiercest warriors in the northern Hijaz, and whose Beduin were instrumental in the capture of 'Aqabah. There the Banu 'Atiyah and Banu Sakhr tribes were brought in as Faysal prepared to launch his offensive into southern Syria. The last major

tribe to join the revolt--in July 1918--was also one of the most powerful in Arabia. Inland from and adjoining the Huwaytat domain was the Ruwala tribe, led by Nuri Sha'lan, "a hard old man" of seventy "whose word was law."<sup>88</sup> Nuri was competing for control of the 'Anazah confederation of tribes of which the Ruwala were a part, with Fahad ibn Hadhdhal of the 'Amarat, and was considered by many as "fourth among the princes of Arabia" after Husayn, ibn Sa'ud and ibn Rashid.<sup>89</sup> Many other smaller tribes had a role in the revolt and some, like the Hutaym and the Muntafiq in the east actively served the Turks. The Subai', Buqum, Qahtan and others on the Najd border were more important for their role in the conflict with ibn Sa'ud than in the war against the Ottoman Empire. Here I have listed only the major tribes whose names will appear often in the pages ahead. Others will be noted in passing or relegated to the footnotes in cases where it is felt that additional names in the text obscure the issue.

One other set of characters must be introduced here--the British officials upon whose letters, reports, meetings and analyses this work relies. In closest and most constant touch with the Sharif himself was Colonel E.C. Wilson, British representative at Jiddah, whose voluminous correspondence and observations form an invaluable source of information which has barely been tapped in the secondary literature. Except for a spell of illness in mid-1918 when he was briefly replaced by Colonel Bassett, Wilson remained at his post throughout the war and probably knew the Sharif better than any other European ever did. Apart from numerous interviews and telephone conversations, the two were in touch almost daily

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<sup>88</sup>Robert Graves, Lawrence and the Arabs, London, Jonathan Cape, 1927, p. 146.

<sup>89</sup>Nutting, op. cit., p. 69.

by letter and telegram for three years. Unfortunately Wilson wrote no book and left no collection of private papers,<sup>90</sup> and his correspondence has lain buried in the Foreign Office archives since the war. Lawrence's biographers tend to dismiss Wilson as "a stiff and downright type"<sup>91</sup> or to overlook him entirely, and certainly he does not appear to have been as colorful as some of the other British officers in Arabia. But his very level-headedness made him a suitable link between Britain and the Arabs, and there is no doubt from his hundreds of reports and letters that he was an extremely energetic man in close touch with the political and military realities of the moment. Kedourie's description of Wilson as "too naive, too respectful and too tender-minded to cope with a wily and changeable negotiator like Husayn," gives insufficient credit to a man whose extraordinarily difficult task was to balance often irreconcilable interests with sufficient tact and diplomacy to maintain an alliance of cooperation.<sup>92</sup> For our purposes there is no comparable resource for an evaluation of the Sharif's motives and actions.

No one, however, perceived the working of tribal politics with the clarity and insight of T.E. Lawrence, the legendary Lawrence of Arabia. By literally adjusting his perceptions to those of tribal society, and as one of Faysal's closest and most trusted associates, he was able to observe the behavior of the Arabs in almost every conceivable circumstance of daily life as no other British officer could. His account of the northern campaign and of Faysal's negotiations with the tribes at Wajh and 'Aqabah

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<sup>90</sup>Extensive inquiries in London, especially through the Office of Historical Archives on Chancery Lane, were unable to produce any such material by Wilson.

<sup>91</sup>Nutting, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>92</sup>Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*, p. 310.

will be drawn upon often in the following pages. However, Lawrence also had his own grandiose vision and was obsessed by the dream of a united Arab nation governed from Damascus. We must be careful therefore not to confuse his accurate and detailed description of tribal realities with his nationalist ideals, and to this end I have found the letters and intelligence reports which he filed regularly and which are presently in the British Foreign Office archives, more useful than his later writings which were often directed towards advancing the "Arab cause." Occasionally, however, his very experiences of bitter disillusionment, which resulted from the clash of his hopes and his observations, are themselves a useful resource.

Until his capture by the Turks at the end of 1917, Col. S.F. Newcombe, who had been sent to the Hijaz as chief British military adviser to the Arabs, was engaged almost continuously in attacks against the Hijaz Railroad. Although Lawrence recorded that he and Newcombe "had the same general views,"<sup>93</sup> the latter's experiences with the Beduin were almost invariably negative. Newcombe's frustrations, however, as reported in dozens of dispatches to Jiddah, also reveal much important information about tribal behavior in the revolt. Other British officers in the field, mostly employed in demolitions work, also submitted frequent reports. The more important of these--Joyce, Garland and Davenport--will be mentioned in the text, while others such as Hornby, Vickery and Ross will generally be referred to only in the footnotes. Navy personnel aboard British ships in the Red Sea and members of the Royal Flying Corps sent to fly and supervise the aeroplanes in the Hijaz also made useful observations which will be noted occasionally. Most of the communication with the Idrisi Sayyid of

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<sup>93</sup>Graves, op. cit., p. 139.

'Asir for example was conducted from H.M.S. Northbrook and other British warships off the coast of southern Arabia. From the Residency and the Arab Bureau in Cairo we have two additional kinds of information--official correspondence between Britain and the Arabs, and political and military analyses of various aspects of the Sharif's revolt which often formed the basis of policy recommendations. Sir Henry McMahon was replaced as High Commissioner in Egypt by Sir Reginald Wingate, formerly Sirdar of the Egyptian Army at Khartum, at the beginning of 1917, and these men in turn transmitted all British policy decisions to Mecca and received all official requests from Husayn. The Arab Bureau was established in 1916 to centralize intelligence operations in the Arab world for the Foreign Office, and was responsible for the regular publication of classified information in the Arab Bulletin. Of the Bureau staff, the analyses of Dr. D.G. Hogarth, Sir Ronald Storrs, and Colonel Gilbert Clayton, are the most useful, while Cornwallis, Symes and others, who are referred to less frequently, will again be mentioned only in the footnotes.

Beyond the borders of the Hijaz there were British officials and political agents in several other parts of the Peninsula. Eastern Arabia came under the purview of the India Office, whose views on Arab policy were very different from those of the Foreign Office, which was responsible for the revolt through its representatives in Cairo.<sup>94</sup> From Baghdad, Gertrude Bell provided perceptive and detailed reports of tribal politics in central Arabia and Mesopotamia which are very helpful for comparative purposes. Her thumbnail descriptions of tribal leaders and desert politics are matched only by those of Lawrence himself, and she had the additional

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<sup>94</sup>For these divisions, see especially Busch, op. cit.



advantage of a deep knowledge of the history of the Peninsula. Sir Percy Cox was the British political resident at Basrah and therefore responsible for communications with ibn Sa'ud. His letters and reports, as well as those of H. St. J.B. Philby, provide an important counterweight to British dispatches from the Hijaz and Cairo, for they often present the other side of Husayn's bitter conflict with the Amir of Riyadh.<sup>95</sup> From Aden, Col. H.F. Jacob is our main source of information about tribal politics in southern Arabia and his extensive knowledge of that area provides further useful comparative material against which to evaluate reports from the Hijaz. Finally, in London, Sir Mark Sykes was the Foreign Office representative most directly concerned with Arabia, and it will occasionally be necessary to contrast Sykes' "catholic imagination"<sup>96</sup> and unbounded rhetoric concerning the "Unity of the Arab Nation" with the political realities of the revolt.

I have mentioned here only the British officials whose writings are referred to most frequently and whose names therefore appear most consistently in the text. There were dozens of others in Cairo, Delhi, Baghdad and Aden whose memoranda often contain valuable pieces of evidence, apparently inconsequential at first sight, but with important implications for the Sharif's movement. From the French perspective, only the writings of Colonel Edouard Brémont, head of the French military mission at Jiddah, have been examined, as well as official correspondence on Arabia with the French Embassy in London and the British Embassy in Paris. The Ottoman

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<sup>95</sup>Officials in Kuwayt and Bahrayn, such as Colonel Hamilton and Major Dickson also reported on Najd and the activities of ibn Sa'ud.

<sup>96</sup>Lawrence; Seven Pillars, p. 453.

view is not well represented but may be gathered from several interviews with captured Ottoman officials and prisoners as well as from intelligence sources in other parts of the world which have been reproduced in the British documents. In addition there are translations from Turkish newspapers and of letters sent from Damascus to Arab leaders in the Peninsula. The commander of the Ottoman garrison at Medina, Fakhri Pasha, is the Turk who will be encountered most frequently in the pages ahead.

However, one of the most important parts of the British source material is the translation from Arabic of hundreds of letters and telegrams that flowed between the Sharif and his sons, neighbors, agents and adherents, and of articles in the newspaper of Mecca, The Qibla. The Arabic originals of the letters are in most cases no longer extant, having been burnt by the Sa'udis when they captured Mecca in 1924.<sup>97</sup> It is interesting for example to see that what 'Abdallah told his father was sometimes not the same as what he told the British. The Jiddah Agency had its own Arab and Muslim agents and informants, which was especially necessary since no Christian official could set foot in Mecca. Husayn Ruhi was the most important of these during the war, although several others are listed only by their initials, such as "M.N." and "G." These agents often perceived facets of Arabian politics which British officials would probably never have seen. Almost all the available evidence on the rivalry at Mecca between the Sharifian clans, for example, comes from Arab informants. Battlefield reports, analytical memoranda, minutes of decision-making meetings, official and private correspondence, and reports

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<sup>97</sup>According to information given me privately in interview with Sulayman Musa, University of Amman.

of conversations and interviews with Husayn, his sons, ibn Sa'ud, and numerous tribal leaders, in addition to the communications between the Arab participants themselves, therefore provide a wealth of source material from the British archives. The fact that there are hundreds of different authors, both British and Arab, of this evidence, guards against the charge of possible bias by "interpretative" reporting. In any case, the documentary evidence is used here as descriptive material for the analysis of the behavior of the actors, so that even subjective comments may be revealing of a significant clash of real interests. Motivations, as we have explained, will be deduced from actions, which themselves indicate the interests of the actors. And for this purpose, the British sources provide ample material.

## PART I

MOBILIZING THE TRIBES OF THE HIJAZ:  
THE INTERNAL CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

## CHAPTER TWO

## THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS

Having examined the deal struck between the Sharif of Mecca and the British, most analyses of the Arab Revolt generally give a brief narrative of Faysal's northern campaign and then delve in detail into the breakdown of the alliance which accompanied the postwar peace negotiations. However they neglect another alliance, the breakdown of which was equally as crucial in explaining the erosion of Husayn's support as was his abandonment by the British and his ultimate defeat by ibn Sa'ud. Between the new set of forces which began to operate on the political system of the Hijaz and the final collapse of the system, what were the internal processes through which these new forces were mediated? The missing step was the alliance (the word is deliberate) between Husayn and the tribal chiefs of the Hijaz. If, as we have noted, the tribe was the prime unit of authority in a political system in which the tension between local and central forces was the basic dynamic, then it would be naive to imagine that the Sharif could summon the Beduin at will for his own objectives. Yet he did manage to weld the tribes together for a common purpose under his leadership and virtually to evict the Turks from his domain, and the method by which this was achieved may be expected to shed important light on the nature of the revolt. A failure to examine the basis of the Sharif's support would necessarily lead to faulty perceptions about the political system itself and to the assumption that Husayn in his actions embodied the expression of a cohesive and popular national will. For us this therefore represents

the real beginning of our analysis and the point at which we part company from most secondary sources in order to examine the revolt within the context of the traditional tribal system of the Hijaz. The succeeding chapters then, will be devoted to an examination of the process of recruitment for the Sharif's revolt, both in order to answer the specific question--who fought the Turks and why-- and also to examine the strategies of coalition formation in a segmentary system.

At first sight the mobilization of the Sharif's forces appears to present few problems. Before the revolt, Husayn himself wrote to the British that he could raise "more than a quarter of a million men from the districts which are connected with us only."<sup>1</sup> And a month after the Sharif had declared his independence, his representative in Cairo, Muhammad Sharif al-Faruqi, told the Arab Bureau:

All the people of Hejaz bear obedience to our Lord and all are devoted to his cause... they are ready to give up their lives in his path and none would object to carry out his commands....It is very easy for our Grand Lord to levy from 160,000 to 250,000 fighting men from the Hejaz alone...<sup>2</sup>

British policymakers were initially inclined to accept these estimates at their face value and proceeded according to the assumption that the ruler of the Hijaz had the power, implicit in the concept of national sovereignty, to summon his subjects at will. More seriously

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<sup>1</sup>F.O. 371/2768, p. 111; Husayn to McMahon, dated 1 Jamad Awal, enclosed in McMahon to Foreign Office, April 15, 1916.

<sup>2</sup>F.O. 371/2774, p. 41 (File 42233), Muhammad Sharif al Faruqi to Clayton, undated, probably July 1916, after the surrender of Jiddah.

perhaps, contemporary writers seeking to explore the origins of modern Arab nationalism have also accepted such statements literally. Antonius for example claims that "the whole countryside had risen on a signal from Feisal."<sup>3</sup> And Zeine, while he questions the extent of Husayn's support in other parts of the Arab world, never doubts his authority within his own borders. By characterizing the Sharif as a "leader of Arab political nationalism" without relating this to the system within which he operated, Zeine implicitly accepts that Husayn exercised the prerogatives of a national sovereign, which included the power to raise armed men.<sup>4</sup>

In actual fact it is doubtful whether the number of fighting men under the Sharif's command ever exceeded a fraction of his original estimate. Early in 1917 British military intelligence sources put the combined strength of his armies at 22,000.<sup>5</sup> War Office personnel appear to have been more realistic about the Sharif's capabilities in this regard than their counterparts in the Foreign Office. A memorandum from the General Staff remarked that while it was possible that 250,000 men might temporarily respond to his orders, nevertheless "difficulties of supply, lack of discipline, and the want of cohesion inherent in the Arab race would certainly prevent

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<sup>3</sup>Antonius, op. cit. p. 237

<sup>4</sup>Zeine N. Zeine, The Emergence of Arab Nationalism, p. 151

<sup>5</sup>F.O. 371/3049, (File 28744), "Arabia" --printed report on the tribes; sent Director of Military Intelligence to Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Feb. 5, 1917.

the concentration and maintenance of even a tithe of that number in any one locality."<sup>6</sup> However all such figures are somewhat misleading for the revolt was not fought by a permanent standing army but rather by disparate groups of tribesmen often enrolled for relatively short periods of time, who joined the Sharif's forces when the fighting moved to their tribal domain. More important than numbers here is the process by which the Sharif raised these forces, and what we are questioning here is the assumption that he could "raise the countryside" at will. How did Husayn recruit his men, and how did he manage to weld the various tribal groupings together into an army capable of fighting the Turks? In fact he secured support by a complex process of negotiation and by a mutual assessment of advantage in which the tribesmen were persuaded primarily by the Sharif's successes and cajoled by offers of arms, gold and supplies. Moreover their shaykhs remained jealous of the paramountcy of their own local authority, standing as independent rulers in their own right who at most acknowledged the suzerainty of an overlord, rather than as subjects at the beck and call of their leader.

From the beginning, the uprising was marked by frequent delays and spasmodic advances which suddenly stalled, causing endless frustration to British officers working with the Arabs. The British sources are replete with correspondence from these officers expressing complaints about the "abominably slow" progress of the revolt and the "months of hesitation" by Faysal,<sup>7</sup> about 'Abdallah's "propensity

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<sup>6</sup>F.O. 371/2773, "The Sherif of Mecca and the Arab Movement," memorandum of the General Staff, War Office, p. 2, July 1, 1916.

<sup>7</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 39, Garland to Wilson, Cairo, March 9, 1917.



to postpone operations"<sup>8</sup> and Sharif 'Ali's agreement "to nothing except inactivity."<sup>9</sup> At Wajh, Major Davenport complained that "nothing had been done but talk."<sup>10</sup> and therein lies an important clue to the internal political processes that prevented decisive military action. What caused these delays and what explains this apparent difference in the perceptions and priorities of the Arabs and the British?

For the British the Arab uprising had one major military aim: to wage war against the Turks and to expel them from Arabia. In this objective the Sharif of Mecca certainly concurred for he stood to gain his freedom from the Sublime Porte and the concomitant power that independent political control would bring. However he had a concurrent objective which was inseparably linked to the military task. His power depended not only on being freed from the shackles of external authority, but on a consolidation of his position within his own domain. Both in order to accomplish the military objective and to ensure his newly won freedom, the Sharif had also to establish his legitimacy with the leading shaykhs, and, if possible, to expand his authority by obtaining the allegiance of tribal leaders formerly outside his sphere of control. The war therefore provided both a test and an opportunity for Sharif Husayn which was no less important than

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<sup>8</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, Newcombe to Wilson from 'Abdallah's camp at Jaydah, July 18, 1917.

<sup>9</sup>F.O. 686/54, p. 11, HMS Dufferin to HMS Suva for Wilson, undated, probably November 3, 1916.

<sup>10</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, Davenport (report), Wajh, Aug. 8, 1917. See also F.O. 686/38, p. 46, Wilson to Husayn for 'Abdallah, private letter, Halwan, Egypt, March 14, 1918.

the defeat of the Turks. Negotiating for the allegiance of these tribes thus became a primary activity of the Arab Revolt, which sometimes conflicted with the immediate military task at hand. The following  
 x dispatch from Sir Reginald Wingate, the High Commissioner for Egypt, to the War Office indicates a problem of differing priorities which recurred throughout the revolt in Arabia:

I telegraphed you Feisal's future plans consequent on his meeting with the chiefs of certain of the northern tribes, but we have impressed upon him that these [meetings] must not be allowed to interfere with the present business in hand, viz. the defeat of the Turks at Medina and to prevent their withdrawal along the railway from the town.<sup>11</sup>

The impatience of British officials with the Sharif's negotiating process probably stemmed as much from an underlying supposition, based on their own conception of what constituted a nation-state, that a "national" sovereign could mobilize his forces and summon his subjects to arms at will, as it did from their own definition of the revolt's objectives.

One of the main reasons that Husayn needed time in the first half of 1916 and was not ready to start the revolt until June despite his earlier agreement in principle, was that he was engaged in time-consuming negotiations with the various sections of the Harb tribe in the vicinity of the Holy Cities.<sup>12</sup> An early issue of the Arab

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<sup>11</sup>Sudan Archive, the private papers of Sir Reginald Wingate and Brig.-Gen. G.F. Clayton at Durham University, Durham, England, (S.A.)145/4, Wingate to General Sir William Robertson (War Office), April 15, 1917.

<sup>12</sup>For Husayn's earlier agreement in principle, see the Husayn-McMahon Correspondence, begun July 14, 1915 and completed by March 10, 1916. The basic principles of British-Arab cooperation had been laid down in this exchange of letters before the end of 1915. See

Bulletin noted that Husayn had to "bargain" for the allegiance of each tribe.<sup>13</sup> After the fall of Mecca and Jiddah on June 13 and 14, it became clear that the whole countryside was not about to rise spontaneously on Faysal's command. While the support of most of the Harb, 'Ataybah and Juhaynah tribes was enlisted at an early stage,<sup>14</sup> the progress of the revolt was impeded by the neutrality and non-committment of the northern tribes. The further the revolt moved from the center of the Hijaz and thus from the Sharif's immediate sphere of influence, the more tenuous became the control that could be exercised from Mecca. The ensuing hiatus was perhaps the movement's most difficult stage.

In January 1917 the first northward thrust took place with the capture of Wajh, and here the revolt temporarily ground to a halt as Faysal patiently negotiated with the Bili, Banu 'Atiyah and Fuqarah, adjudicated feuds among the Huwaytat, Ruwala and Shararat, and attempted to lure the Banu Sakhr, Fad'an and Sba'a tribes away from the Turks. The long delay at Wajh was not the product of indolence or "laziness" as Major Garland claimed or of "inertia" as charged by Major Bray.<sup>15</sup> In fact Faysal was working strenuously with all the tact and diplomacy he could muster in a effort to win over hitherto uncommitted tribal sections. When, six months later,

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Hurewitz, Diplomacy, vol. 2, p.13; and Antonius, op.cit., Appendix A pp. 413-427.

<sup>13</sup> A.B. No. 13, Aug. 1, 1916, p. 131.

<sup>14</sup> F.O. 371/2773, McMahon to Foreign Office, Ramlah, June 8, 1916.

<sup>15</sup> Major N.N.E. Bray, Shifting Sands, London, Unicorn Press. 1934, pp. 134-135.

Faysal moved his army to 'Aqabah, which was captured by Lawrence and the Huwaytat in June 1917, he began the even more laborious task of obtaining the adherence and loyalty of the southern Syrian tribes. In a letter to The Times the following year, Lawrence recalled that "it took [Faysal] months to obtain the suffrages of all the tribes."<sup>16</sup> So seriously did the amir regard this work that a British telegram in September 1917 noted that he had requested a special durbar tent to be ordered from India, expressly for the purpose of receiving tribal deputations.<sup>17</sup>

It will be the task of Part I of this study to explore these negotiations in more detail in order to determine how the adhesion of the tribes was obtained. What means were employed to secure their participation in the revolt and what was the nature and strength of their allegiance to the Sharif? The crucial point here is that the process was one of "winning over"<sup>18</sup> and not of simply summoning to the standard. Time and again we read of shaykhs "swearing allegiance" and "offering their services" to the King of the Hijaz,<sup>19</sup> duties which in theory at least are non-negotiable prerequisites of the relationship between the ruler and subject in a modern nation-state. When loyalty becomes an issue in a national

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<sup>16</sup>The Times of London, Nov. 27, 1918, reprinted in Lawrence, Evolution of a Revolt, 1968, p. 41.

<sup>17</sup>S.A. 146/4, telegram No. 639M to India, Sept. 10, 1917.

<sup>18</sup>A.B. 31, Nov. 18, 1916, p. 453.

<sup>19</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 161, Joyce to Director, Arab Bureau, Wajh, Apr. 9, 1917.

entity, as in the case of a refusal to answer a call to arms, no intervening authority will prevent the sovereign from enacting sanctions to enforce his demand. In our case, however, the operative word is "negotiations," a concept which minimally implies a relationship between equals in which each side has the right to set conditions, and it is for this reason that the revolt may more accurately be characterized as a tribal alliance than as a national uprising. In a process of bargaining each side maintains its own authority. In order to determine the nature of this negotiating process, we shall now turn to the specific strategies and goals of the several actors who comprised the Sharif's coalition.

## CHAPTER THREE

## STRATEGIES FOR MOBILIZATION--THE DRACHMA AND THE SWORD

The Arab is moved by the sword and by the drachma--min al saif wa min al darahim--but one is no good without the other, and the drachma is more powerful than the sword.

Ibrahim al-Rawaf<sup>1</sup>

Money and power speak loudly in any society, and there is no reason why Arabia should be an exception. That both were important factors in mobilizing the Beduin in the Arab revolt there is no doubt. But what interests us here is how these strategies were used and for what purpose. Whether in a simple binary relationship as between an employer and an employee or in a complex social system, the exchange of material wealth inevitably reveals significant characteristics of the power structure within which these actors perform their transactions. What conditions are attached to the exchange, what is the nature of the interdependence created by it, what is the balance between supply and demand--the political import of these questions cannot be divorced from the pursuit of more immediate economic objectives. In his negotiations with the tribes, the Sharif's ability to dispense the substantial material resources provided by Britain, prompted a fundamental reassessment of the relationship between the center and the periphery, between the authority of Mecca and that of the local shaykh. In addition, the intrusion of the war, the Sharif's alliance with Britain and his challenge to Ottoman authority, demanded a re-evaluation by all the actors in the system of their ability to enforce their

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<sup>1</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./10/601, file 2100, part 6, statement sent by Chief Political Officer, Basrah, to Director of Military Intelligence, Cairo, Nov. 15, 1916. Ibrahim al-Rawaf was a Damascus camel and sheep dealer whose business frequently took him among the tribes of the Peninsula.

decisions and to impose their will on rival political forces. Material and military factors therefore provide a concrete and accessible tool with which to begin to probe the Arabian political system, the disruption of the war helping to throw significant relationships into starker relief.

An immediate problem is that the very nakedness of the drachma and the sword as motivations to action, arouses defensive responses and an attempt to overlay such "base" motives with a more acceptable ideological cover. "Some critics may sneer and say it was all done with gold," writes Nutting, asserting that "patience, understanding and example" were "far more important assistants" in winning over the Beduin.<sup>2</sup> Certainly those qualities, as displayed by Faysal in his negotiations with the northern tribes, were indispensable to the success of the revolt. However, it is equally certain that not only gold, but also wider economic considerations and tribal evaluations of the strength and power of the contending parties were significant material inducements to action, and attempts to dismiss them serve only to obscure the important relationships which they represent. No nationalist will want to admit that those who served as "brothers in arms...for the liberation of all the Arabs" and who were entrusted with the sacred task of bringing the aims of the Damascus Protocol to fruition,<sup>3</sup> were mercenaries fighting for personal gain. Nor will the British, who for their own reasons actively fostered the belief in an "eruption against Turkey" based on a "passion of anti-Turkish feeling" easily admit that their allies were taking up arms for British gold as much as against "Turkish oppression." And indeed, the secondary litera-

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<sup>2</sup>Nutting, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

<sup>3</sup>Antonius, op. cit., p. 220.

<sup>4</sup>Lawrence, Seven Pillars, p. 78.

ture tends either to ignore the role of material and military factors, or to relegate them to minor importance.

However, one need only reflect on the terms attached to military and economic aid in the international system today, on alliances preserved by financial dependency and political coercion, and on the manipulation of superpower guarantees by nations searching for security and assistance, to realize the importance of these strategies in the modern world. In Libyan aid to Africa, United States investment in South America, and the former Soviet involvement in Egypt, both the drachma and the sword lurk not far below the official ideological justifications advanced for those relationships and reveal significant aspects of the nature of the interdependence between supplier and recipient. The concern of nation-states and impersonal rationalized structures today with economic self-preservation and military protection are seen in our study on a more personal level in the objectives of individuals and local chieftains. We should be no more ready to accept official rationalizations of treaties and alliances in the tribal political system of the Hijaz in 1916 than we are with regard to the military pacts that unite western and eastern Europe respectively today. Here the nature of the British source materials is helpful in enabling us to go beyond the mass of government proclamations, speeches and correspondence, and to penetrate the realm of real action. Direct field reports, accounts of raids and military clashes, and reports of the distribution of money and weapons strip the mask from the official verbiage and provide a wealth of descriptive material from which basic economic transactions, and the political relationships which they represent, can be extracted.

It is possible to distinguish three levels at which the drachma



and the sword were strategically significant in mobilizing Beduin support for the revolt. The first was the promise of direct personal gain and included the acquisition of gold, supplies, rifles and plunder. On another level was the pursuit of wider economic goals such as the protection of property, the concern for access to markets and the quest for profitable trade. Finally there were considerations of strength, coercion and military power as they influenced allegiance to the Sharif of Mecca. After considering these in turn and drawing attention to the nature of the political ties into which the tribes were thereby drawn, we shall then ask toward what goals these strategies were directed.

## MATERIAL INCENTIVES

1. Money and Supplies.

While there is still debate on the degree of British control and manipulation of the revolt, there is no doubt that it depended entirely on the British financial subvention and could not have succeeded without it. By the time of the armistice in 1918, Britain had paid Sharif Husayn over six million pounds sterling in the only acceptable currency - gold sovereigns.<sup>1</sup> The British blockade of the Red Sea coast of Arabia after the Ottoman declaration of war and the ending of subsidies from Istanbul after Husayn's revolt, would in themselves have caused serious convulsions in the economy of the Hijaz. An industrial society would be capable of absorbing such shocks to some extent and cushioning their impact. Furthermore the sudden infusion of a substantial new source of income into an economy capable of sustaining its own growth from within, would largely be absorbed in capital investment and would not be felt directly and immediately by the populace. In a subsistence economy which could barely support itself in normal times, the deprivation caused by the blockade and the prosperity experienced after the influx of massive quantities of British coins, were instantly and powerfully felt by the inhabitants of the Hijaz. Thus, we cannot compare the profit motive as it was perceived by the desert tribesmen as an incentive to take up arms, to army pay in the eyes of an English soldier who is accustomed to a regular and guaranteed source of income. British officers serving in Arabia were not always aware of this distinction. When Major Garland remarked indignantly that the "scandalously over-paid and

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<sup>1</sup>Gerald de Gaury, Rulers of Mecca, London, Harrap, 1951, p. 273. See also Arnold J. Toynbee in Survey of International Affairs, vol 1 (1925), pp. 271-296, esp. p. 273. Zeine, The Struggle for Arab Independence, p. 15, puts the figure at £11 million, total.

well-fed" Hijazis would do nothing to shorten the revolt, but would prefer the war to continue forever,<sup>2</sup> he failed to add that the experience of good pay and food was such a welcome and unexpected palliative to the harshness of desert life that it was not to be surrendered lightly once tasted.

If writers do not ignore the influence of gold entirely, they tend like Antonius and Nutting, to subordinate it to the "power of faith" and to dismiss it in a single sentence.<sup>3</sup> The extent of the British subsidy and the revolt's dependence on it are therefore often not appreciated. Within six months of the Sharif's declaration of independence, there was already a severe shortage of gold in the British coffers in Cairo as a direct result of payments to the Hijaz, and by 1918 the "gold drain" had reached crisis proportions, with Egypt being unable to meet the requirements of the Sharif.<sup>4</sup> By contrast Garland reported from the field that "gold is now so plentiful that the British sovereign may almost be said to be the unit of coinage. The filthiest Arab unearths (the term is no mere *façon de parler*) a bag of gold when making his purchases in the suk, and they pay £50 for a camel as an ordinary procedure."<sup>5</sup> By local standards the funds available to those tribes participating directly in the revolt were enormous, and the immediate result was massive inflation in the price of commodities. Aware that the value of their newly found riches

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<sup>2</sup>A.B. 61, Sept. 1, 1917, p. 362.

<sup>3</sup>Antonius, *op. cit.*, p. 219; Nutting, Lawrence, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup>S.A. 149/3, Wingate to Allenby, Ramlah, Aug. 5, 1918; also 149/5, telegrams 439P, 739M, 1183 and 1260 to Foreign Office; and 149/8, telegram 1333 to Foreign Office.

<sup>5</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 40, Garland to Wilson, Cairo, Mar. 6, 1917.

might suddenly diminish, the tribesmen refused payment in paper currency, and by the end of the war, the British found it necessary to put severe pressure on the merchants of Jiddah and 'Aqabah to disgorge the gold accumulated from their Beduin customers.<sup>6</sup>

From the very beginning there was no lack of candor among those responsible for policy in the Hijaz concerning the necessity for large cash payments to the rebels. Even those, like Sir Mark Sykes, who were the most outspoken proponents of an Arab national cause, admitted that "the success of our policies in Arabia would depend rather on the expenditure of British gold and effort than on native initiative and enthusiasms."<sup>7</sup> The barter of money, supplies and weapons in exchange for allegiance to the revolt was the sine qua non of the Sharif's negotiations with the Hijaz tribes. Referring to his attempts to win over Nuri Sha'lan, paramount chief of the Ruwala tribe and one of the leaders of the powerful 'Anazah tribal confederation, Husayn told Sir Henry McMahon that "we shall send them as much money as we can, in accordance with their request, as money is the only axis on which everything revolves."<sup>8</sup> While the initial British grants were quickly used up

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<sup>6</sup>A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, p. 198; also A.B. 108, Jan. 11, 1919, 1, report by D. G. Hogarth; and F.O. 371/3048, Sir M. Sykes, minute, Feb. 8, 1917.

<sup>7</sup>F.O. 882/3, AP/17/3, minutes of a meeting at the Residency, Cairo May 12, 1917, also Storrs, Memoirs, p. 168 and p. 170.

<sup>8</sup>F.O. 371/2768, p. 256, Husayn verbal message to McMahon, sent McMahon to Foreign Office, Cairo, Apr. 25, 1916; *ibid.*, p. 260, Faysal to Husayn, letter, April, 1916; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 206, report by Husayn Ruhi to Wilson, Mar. 2, 1917. Similar reports are in S.A. 137/5, Intrusive, Cairo, to Governor-General, June 26, 1916; S.A. 137/5, McMahon to Sirdar, June 20, 1916, being report of HMS Fox, June 19, 1916; F.O. 686/6/1, p. 28, Nasir al-Din, intelligence report, Mar. 13, 1917; F.O. 371/2768, p. 83 'Abdallah verbal message to Storrs, undated, probably Feb., 1916; I.O. L. P. & S./10/598. message from Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali al-Birk, reported by 'Turton to Idrisi Sayyid, HMS Northbrook, June 21, 1916, received by wireless telegram from HMS Minto.

in buying the support of the tribes around Mecca and Medina, primarily the Harb, Juhaynah and 'Ataybah, the revolt soon became bogged down with the long siege of Medina and the consequent severe dampening of Arab morale. There were large-scale desertions and a fear that the Turks would mount a rapid offensive to retake Mecca. Only attractive pay and rations would be able to sustain a Beduin army in the field in this difficult period, since the tribesmen, whatever their sentiments, were accustomed to intermittent raiding, and had no experience of protracted warfare. "Money and money only is going to give us the breathing space necessary to equip the Arab armies....," concluded a British report from the field.<sup>9</sup> The stalemate was finally broken with the decision to push northwards rather than attempt to take Medina and again it was the "pay-master" rather than the politician who held the revolt together at this crucial stage.<sup>10</sup> Early in 1917 Husayn asked the British for an increase in his subsidy to help extend the sphere of his operations: "He urges the necessity for immediate steps to bring in the Billi, Huweitat and other powerful tribes of northern Hejaz. For this he requires the sum of £50,000 at once, and 20,000 rifles. He states more money will be necessary as further tribal units are won to the Arab cause."<sup>11</sup>

In almost all cases, the agreement to fight for the Sharif was strictly conditional. Unlike the conscript army of a modern state or

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<sup>9</sup>A.B. 32, Nov. 28, 1916, p. 478; A.B. 1, June 11, 1916, p. 50; A.B. 5, June 18, 1916, p. 47; A.B. 31, Nov. 21, 1916, p. 462; A.B. 17, Aug. 30, 1916, p. 195; Lawrence, Seven Pillars, pp. 66 ff.

<sup>10</sup>A.B. 39, Jan. 19, 1917, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup>I.O. L. P. & S./10/602, McMahon to Foreign Office, Oct. 28, 1916; I.O. L. P. & S./11/117, file 446, Wingate to Foreign Office, Cairo, Jan. 29, 1917.

even the strict discipline of a nationalist guerrilla organization, the commitment was not a total one and implied the right to withdraw from it the moment the central authority ceased to fulfil its side of the bargain, namely the provision of money and supplies. Beduin support for the revolt often appeared like the sale of a commodity rather than an affirmation of ideological principles. If the buyer, whether Faysal or the British, reneged on his payments, the goods in the form of fighting men could be withheld.<sup>12</sup> While British correspondents were apt to describe some tribesmen as "pure mercenaries who swarm to the standard of the biggest briber," Arab informants more sympathetically saw them as "independent" and "free-lance" warriors "seeking their livelihood wherever they may find it."<sup>13</sup> Gold was not only crucial therefore in initially pledging tribes to the Sharif's campaign, for once they had been enrolled, even the success of day to day maneuvers and military operations depended on a constant supply of money to buy cooperation. Individual shaykhs and tribesmen frequently employed obstructionist tactics to extract more money from their employers, refusing to obey orders until they received higher pay. Bargaining and monetary quarrels therefore became a

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<sup>12</sup> F.O. 686/10/1, p. 184, Faysal to Wilson, Wajh, Mar. 27, 1917; ibid., p. 227, report by 2nd Lieut. D.N. Thomson to Wilson, Rabigh, Jan. 5, 1917.

<sup>13</sup> On the Hashid and Baqil tribes: A.B. 49, Apr. 30, 1917, p. 196, Col Jacob; A.B. 66, Oct. 21, 1917; and A.B. Nov. 27, 1917, p. 474 for British report. Also F.O. 371/2770, the Idrisi Sayyid to Turton, dated 27th Sha'ban, 1334. Similar statements are in F.O. 686/10/2, p. 286, Bassett, undated note, probably Dec., 1918; ibid., pp. 280-1, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, Dec. 9, 1918; F.O. 371/2770, Sayyid Mustafa, conversation with G.A. Richardson, Political Officer, Kamaran, sent by Richardson to Military Administrator, Kamaran, June 8, 1916; F.O. 686/10/2, p. 287, report of M.N., Arab agent in Mecca, Dec. 5, 1918; ibid., p. 316, Aden to High Commissioner in Egypt, telegram, Oct. 14, 1918.

common preliminary to even the most minor of military actions.<sup>14</sup>

But the fact that large payments were made to the tribes is in itself insufficient proof for the hypothesis that the desire for gold was a prime motivation for the Beduin to fight the Turks. Bismarck after all fought his wars for the consolidation of the emergent German nation, not with a popular force recruited from the masses, but with a paid army of regular soldiers. What then does the evidence show of cases where the quest for gold on the one hand and the stated objectives of the Arab movement on the other, were in conflict? That material interest and loyalty to Husayn were not entirely synonymous is clear from reports that some shaykhs were not averse to accepting subsidies from both sides. While it might be argued that these enterprising tribes had the ideological advantage of supporting both the Arab cause and the Caliphate, it seems more likely that the profit motive pure and simple guided their actions.<sup>15</sup> More seriously perhaps, large numbers of Arabs were persuaded to work directly against the Sharif's cause and provided the Turks with fighters, camels and intelligence information in exchange for monetary reward.<sup>16</sup> Still others were paid by Ottoman agents for their neutrality and when the revolt

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<sup>14</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, pp. 163, 154, 107, 30, 73, Newcombe to Wilson dispatches, dated respectively Apr. 3, Apr. 16, Apr. 25, July 11, and May 10, 1917, from the field. Also *ibid.*, Capt. Hornby from Abu Raya, May 13, 1917; F.O. 686/6/1, pp. 39-40, Garland to Wilson, Cairo, Mar. 6, 1917.

<sup>15</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 15, Newcombe, report, Mar. 12, 1917; A.B. 46, Mar. 30, 1917, p. 144; and A.B. 39, Jan. 19, 1917, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 91, Joyce to Wilson, intelligence report, Rabigh, Jan 21, 1917; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 223, McMahon to Husayn, sent by Wilson, Sept. 8, 1916; S.A. 139/3, Husayn to High Commissioner, transmitted Wilson to Cairo, Aug. 3, 1916; F.O. 371/3046, file 9237, report by Capt. Ahmed Hayreddin, ADC, to Jemal Pasha, sent Horace Rumbold to Balfour, Berne, Sept. 18, 1917.

was in imminent danger of collapse at the end of 1916, Husayn himself attributed the bad behavior of the Arabs to the distribution of large amounts of money by the Turks to the Juhaynah, Harb and Bili tribes.<sup>17</sup> Early in the revolt an Arab correspondent reported that the distribution of substantial quantities of gold by Enver Pasha to Arab shaykhs near Medina "is one of the main factors that is interfering with the success of the Sherif's movement and [accounts for] the hesitation among many Arabs in Arabia to assemble under his banners."<sup>18</sup> Of course British correspondents inevitably referred to the Turks "bribing" Arabs to serve them, while they themselves simply "paid" their allies, although in the view of Colonel Edouard Brémond, the French representative in Jiddah, the Beduin made no such distinction: "Friends today, enemies tomorrow, if the opportunity for greater profit presents itself,"<sup>19</sup> Needless to say the solution to this problem was pecuniary rather than political, as the Sharif's agent recognized when he asked for "more funds to buy over the Arabs who are being bribed more liberally on the other side."<sup>20</sup> After initial hesitations the British Treasury finally disgorged sufficient funds at the end of 1916 to match the Turkish subsidies.

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<sup>17</sup> F.O. 686/6/1, p. 152, Husayn to Wilson, conversation reported by Capt. Lloyd, Dec. 22, 1916; F.O. 371/2767, Shaykh Urayfan to Storrs, Feb. 26, 1916; and F.O. 686/6/1/ p. 13, Newcombe, report, Mar. 12, 1917.

<sup>18</sup> F.O. 371/2775, Ibrahim Dimitri, report, Aug. 24, 1916.

<sup>19</sup> Général Edouard Brémond, Le Hedjaz dans la guerre mondiale, p. 32; the terms are used this way in F.O. 371/2775, Ibrahim Dimitri, Aug. 24, 1916; F.O. 686/10/1 p. 223, Wilson to Husayn, Sept. 8, 1916; S.A. 139/3, Husayn to High Commissioner, Aug. 3, 1916; A.B. 34, Dec. 11, 1917, p. 519; A.B. 99, Aug. 6, 1918, p. 268; and A.B. 67, Oct. 30, 1917, p. 429.

<sup>20</sup> F.O. 371/2775, Ibrahim Dimitri, report, Aug. 24, 1916.



With few exceptions the Sharif was seen as "more profitable" than the Turks in the early stages of the revolt, because he paid handsomely for captured prisoners, rifles and camels, and provided good pay and food.<sup>21</sup> It was therefore rare that a tribal shaykh had to make a choice between the Sharif's purse and his ideology. But while Husayn was still venerated as a "sultan of great wealth," the potential conflict between loyalty to the 'Arab cause' and personal gain was not really put to the test.<sup>22</sup>

This test came in two stages. The first was marked by the severe crisis in the British gold reserves in Egypt towards the end of 1917 which coincided with the northward spread of the revolt. As Faysal negotiated in Wajh and 'Aqabah, more and more tribes were drawn into the orbit of the Sharif's movement and the number of shaykhs on his payroll increased proportionally. At the same time, the tribesmen refused payment in paper currency, and gold became an ever scarcer commodity, with the Beduin hoarding and refusing to believe that England could ever go short.<sup>23</sup> Something had to give. Because his supplies of gold from the British were not limitless, Husayn adopted the policy of paying only those tribesmen in active service in the field.<sup>24</sup> Many of the southern tribes, who had initially been actively involved in the revolt, suddenly found their sources of income dried up and they defected, turning actively against their

<sup>21</sup>A.B. 31, Nov. 21, 1916, pp. 461-2; F.O. 686/6/2, p. 164, Newcombe to Wilson, Wajh, Apr. 3, 1917; A.B. 66, Oct. 21, 1917, pp. 410-12.

<sup>22</sup> See for example, A.B. 100, Aug. 20, 1918, p. 279.

<sup>23</sup>S.A. 149/3; 149/5; Also A.B. 40, Jan. 29, 1917, pp. 42-44; A.B. 47, Apr. 11, 1917, p. 163; A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, p. 198; and A.B. 108, Jan. 11, 1919, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup>A.B. 67, Oct. 30, 1917, p. 428; A.B. 80, Feb. 26, 1918, pp. 57-60.

former patron. Before the end of 1917 the Harb were refusing to allow Sharifian operations east of Medina and there were frequent reports of convoys and army stores being plundered by rebellious tribesmen claiming arrears of pay.<sup>25</sup> By April of 1918, almost all of the Harb were said to have left 'Ali and "most Juhaynah" to have deserted from 'Abdallah, while tribal sections even on the front line of Faysal's northern army refused to fight until they were paid.<sup>26</sup> The Arab Bulletin added paranthetically to one of its dispatches that neither Husayn nor 'Ali were unduly concerned about the Harb disaffection since it was a convenient lever for them to extract increased subsidies from Britain.<sup>27</sup> The Turks were not slow to exploit these grievances and succeeded in luring a significant number of Beduin from their allegiance to Husayn by offering larger subsidies. It should be noted of course that Arabs on the Turkish side manifested similar signs of discontent when their supplies were late in arriving and when they found themselves short of cash, food and fodder.<sup>28</sup> As ever more tribal groups found themselves outside the ambit of the battle and thereby of the paymaster and as the gold drain became more severe in 1918, it was no longer clear to many tribesmen that their material rewards were compatible with the Sharif's cause, and one report from the field remarked candidly

<sup>25</sup> F.O.686/10/1, pp. 113-14, Bassett to Husayn, strictly private and secret; also A.B. 71, Nov. 27, 1917, p. 473; A.B. 67, Oct. 30, 1917, p. 428; A.B. 70, Nov. 21, 1917, p. 465; A.B. 80, Feb. 26, 1918, p. 58; A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, p. 197; A.B. 110, Apr. 30, 1919, p. 35; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 124, M.N. (Arab agent) to Wilson, Jan. 21, 1918; A.B. 83, Mar. 27, 1918, p. 97.

<sup>26</sup> A.B. 84, Apr. 7, 1918, pp. 111-12; A.B. 82, Mar. 17, 1918, p. 87; A.B. 65, Oct. 8, 1917, p. 401; A.B. 79, Feb. 18, 1918, p. 53; and A.B. 99, Aug. 6, 1918, p. 270.

<sup>27</sup> A.B. 70, Nov. 21, 1917, p. 465.

<sup>28</sup> A.B. 57, July 24, 1917, p. 307.

that "...the distribution of gold is the most effective form of propaganda which either side can undertake."<sup>29</sup>

The second stage, in 1919, was even more serious and marked the beginning of the end of Husayn's brief tenure as the first Arab leader to secure independence from 400 years of Ottoman rule. An already precarious situation was exacerbated by the reduction and threat of complete cessation of the British subsidy after the armistice, and the necessity of consolidating the new state without an external bankroll to help in the process. After the war the Sharif's utter dependence on the British subsidy was revealed with all its glaring contradictions. From the British perspective the huge sums paid out in the war had been justified by military necessity, but what benefit did she receive now in return for her expenditures? The British, having artificially propped up the monarch for their own purposes on the basis of an ideology that was as fluid as the supply of gold, withdrew both their money and their lip-service to the now embarrassing ideology, as soon as it no longer served their interests, abandoning in the process both their king and the 'Arab cause'. The Sharif was caught in an impossible situation. Not only was his power over the Beduin within his territory imperilled by the threat of the discontinuation of the subsidy. But by receiving it in the first place he had aroused the jealousy of his neighboring chiefs in the Peninsula and the resentment of much of the Islamic world which regarded him as the "paid vassal of an infidel government."<sup>30</sup> Little more than a year after the revolt, the state of affairs in the Hijaz was chaotic, with robberies, looting and violence rampant throughout the land. The unsettled state of the country

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<sup>29</sup> A.B. 82, Mar. 17, 1918, p. 88.

<sup>30</sup> F.O. 686/12/2, pp. 51-52, Nasir al-Din to British Agent at Jiddah, Mecca, July 29, 1920.

was almost universally attributed "to the shortage of food and money."<sup>31</sup> Prices of food increased astronomically, and convoys and coastal launches were looted on the roads and in the harbors.<sup>32</sup> For Husayn, the defeat of the Turks was therefore rather a pyrrhic victory, as his support disintegrated more quickly than it had ever coalesced. When generous British assistance was no longer available to subsidize the Hijaz government, centrifugal forces were set in motion and rebellion against the Sharif was rife.

None of the evidence we have examined gives an impression that there was an underlying commitment to the cause of Arab national independence and unity which overcame adversity and was able to counteract the material grievances of the individuals and groups which comprised the Sharif's support. It is misleading to conclude of the Beduin, as Colonel Newcombe did, that "their sole thoughts are money and not war," and it is an oversimplification to classify the allegiance of the tribes by economic criteria alone.<sup>33</sup> There were other important determinants of action which will be examined in succeeding chapters. But if actions are any guide to motivations then we must place gold high on the priority list as an effective inducement to battle. Guarding Turkish supply lines, defecting from the Sharifian armies and plundering convoys were acts which directly hindered the war effort, and indicates that, of the Sharif's retainers, there were many whose adherence to the Arab cause

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<sup>31</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, p. 222, Ayyub Khan, Mecca, intelligence report to Feb. 29, 1920; F.O. 686/12/1, pp. 13-14, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Jiddah, Mar. 3, 1921; *ibid.*, p. 121, Ihsanullah, Mecca, to British Agent, Apr. 29, 1920.

<sup>32</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, pp. 209-210 and 222, Ayyub Khan, intelligence report, Mecca, Mar. 9, 1920 and Feb. 27, 1920 respectively; *ibid.*, p. 144, Ihsanullah, Mecca, to British Agent, Apr. 8, 1920; *ibid.*, p. 55, Nasir al-Din, Mecca, to British Agent, Sept. 18, 1920.

<sup>33</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 30, Newcombe to Wilson, Jaydah, July 11, 1917; A.B.

was "not immutable" but rather a "purchasable commodity."<sup>34</sup> Cash, remarked Colonel H.F. Jacob, was "the tongue of the eloquent and the strong arm of the fighter," and we may certainly conclude that there was a direct correlation between the Sharif's control over and temporary unification of the diverse tribal elements during the revolt, and his manipulation of the purse-strings.<sup>35</sup> "The allegiance of these tribes," wrote Colonel Wilson, "is a very precarious plant whose roots need constant feeding with gold."<sup>36</sup> This conclusion, it must be emphasized, is not a judgment that the Beduin were more "avaricious, rapacious and predatory," than say the British.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, an argument might be made, that as a corporate unit the modern European nation state has taken the pursuit of economic objectives to its extreme, as the history of imperialism indicates. From the perspective of a harsh desert environment, it is perhaps hardly surprising that the "unaccustomed delights of tents, boots, and socks" and the other "luxuries" that British gold could buy in the suk,<sup>38</sup> should have become realistic objectives at the time of the revolt.

Our evidence however leads us to another important conclusion, for the aim of this study is not only to question the assumption that the Arab revolt was an expression of incipient Arab nationalism, but also to trace the roots of the movement in the existing political system of the area.

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86, Apr. 7, 1918, pp. 129 and 132.

<sup>34</sup>A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 105.

, <sup>35</sup>A.B. 49, Apr. 30, 1917, p. 199

<sup>36</sup>A.B. 91, June 4, 1918, p. 180

<sup>37</sup> Wilfred Thesiger, Arabian Sands, New York, Dutton, 1959, p.83.

<sup>38</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 44, Garland to Wilson, Cairo, Mar. 6, 1917.

To that end, the structure within which the material demands of the Beduin were negotiated are equally significant. The temporary and conditional nature of tribal allegiance which we have observed here, and the ability of the tribes to maneuver among the warring parties for their own material advantage, reveals that the ultimate units of authority were segments very much smaller than the nation state or even the Sharifate at Mecca. Tribes, clans and even individuals had a much larger voice in the councils of war than small groups in a modern national army. Neither the British conscript of the First World War nor the Algerian guerrilla forty years later had any semblance of the individual bargaining power of the Hijaz tribesman. Whether formed, as with England, or emerging, as the F.L.N., the nation as a corporate entity demands a commitment beyond the interests of the smaller segments of which it is composed. What the frequently bitter and frustrated dispatches of British officers in the field tell us, is that in a traditional tribal system, the support of the prime organizational units for a larger and still rather elusive and ephemeral concept of Arab nationhood, could not be taken for granted, but had to be negotiated constantly, and that in these negotiations, material objectives figured significantly.

## 2. Rifles.

While the material needs and possessions of the Bedu were minimal, there was one asset which had a value above and beyond any material worth, for it was an integral part of his personality and being. From time immemorial his weapon had been a mark of his dignity, individuality and freedom. Whether it was the dagger or sabre of generations past or the rifle of the modern day, it represented the Bedu's ability both to defend

himself and his family, and to extract revenge for the sullied honor of his clan. "All tribesmen" wrote Thesiger, "like to wear a dagger or carry a rifle, even in peaceful surroundings, as a mark of their manhood, as a sign of their independence;...the safety of their herds, even their lives, may at any moment depend upon their rifles."<sup>39</sup> Rather than being an abstract theoretical model of behavior, this code of conduct was a direct result of the nature of tribal existence in the ecological conditions of Arabia. Settled, rural or urban populations have never felt the same need as desert nomads to display their weapons because they were more dependent on the power of central authority both as ruler and protector. In the desert the tribe was the ultimate authority and, while constantly seeking security by adhesion to a powerful amir, the Beduin nevertheless depended in the last resort on themselves for self-defense and the protection of their interests. The tribes and clans of Arabia were not only <sup>the</sup> principal political units of the Peninsula but also the only lasting form of military organization and activity.

Given this system of tribal authority in the Arabian desert, the opportunity to acquire good European rifles took on a particular significance. Within the first six months of the revolt Britain had supplied an estimated 54,000 rifles and 20 million rounds of ammunition, and the demand appeared to be insatiable.<sup>40</sup> All four brothers submitted

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<sup>39</sup>Thesiger, op.cit. p. 117; also *ibid.*, p. 35; Alois Musil, The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins, New York, The American Geographical Society, 1928, pp. 131-134; Charles M. Doughty, Travels in Arabia Desert, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1920, pp. 504-5; H.R.P. Dickson, The Arab of the Desert, London, Allen and Unwin, 1949, pp. 95-6 and chapter 26.

<sup>40</sup>F.O. 686/53, pp. 27-29, Lt.-Col. G.W.V. Holdich, Dec. 4, 1916, report of G.O.C.'s comments at Cairo conference between Britain and

repeated and urgent requests for further shipments, complaining that they were unable to make any progress and bring new tribes into the sphere of the Sharif's control until they were able to supply them with weapons.<sup>41</sup> However by March 1917 Cairo was faced with a severe shortage of rifles to accompany its steadily worsening gold drain, and could no longer keep up with the Sharif's requests. An initial abundance had enabled the revolt to expand and to draw more tribes into its orbit, which in turn created an ever greater demand. As supplies were depleted and a scarcity of resources resulted at the British end, frustration and disappointed expectations in the Hijaz produced tension and irritation between the alliance partners. Britain's irritation at the seemingly endless demands for more rifles, and the Sharif's annoyance at delays experienced in their delivery, resulted from misplaced expectations on both sides. Some British officials naively assumed that 60,000 rifles would create an army of equivalent number to fight the Turks. When, by the end of 1916, no such army was in evidence, Sir Ronald Storrs complained to Husayn that the weapons were not being put to proper use.<sup>42</sup> By June 1917, 71,000 rifles

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France, Nov. 29, 1916; also F.O. 882/3, p. 144, IM/17/1, Fuad al-Khatib, undated, probably Jan., 1917; A.B. 47, Apr. 11, 1917, p. 163; A.B. 36, Dec. 26, 1916, p. 554, gives figure as 60,000; also F.O. 686/33, p. 92, shipments of rifles and ammunition in Oct., 1916.

<sup>41</sup>F.O. 686/34, p. 83, Husayn to Under-secretary for Foreign Affairs, Fuad, 3rd Jamad 2, 1335, (=Mar. 27, 1917); F.O. 686/33, pp. 74-75, Husayn to Wilson, Aug. 19, 1916; ibid., p. 160, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Sept. 5, 1916; ibid., p. 25, Wilson to Faysal, Jiddah, Nov. 15, 1916; ibid., p. 35 Wilson to 'Abdallah (telephone), Nov. 9, 1916, and 'Abdallah to Wilson Nov. 9, 1916; F.O. 686/34, pp. 84-85, Wilson to Husayn, Mar. 29, 1917.

<sup>42</sup>A.B. 36, Dec. 26, 1916, p. 554, Storrs interview with Husayn at Jiddah, Dec. 11 and 12, 1916; F.O. 686/34, p. 139, Lt.-Col. Pearson to Husayn, Jiddah, Jan. 22, 1917.



and over 40,000 million rounds of ammunition had been sent to the Sharif for use in the Hijaz, and, commented the High Commissioner, "the number of Arab troops in the field is by no means as great as this. It is therefore difficult to understand Your Highness's statement to the effect that Mecca and the country around is now devoid of any arms."<sup>43</sup> What was happening to the rifles, and why were they not all in active service against the Turks? On the one hand, there were never enough weapons and it is impossible to doubt the genuineness and urgency of Faysal and 'Abdallah's requests for more. On the other hand, it was reported that "the country is simply stiff with rifles of all sorts, from blunderbusses to H.V. British rifles."<sup>44</sup>

What the British officials failed to understand was that the purpose of the rifles in the eyes of the tribesmen was not solely for use against their Turkish "oppressors." According to the European conception of a regular army, weapons are the property of the state, to be surrendered at the army's convenience. The gun is not the private property of the soldier but is issued to him for a specific purpose to be used as the state ordains and against whom the state specifies. Any unauthorized use of the weapon is considered criminal. Not unnaturally, the British therefore expected that since the Arabs were fighting for one cause, it should have been a comparatively simple matter to transfer the rifles from one theatre of operations to another as different tribal groupings were brought into the fight in their own territories. However when there were suddenly severe shortages of weaponry at Wajh and 'Aqabah, the

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<sup>43</sup>F.O. 686/35, p. 52, High Commissioner to Husayn, June 29, 1917.

<sup>44</sup>S.A. 146/6, unsigned handwritten letter to Wingate, Hella, Oct. 24, 1917.

British were forced to admit that it was "very hard to recover rifles once issued" since the Beduin refused to part with them.<sup>45</sup> As the revolt moved northwards, most of the Harb, Juhaynah and 'Ataybah Beduin returned to their own territories, taking their rifles with them and leaving none for the Huwaytat, Ruwala and others who were now coming in to Faysal. By the end of the war Husayn himself was conceding that he had no control over the tribesmen to whom rifles had been issued and that large supplies of British arms and ammunition were still in the hands of the Harb and could not be collected.<sup>46</sup> This problem was not, it should be noted, simply the product of irregular as opposed to regular warfare, since guerilla wars of national liberation are frequently fought with captured weapons. Rather it arose because the tribesmen regarded their arms as legitimate prizes of battle which were theirs as rewards and payment for supporting the revolt.

The provision of the rifle itself was therefore a direct inducement to the Bedu to join the Sharif's movement and many shaykhs in their correspondence and negotiations with the amir<sup>s</sup> made their adhesion to the cause conditional on their ability to supply their tribesmen with weapons.<sup>47</sup> Prior to the revolt, good rifles were at a premium in the Hijaz and difficult

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<sup>45</sup> A.B. 47, Apr. 11, 1917, p. 163.

<sup>46</sup> A.B. 108, Jan. 11, 1919, p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> I.O. L.P. & S./10/598, Director of Military Intelligence, Egypt, to Director of Military Intelligence, London, Aug. 12, 1916, containing report by Faysal; F.O. 371/2775, Wilson to McMahon, Jiddah, Sept. 1, 1916, report of Wilson's interview with Faysal at Yanbu'; A.B. 20, Sept. 14, 1916, p. 241; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 172, Newcombe to Wilson, Apr. 4, 1917; I.O. L.P. & S./10/598, Turton to Idrisi Sayyid, HMS Northbrook, June 21, 1916; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 227, 2nd Lieut. D.N. Thomson to Wilson, Rabigh, Jan. 5, 1917.

to obtain. Many of the tribesmen were said to have "only old guns and others only flint locks" when they joined the movement.<sup>48</sup> But in the beginning Arab observers were perhaps more keenly aware than their British counterparts that many of the Beduin intended merely to use this unprecedented opportunity to obtain a good rifle for free, and had no desire to take part in the war. Husayn Ruhi received a report that "most of the Arabs who were armed by the Sherif took the rifles and fled away" back to their homes, without ever taking the field against the Turks.<sup>49</sup> And at one point in exasperation, the Hijazi Minister of War, Sa'id 'Ali Pasha, denounced the Beduin as a "cowardly rabble" who dispersed into the desert as soon as they had received their rifles.<sup>50</sup> The provision of weapons therefore had no relation to the number of troops in the field at any one time, a process which, taken to its ultimate conclusion, implied that Britain would soon be arming every Hijazi tribesman through whose territory the Sharif's movement passed.

However despite the actual shortages of arms at the front, there were enough European rifles in circulation, whether supplied or captured, for a profitable weapons trade to spring up. As early as September 1916, there were reports of gun-running from Yanbu', Rabigh and other small harbors on the Hijaz coast. Since these were the points of delivery from Suez, it was an easy matter for some of the rifles to be diverted, being taken then on small dhows to 'Asir, Yemen and even the African coast of

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<sup>48</sup>F.O. 371/2775, Wilson to McMahon, Jiddah, Sept 1, 1916.

<sup>49</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 180, Ruhi, Jiddah, Oct. 25, 1916.

<sup>50</sup>Quoted in Storrs, Memoirs, p. 190

the Red Sea.<sup>51</sup> Having begun on a fairly modest scale, the arms trade was burgeoning by 1918, as the northward movement of the revolt left tens of thousands of rifles in the hands of tribesmen who were no longer actively engaged in fighting the Turks. Over 300,000 rounds of ammunition and many rifles were bought by the Amir ibn Sa'ud himself both from Hijazi Arabs who brought the weapons across the border and from Najdi tribesmen who had joined the Sharif's armies and then returned to their own country, In addition, Philby reported that the Harb were smuggling large quantities of weapons and ammunition from the Hijaz to Kuwayt through Najd, and that the Najdi tribesmen themselves were being armed with the Sharif's rifles, an ironic situation since they were soon turned against Husayn himself.<sup>52</sup> Sharif 'Ali told his father that he had given "strict instructions" to his troops not to sell their weapons, but an Arab informant who had been in 'Ali's camp reported that "all the Baghdadi officers with 'Ali trade in the Army supplies and equipment right and left, and are enriching themselves as fast as possible by this means."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p 234, Teppetts to Wilson, received Sept. 27, 1916; F.O. 686/53, pp. 27-29, Lt.-Col G.W.V. Holdich, minute on Cairo conference between Britain and France of Nov. 29, 1916, Dec. 4, 1916.

<sup>52</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 18, Bassett to Husayn, Jiddah, 11.1.37, (=Oct. 17, 1918), forwarding letter High Commissioner to Husayn; F.O. 686/10/2, p. 355, Arab Bureau to Bassett, Aug. 27, 1918, sending report by Philby.

<sup>53</sup>F.O. 686/38, p. 244, 'Ali to Husayn, 25.5.36 (=Mar. 8, 1918); *ibid.*, p. 236, British Agent, Jiddah, to Director, Arab Bureau, being report from Nuri Bey Kuayri al-Maghrabi; and A.B. 108, Jan. 11, 1919, p. 8.

By the time the armistice was being signed, British weapons had spread to every corner of the Arabian Peninsula. No supply could ever satisfy this demand in a political system where the rifle represented both a means of livelihood and a social badge of independence, for in the extreme, Britain would eventually be arming not only Hijazi tribesmen in the staging area of the revolt, as we observed earlier, but Beduin hundreds of miles distant who had no connection with the Sharif's movement at all. The struggle between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud as well as most of the minor inter-Arab clashes in the Peninsula following the war, were fought and resolved with British weapons. In the end Britain was drawn into a dilemma that confronts all the major arms suppliers today. Wilson was probably correct in asserting that the massive influx of rifles and weapons and their almost indiscriminate distribution to the Sharif's tribal contingents was a powerful inducement to fight the Turks and a means of promoting a temporary unity among the disparate tribes. But the result, as in the Middle East today and in most areas where superpower intervention in regional conflicts has provided an extensive arms supply to the local feudatories, was to raise the stakes in the existing power struggles and thereby to exacerbate rather than ameliorate the internal divisions.

### 3. Plunder

Furthermore, it is the nature of the Bedouin to plunder whatever other people possess. Their sustenance lies wherever the shadow of their lances falls. They recognize no limit in taking the possessions of other people. Whenever their eyes fall upon some property, furnishings, or utensils, they take them. When they acquire superiority and royal authority, they have complete power to plunder as they please.

Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah<sup>54</sup>

No description of the Beduin life style can omit the concept of the "ghazzu," which may loosely be defined as "raiding." Long before the advent of Islam and the pillaging of pilgrims on their way to the Holy Cities, merchants were being plundered by Beduin raiders on the caravan routes of Arabia. So characteristic was the ghazzu of the Peninsula and so integrated as an institution into the economic life of the desert that it was part of the tribesman's self-definition and sense of being.<sup>55</sup> Of course its frequency and indeed its very existence were directly related to economic and geographic conditions. The ghazzu was as endemic to the desert as the drought and as frequent an experience as economic hardship. It was a product of the most basic fact of economic life in Arabia, the dichotomy between the desert and the sown. Indeed it is the interplay between the "desert life" and the "sedentary culture" which lies at the root of ibn Khaldun's theory of dynastic change.<sup>56</sup> While this is not the place to explore that relationship through history, it should merely be noted here that, leaving aside the issues of tribal organization and blood-feud which

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<sup>54</sup>Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, one volume edition, abridged by N.J. Dawood, translated by Franz Rosenthal, Bollingen, 1967, p. 118.

<sup>55</sup>Thesiger, op. cit., p. 83; Musil, op. cit., pp. 537-8.

<sup>56</sup>Ibn Khaldun, op. cit., pp. 136ff. This relationship will be considered in chapter 6, section 1.

will be discussed later, the immediate motive of the raid was the acquisition of food, money, supplies, rifles and animals. That the ghazzu was directly related to the economic and demographic conditions of the Beduin is further indicated by the fact that it was an institution throughout the Middle East. Wherever tribal society and desert economy coexisted, Beduin raids and plunder were a commonplace which kept townsfolk, travelers and government officials constantly alert. During the war, the British sources reported raiding and looting in every part of the Arab world in which they were involved, from North Africa to Aden and from Mesopotamia to Central Arabia, the tribes taking advantage of the unrest created by the war to plunder to their heart's content.<sup>57</sup> A Beduin proverb proclaimed unambiguously:

He who feels himself strong is a robber,  
he who feels himself weak, a beggar.<sup>58</sup>

There can be little doubt that the tribesmen of the Hijaz looked on the Sharif's revolt against the Turks at least to some degree as officially sanctioned raiding and looting. The British sources tell us not only that raiding took place, but that the Beduin "love" plunder, and that when booty is the objective "they will act like friends."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See for example S.A. 135/7, Maxwell to Wingate, Cairo, Dec. 25, 1915 (Senussi); F.O. 882/2, AP/16/1, Col. Jacob, Mar. 14, 1916 (southern Arabia); I.O. L.P. & S./10/598, Cairo to D.I.D., Aug. 15, 1916 (central Arabia); F.O. 686/10/1, p. 99, Political, Baghdad, to Arab Bureau, Cairo, June 5, 1918 (Mesopotamia and Syria).

<sup>58</sup> F.O. 882/3, p. 113, HM/16/1, May 3, 1916, report of Alois Musil, 1910.

<sup>59</sup> A.B. 32, Nov. 28, 1916, p. 479; A.B. 60, Aug. 20, 1916, p. 351; A.B. 66, Oct. 21, 1917, p. 413; A.B. 50, May 13, 1917, p. 217; F.O. 686/39, p. 245, 'Abdallah to Husayn, G.10.36 (=July 13, 1918); S.A. 148/2, War Office to Arab Bureau, Jan. 25, 1918; F.O. 686/6/1, pp. 35, 59 and 88.

Attacks on Turkish trains, convoys and outposts often produced rich dividends in gold, grain, rifles and horses, and we occasionally read of such raids taking place by tribesmen acting quite independently of any higher authority.<sup>60</sup> While a few British advisers like Lawrence managed to accept the desire to plunder for what it was and to turn it to good use, most of the officers in the field could not reconcile what they saw as "greed" and "avarice"<sup>61</sup> with the stated aims of the revolt. In his report of the capture of Wajh, Major Bray was outraged that of the 500 Arabs who took part in the attack, 100 dropped out and did nothing, 300 looted the town, and only 100 did any fighting.<sup>62</sup>

Again it might be argued that looting a Turkish convoy does not deny the cause of Arab liberation. If in harrying a Turkish retreat, the Rahalah Harb managed to lift 400 camels, or if a group of Beduin managed to pilfer a flock of sheep from the Turks,<sup>63</sup> then the interests of the revolt were still being served while rewarding its adherents. There were however many cases where the pursuit of plunder actually hindered the progress of the struggle and British officials frequently complained that they were unable to press home an attack or occupy a Turkish position

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<sup>60</sup> Nutting, Lawrence, p. 72 and elsewhere; F.O. 686/36, pp. 40-41, Faysal to Husayn, undated, probably end Sept. or beginning Oct., 1917; A.B. 77, Jan. 27, 1918, pp. 30,31; A.B. 74, Dec. 24, 1917, p. 513; A.B. 83, Mar. 27, 1918, p. 93; A.B. 85, Apr. 15, 1918, p.118; A.B. 87, Apr. 30, 1918, p. 142; A.B. 89, May 14, 1918, p. 159; and A.B. 93, June 18, 1918, p. 206. Also A.B. 42, Feb. 15, 1917, p.73.

<sup>61</sup> F.O. 686/6/2, Newcombe to Wilson, report Apr. 25 to May 2, 1917; A.B. 67, Oct. 30, 1917, p. 430; A.B. 49, Apr. 30, 1917, p. 199. For a trenchant criticism of Lawrence's position on the subject, see Richard Aldington, Lawrence of Arabia, London, Collins, 1955, pp. 208-9.

<sup>62</sup> A.B. 41, Feb. 6, 1917, pp. 66-69; and N.N.E. Bray, Shifting Sands London, 1934, Chapter 9, esp. p. 118.

<sup>63</sup> F.O. 686/6/1, p. 167, intelligence report, Dec. 28, 1916, *ibid.*



because the Beduin fled into the desert as soon as they were laden with loot.<sup>64</sup> "A Bedouin force no longer exists when plunder had been obtained," wrote Lawrence, "since each man only cares to get off home with it."<sup>65</sup> Probably the largest single desertion of the entire revolt occurred when more than 5,000 'Ataybah with 'Abdallah pillaged a Turkish convoy carrying £20,000 in gold, and absconded with the booty.<sup>66</sup> Aside from the reports of Beduin abandoning the fight for plunder, there were also several instances of raiding directed against friendly forces.<sup>67</sup> And sometimes the preoccupation with looting actually resulted in Sharifian reverses. Early in the revolt for example, the 'Ataybah tribesmen who were stationed at Qunfidhah fired the market and deserted the Sharif, enabling the Turks to take over the town the following day.<sup>68</sup>

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p. 124, Lawrence to Wilson, Yanbu', Jan. 8, 1917; F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 215-16, Faysal to Capt. Bray (telephone), Jan. 13, 1917; A.B. 43, Feb. 28, 1917, p. 96; A.B. 104, Sept. 24, 1918, p. 330.

<sup>64</sup>A.B. 65, Oct. 8, 1917, p. 403; Lawrence, Seven Pillars, pp. 128-9, pp. 368ff, and p. 470; A.B. 79, Feb. 18, 1918, pp. 52-3; A.B. 59, Aug. 12, 1917, p. 338.

<sup>65</sup>A.B. 65, Oct. 8, 1917, p. 403.

<sup>66</sup>On Jan. 13, 1917. See Lawrence, Seven Pillars, p. 321; Aldington, op. cit., p. 210; F.O. 686/6/1, p. 88, Vickery to Joyce, Jan. 21, 1917; ibid., p. 59, Lawrence to Wilson, Wajh, Jan. 1917, sent from Cairo, Feb. 28, 1917; ibid., p. 35, Meccan agent's report, Mar. 4, 1917, via Ruhi, Jiddah, Mar. 12, 1917.

<sup>67</sup>A.B. 99, Aug. 6, 1918, p. 271; F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 131-3, Bassett to French Military Mission, Jiddah, Oct. 26, 1917, and 'Abd al-Majid Farid to Wilson, Yanbu' Oct. 24, 1917; A.B. 50, May 13, 1917, p. 219; A.B. 90, May 24, 1918, p. 170; F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 123-5, M.N. (Arab informant) to Wilson, Jan. 21, 1918 and Jan. 24, 1918; ibid., Wilson to Director of Arab Bureau, Jiddah, Jan. 31, 1918; ibid., p. 117, M.N. to Wilson, Mar. 10, 1918; ibid., Ruhi to Wilson, Mar. 9, 1918; A.B. 47, Apr. 11, 1917, p. 167; A.B. 95, July 2, 1918, p. 233, report by Leachman; A.B. 32, Nov. 28, 1916, p. 490; A.B. 35, Dec. 18, 1916, p. 541; A.B. 44, Mar. 12, 1917, p. 117; A.B. 44, Mar. 12, 1917, p. 122; and F.O. 686/6/1, p. 59, Lawrence to Wilson, sent by Cairo, Feb. 28, 1917.

<sup>68</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./10/598, Cairo to D.I.D., Aug. 15, 1916; A.B. 37, Jan. 4, 1917, p. 2; see also chapter 11, section 2, on Qunfidhah.

But perhaps the most startling revelation on the subject, which I have not seen reported in any of the secondary literature on the revolt, is the account of the Arab entry into Medina after the surrender of the Ottoman garrison under Fakhri Pasha in January 1919. Perhaps somewhat reluctantly, six months after the event, the British sources admitted that 4,800 buildings of absent Medina residents, which had been sealed by the Turks, were broken open and their furniture and belongings stolen. "The natives of Medina," alleged a report by Egyptian Colonel Sadiq Bey, "lost more during the first 12 days of the Arab occupation than they did during the two years it was in the hands of Fakhri Pasha."<sup>69</sup> The report, conveniently lost by the amirs for several months, stated that only one-eighth of the town's houses were not pillaged. Considerations other than the expulsion of the Turks were clearly motivating the Arabs who entered the town.

Most Beduin raids however are difficult to evaluate in terms of the pro and anti-Turkish sympathies of the tribesmen. During the war there was ample opportunity for plunder at the expense of the 'official' enemy. It was an added inducement to join the Sharif's movement against the Turks, a supplementary bonus as it were, to their receipt of British money, food and rifles. Since they could now get all of these, as well as camels and livestock in one fell swoop in a single raid on an Ottoman convoy or train, the opportunities afforded by the revolt were irresistible. As Robert Graves remarks, the tribesmen "would have liked the war to last another ten years."<sup>70</sup> But with the

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<sup>69</sup>A.B. 112, June 24, 1919, p. 91; A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 127.

<sup>70</sup>Robert Graves, Lawrence and the Arabs, London, Jonathan Cape, 1927 p. 108

Turks defeated, the ghazzia were once more directed against other Arabs, the struggle between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud providing the new framework for much of the intertribal raiding and plunder.<sup>71</sup> Even before the war, Alois Musil, in 1910, had described extensive looting among the tribes and raids against Ottoman outposts in the northern Hijaz in remarkably similar terms to the evidence on the revolt itself.<sup>72</sup> If these reports yield any consistent data, they show the ghazzu as representative of an ancient and indigenous political system in which independent tribal groupings pursued their own material interests at the expense of the settled areas and of each other, with little reference to any outside or overarching authority. The latter could influence the parameters of tribal action but not its content, the characteristics of traditional segmental opposition being manifested here in economic terms. "Tribal raids," concluded Major Garland, "will never go out of fashion."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, pp. 105, 137-8; and 100, reports of raids and looting on the Hijaz-Najd border by Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, dated May 19, Apr. 17, and May 29, 1920, respectively; also F.O. 686/12/1, p. 43, Nasir al-Din to British Agent, Mecca, Jan. 10, 1921; ibid., p. 67, Nasir al-Din to British Agent, Mecca, Nov. 16, 1920, ibid., p. 45, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, Jan. 9, 1921.

<sup>72</sup>F.O. 882/3, pp. 125-9, HM/16/1, May 3, 1916, Alois Musil report, 1910.

<sup>73</sup>A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 106.

## WIDER ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

1. Property and Markets.

While the direct pursuit of material goods, whether in the form of money, rifles or plunder, was closely related to the economic conditions of the Hijaz tribesmen, the effect of the subsistence level economy on their actions made itself felt in subtler ways also. No less important as a motive for joining or abstaining from the revolt was the issue of which side controlled the lands and markets on which the Beduin depended for their existence. When Antonius maintains that the Beduin "had taken an oath...to 'hold independence dearer than family, property, or life itself,'" <sup>74</sup> he is applying the rhetoric of such popular movements of national liberation as we have seen in China, Algeria or Vietnam to an entirely different situation. Such evidence as the British sources supply does not indicate a willingness on the part of the tribesmen to suffer economic deprivation or to sacrifice their personal interests for the 'Arab cause.'

The protection of family and property was probably the first objective of the Hijaz tribesmen, and when this conflicted with the aim of Arab independence, their priorities were not in accordance with Antonius' oath of allegiance. When Zayd fled an Ottoman counteroffensive in Wadi Safrah early in the revolt, the Arabs abandoned him and ran to rescue their families and property in the threatened villages. <sup>75</sup> And with Faysal's simultaneous retreat into Yanbu' an evaluation from the field confirmed that the Juhaynah and Harb would probably not fight if the Turks controlled their valuable palm-groves and threatened to cut them down. <sup>76</sup> With

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<sup>74</sup>Antonius, op.cit., p. 220.

<sup>75</sup>A.B. 41, Feb. 6, 1917, p. 61

<sup>76</sup>A.B. 35, Dec. 18, 1916, p. 535; A.B. 31, Nov. 21, 1916, p.464;

the Banu Salim Harb economically dependent on Wadi Safrah and the Juhaynah dependent on Wadi Yanbu', Ottoman control of these areas would serve to detach the two groups from the revolt. Thus we find for example some Banu Salim attached to the Sharif and some to the Turks according to where their palm groves lay. From the northern front, a revealing letter from Fahad ibn Hadhdhal, paramount chief of the 'Amarat, to Nuri Sha'lan of the Ruwala, indicated a similar concern. Fahad said he could not join the Sharif lest the Turks should seize his lands, but that he would join if the British offered him equivalent lands.<sup>77</sup> "We shall hold him and his Amarat more firmly through his material interests than by any sentimental tie," concluded a British correspondent.<sup>78</sup>

Possibly the greatest barrier to enrolling several of the northern tribes in the revolt, was Ottoman control of their markets. It was considerably easier for Faysal to obtain the suffrage of tribes on the coast or with access to the sea than of those further inland, for with the help of British ships, he could promise the former admission to the Sharifian markets and the guaranteed provision of foodstuffs and staples. But while the Turks were able to operate the Hijaz Railroad and bring supplies to al'Ala, the 70,000 Ruwala, Muhalaf and Wuld 'Ali of the 'Anazah confederation were dependent on them for their food and would take no action in support of the Sharif. Graves notes that Nuri Sha'lan was "at the Turks' mercy...they could blockade his province from the north."<sup>79</sup> The fact that the Hijaz was a subsistence economy is here demonstrably important in considering the adhesion of tribes to the

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<sup>77</sup>A.B. 45, Mar. 23, 1917, p. 133.

<sup>78</sup>A.B. 52, May 31, 1917, pp. 251, 259.

<sup>79</sup>Graves, op. cit., p. 179; On Nuri's dilemma, see F.O. 686/6/1,

Sharif's cause. Their very livelihood depended on their access to the markets, and the Turkish restriction of supplies was a powerful lever to control the allegiance of the Beduin.<sup>80</sup> Inland, the Hijaz railroad was the crucial supply route for both Turks and Arabs, and until it was finally cut in April, 1918, the Turks maintained their hold on the Arabs in this area.<sup>81</sup> Husayn's own interest in Syria and Mesopotamia was probably dictated more by his concern to extend his authority over the tribesmen in his own domain than by any cherished dream of Arab union and nationhood. "Whoever holds the markets in the cultivated provinces," wrote Gertrude Bell, "must ultimately control [the] nomads and oasis dwellers."<sup>82</sup> From Mecca alone the Sharif could never hold the north-eastern tribes who had traditionally sought protection from whichever power dominated the fertile lands to their north. That mastery of the Red Sea coast was not enough is seen by the fact that despite Faysal's conquest of Wajh and 'Aqabah, the Ruwala and other inland tribes did not join the amir until he had pushed well into southern Syria and until supplies no longer flowed down the Hijaz railroad.

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intelligence report, Dec. 28, 1916; *ibid.*, p. 109, Lawrence to Wilson, Jan. 8, 1917, A.B. 32, Nov. 28, 1916, p. 490.

<sup>80</sup> For other tribes similarly affected, see A.B. 39, Jan. 19, 1917, p. 28; A.B. 42, Feb. 15, 1917, p. 82; A.B. 51, May 22, 1917, p. 246; A.B. 65, Oct. 8, 1917, pp. 398 and 407.

<sup>81</sup> Military Operations, Egypt and Palestine. From June, 1917, to the End of the War, Vol. 2, compiled by Capt. Cyril Falls, London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930, pp. 407-8; also Aldington, *op.cit.* pp. 218, 249, and 265-6.

<sup>82</sup> F.O. 371/2768, p. 516, Bell to Lord Robert Cecil, Cairo, Dec. 20, 1915.

### The Red Sea Blockade

So central was the control of markets that the Sharif's initial bid for support in the Hijaz and the very launching of the revolt itself, depended to a large extent upon this economic factor. We have seen that the main inland supply route as far south as Medina was the Hijaz Railroad. The coastal areas and Mecca itself were however supplied by sea, mainly through Jiddah. There was no real trade route linking the western and central Hijaz by land to any major source of supply, and both the provision of necessities and the pilgrim traffic which constituted the only profitable resource of the province, depended at the time of the war, largely on British ships. In an astute political maneuver, the Sharif manipulated this economic fact to his own advantage and secured the support which enabled his initial thrust against the Turks to succeed. With the opening of hostilities against the Ottoman Empire in 1914, Britain had blockaded the Red Sea coast as enemy territory, allowing trade only with ports controlled by the Idrisi Sayyid who had proved his enmity against the Turks and signed a treaty with England in April 1915.<sup>83</sup> By mid-1915, the British action was causing considerable hardship in the Hijaz consequent partly upon the virtual cessation of the pilgrimage, and was judged to be "alienating" the Arabs. Tribes were resentful of the embargo's lack of distinction between friend and foe, and policy makers in Cairo and London recognized that they were harming potential allies. As the possibility of active Arab cooperation against the Ottoman Empire began to be

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<sup>83</sup>Treaty dated Apr. 30, 1915. Text in I.O. L.P. & S./10/638, Major-General D.G.L. Shaw, Political Resident, Aden, to Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign and Political Department, May 1, 1915.

seriously considered later in 1915, Britain decided unilaterally to lift the blockade, producing an immediate and positive effect in the Hijaz."<sup>84</sup>

It was therefore with considerable surprise that Cairo received a request from Mecca in April 1916 for an immediate and total blockade of the Hijaz coast. Although the Sharif argued variously that the action was necessary in order to prevent communication between the Sudan and Arabia, to preempt the landing of Germans on the coast, and to stop money being exported to the Turks by sea, these excuses were rather lame and convinced no one.<sup>85</sup> Unable to divine the Sharif's real intentions in the matter, and afraid to jeopardize her improved position among the Arabs, Britain hesitated to put the embargo into effect. This hesitation annoyed the Sharif who continued to press the matter with increasing urgency, although British documents a month after the initial request still expressed a frank puzzlement as to the motives underlying it, describing Husayn's stated reasons as "somewhat paradoxical and difficult of comprehension."<sup>86</sup> What then could the Sharif have intended by an action which was clearly designed to produce shortages and cause suffering among his own people? When Britain

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<sup>84</sup>S.A. 134/6, Aden to High Commissioner, May 18, 1915; F.O. 882/2, p. 194, AP/16/1, Col. Jacob, Mar. 14, 1916; F.O. 371/2767, G.S.S., Khartoum, Jan. 25, 1916, report of messenger 'G'.

<sup>85</sup>F.O. 371/2768, pp. 92 and 94, two telegrams, McMahon to Foreign Office, both dated Apr. 12, 1916; *ibid.*, pp. 116-7, Husayn to McMahon, undated, probably April, 1916; *ibid.*, pp. 300 and 302, Husayn to High Commissioner, Apr. 19 and 24, 1916.

<sup>86</sup>F.O. 371/2773, Secretary etc., Simla, to Secretary to the Government of Bombay, Political Department, May 9, 1916; F.O. 371/2768, p. 146, Viceroy, Government of India, to Secretary of State, Apr. 22, 1916; *ibid.*, p. 296, McMahon to Grey, May 10, 1916.



acceded to the request and reimposed its blockade in May, Husayn affected to have nothing to do with it. In a proclamation to the Arabs which illustrates the danger of accepting official explanations at their face value, Britain stated that the embargo was necessary in order to prevent food and supplies from reaching the enemy. British policy considerations notwithstanding, this was not the reason for the blockade, for there was never any doubt that it had been "instituted at the urgent and repeated request of the Sherif himself."<sup>87</sup> Despite its rhetorical embellishments, the proclamation's acceptance of total responsibility on Britain's part is primarily noteworthy as an example of the divergence between ideology and interest which emerges throughout this thesis.

What Husayn hoped to accomplish in a convoluted but brilliant way, was to gain the support of large numbers of Hijazis, over whom he had hitherto exercised a peripheral and tenuous influence, by establishing himself in one stroke as the key to their very livelihood. While he exercised no economic leverage, he had little hope of weaning either tribesmen or town dwellers away from an Ottoman authority which had provided both subsidies and supplies to the Hijaz for centuries. Furthermore, it was inadequate for his own purposes that Britain and the Ottoman Empire directly controlled the markets and supply routes and that he himself presented no economic alternative upon whose beneficence his people might rely. His plan was to allow a month or more for the threat of hardship produced by the blockade to take effect, and then to present himself as the means by which relief could be achieved and prosperity restored. Since the block-

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<sup>87</sup>F.O. 371/2773, McMahon to Foreign Office, Cairo, June 3, 1916; the proclamation is in F.O. 371/2768, pp. 183-4, McMahon to Foreign Office, May 2, 1916.

ade would then be lifted as a direct response to his revolt, the Sharif would now be the immediate guarantor of access to markets and the receipt of supplies. Hijazis would then depend on the success of his movement to prevent Britain from reimposing the blockade, and they would be encouraged by a perception of their own economic interests, to give him their support. It was a clever move and it succeeded, for the Sharif had manipulated both Britain and his own people to his own advantage. Whether British officials remained unaware of this political maneuver is hard to gauge, but two things are certainly clear. Husayn deliberately withheld his real purpose from the British because, by making the lifting of the blockade contingent upon his own action, he was in fact depriving his ally of the economic initiative. And, there is nothing in any of the British sources that indicates a cognizance of the Sharif's motives prior to the revolt.

That the tactic worked is confirmed by Ottoman and French accounts linking the effects of the blockade directly to the Sharif's uprising. Bimbashi Mehmed Ziya Bey, the acting governor and commander of the Ottoman garrison at Mecca, saw the blockade as the single most important action in arousing popular support for the revolt.<sup>88</sup> As the British had announced in May that the blockade was aimed only at the Turks, the local populace began to exhibit signs of dissatisfaction and anti-Government agitation. According to the governor, the Arabs felt that if they expelled the Turks they would receive British protection, and restore the crucial supply lines from the Red Sea. The irony of the situation of course was that, probably unbeknownst to Britain itself, the action was politically aimed not at the Turks but at the Arabs, and that economically, an embargo

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<sup>88</sup>A.B. 21, Sept. 15, 1916, pp. 248-9.

which was planned for only a month's duration was not likely to cause the Turks much damage. In his account of the origins of the revolt, the Ottoman commander did not appear aware of Husayn's motives or even that the embargo had been imposed at the Sharif's instigation. What is significant however is his confirmation that the threat of future deprivation did arouse anxiety among the people who had only recently recovered from the hardships of the stoppage of trade in 1914-15. Colonel Brémond, the French representative, agreed with the Turkish assessment and also saw the origins of the uprising in the British blockade "qui va amener un état de disette d'ou sortira le soulèvement du Hedjaz."<sup>89</sup> While correctly perceiving its effects however, Brémond was equally unaware of its cause, and saw the Sharif as the victim of the action which he had in fact inspired. Overlooking Husayn's previous contacts with McMahon, the French representative asserted that it was in order to relieve his own desperate position brought about by the blockade and the consequent ending of the pilgrimage, as well as the Ottoman appointment of 'Ali Haydar as Sharif, that finally prompted Husayn to ally himself with Britain. We may speculate that Brémond's interest in advancing this argument was to malign the British role. But it does underline the curious and, in retrospect, amazing fact that no one at the time appears to have been aware of the motive of what was surely one of the most adroit and skillful strategies of the entire revolt.

I should hasten to add here that I have no shred of concrete evidence to support my analysis of the Sharif's purpose, no smoking gun or even confession on the part of the perpetrator. But it is the only

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<sup>89</sup> Brémond, op. cit. pp. 28-9.

explanation that makes sense and the only one that fits in with the strong circumstantial evidence surrounding Husayn's urgent insistence on the blockade. Be that as it may, our primary concern in this section is with the effects of the action, about which there is no dispute in any of the sources. The entire episode demonstrated plainly the importance of economic considerations in determining allegiance to the Sharif's cause. Indeed, as we shall see in Part Two, the dependence of the Hijaz on external sources of supply made its relationship, and that of Husayn, with Great Britain comparable to that of the tribes with the controllers of their markets. Ultimately, the Sharif's links with the tribes on the one hand, and Britain on the other, were two sides of the same political system, one looking in and the other looking out. As we examine Husayn's external relationships and the mutual dependencies between him and his allies in Part Two, and observe the similarities with his internal policies, it will be seen that such comparisons are revealing of the traditional politics of Arabia as a whole. Here the British blockade and the equivocation of the 'Anazah tribes have served as useful illustrations of one aspect of that system--the importance of markets and an assured source of supplies and provisions in influencing political behavior.

## 2. Trading with the Enemy and the Siege of Medina.

Given the subsistence economy of the Hijaz, tribal action governed by access to markets and based ultimately on the need to feed one's family and clan, cannot be evaluated in terms of any ideological imperative. Despite the bravado of Antonius' assertion that independence was held "dearer than family, property or life itself," I am assuming here without argument that the pursuit of the basic economic objectives

necessary to survival were generally prior to the magnetism of any ideal whether the call to Islamic unity by the Turks or to Arab nationhood by England and the Sharif. In considering the dependence of the Ruwala on Ottoman markets therefore, we have simply observed that their response to economic necessity was to abstain from active involvement in the revolt until alternative supplies were assured, and we have made no attempt to appraise this behavior in terms of the official creed of the Arab movement. Such an endeavor seems fruitless since, as Robert Graves plainly states: "Nuri could not give armed help at present because if the Turks suspected him they would half-starve his tribesmen in three months."<sup>90</sup> These considerations do not however apply to the subject of discussion in this section, where we may well refer to the officially stated objectives of the revolt in assessing tribal motivations. Trading with the Turks, unlike abstention or benevolent neutrality, was an activity harmful to the Sharif's 'cause'. And when it was undertaken purely for personal profit, we must ask where it fitted into the "single purpose" of the revolt--"victory, the unity and independence of Arabia and the cleansing of its soil of foreign oppression."<sup>91</sup> An ardent nationalist attempting to judge the role of the Sharif's movement in the development of Arab unity and nationhood, might well overlook the issues of family, property and food supplies which we have previously discussed. But he will be unable to invoke the exigencies of physical survival to justify instances of covert trading with the enemy by supposed supporters of the revolt. One of England's greatest frustrations through-

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<sup>90</sup>Graves, op.cit. p. 146.

<sup>91</sup>Nutting, Lawrence p. 18.

out the entire anti-Turkish campaign in Arabia was its inability to prevent illicit trading with the Turks and with their ally, ibn Rashid, despite the imposition of an embargo on all goods destined for Medina, Damascus and Hail from anywhere in the Peninsula. There is little doubt that the Arab revolt, and perhaps even the Middle East campaign as a whole, could have been significantly shortened if enemy positions had been successfully isolated from their supply routes. Arab trade with the Turks therefore worked directly against the goal of "cleansing" Arabian soil from "foreign oppression."

Perhaps the most incongruous aspect of the entire Arab movement was the Ottoman hold on Medina throughout the war and until after the armistice. That story provides the greatest insight into the implications of Arab trade with the 'enemy' and is worth recounting in some detail. While Faysal was sweeping north into Syria, a tenacious Ottoman garrison under Fakhri Pasha clung to its possession of the second Holy City in the very heart of the Hijaz and within striking distance of Mecca, resisting all attempts to dislodge it. Despite the resumption of the pilgrimage in 1916, the environs of Medina remained closed to prospective hajjis for the following three years. Ottoman possession of the town long after the coast line had been freed of Turks and even after the Hijaz railroad linking Medina to Damascus had been finally cut, remained an embarrassing and costly thorn in the side of the Sharif's movement. Though contemporary accounts of the revolt, and particularly those with Lawrence at their center, focus on Faysal's northern campaign, it is a significant fact, frequently overlooked, that more Arab troops were deployed around Medina under 'Abdallah and 'Ali than ever served under Faysal on the Syrian front.

When dealing with irregulars, any debate on numbers is somewhat suspect, but there appear to have been about 15,000 tribesmen operating around Medina and against the Hijaz railroad in what was known as the "southern army," while there were generally less than 10,000 under Faysal's command. It was Lawrence's argument and therefore that of most of his biographers, that the decision to bypass Medina and move north to Wajh instead, not only broke the impasse and stalemate that had developed by the end of 1916, but also succeeded in tying up the Ottoman force impotently miles from the actual battlefield.<sup>92</sup> But there were at least as many Arabs "tied up" around Medina as there were Turks defending the town, and the capture of Medina might have "freed" Arab forces for a more vigorous prosecution of the struggle in Syria. Lawrence's original plan and subsequent Arab activity was however aimed neither at discontinuing the fight nor at taking the town by storm, but at starving it into submission by cutting it off from its sources of supply. To all observers this appeared to be a realistic objective and from the time of Faysal's abortive attack on Medina in the first days of the uprising, efforts were directed towards a siege of the town. Taif had fallen in this way in September when the Turkish garrison there was forced, by severe food shortages, to surrender to the Sharif. And there seemed to be no reason why a similar strategy could not succeed at Medina. What is striking in the dozens of British reports on the siege of Medina is the confident expectation throughout the war that the fall of the town was imminent. The Ottoman position was universally regarded as untenable, and the garrison was

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<sup>92</sup>Lawrence, Seven Pillars, p. 167. For estimates of Turkish and Arab military strength, see Antonius, op. cit., pp. 214-5; and Aldington, op. cit., pp. 210-12 and 249.

continually said to be on the verge of succumbing to "poverty and hunger."<sup>93</sup> Yet Fakhri Pasha's continued resistance defied the expectations of every British official and observer, and constituted the major military failure of the Arab revolt.<sup>94</sup>

How then did Medina survive? What prevented starvation from compelling the surrender of the Ottoman garrison? And why was the siege of the town patently unsuccessful? The answer is fairly simple for the evidence clearly indicates that a continuous supply of goods reached Medina from Arab sources. Apart from ibn Rashid, who remained loyal to the Turks throughout the war, Arabs who had pledged allegiance to the Sharif or signed treaties with Britain, actively participated in this illicit trade at great profit to themselves. Harb, 'Ataybah and Hutaym tribesmen serving under 'Ali and 'Abdallah sold food and supplies which had been provided by Britain for the Sharif's armies,

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<sup>93</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 85, Joyce to Wilson, Rabigh, intelligence, Feb. 5, 1917, reporting Nuri al-Sa'id's opinions; F.O. 371/3042, Wemyss, Naval Commander-in-Chief, East Indies and Egypt, to Secretary of the Admiralty, Mar. 16, 1917; F.O. 686/34, p.119, Wilson to 'Ali, Mar. 7, 1917; ibid., pp. 2-5, Wilson to 'Abadallah, May 6, 1917; F.O. 686/35, pp. 58-9, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, June 29, 1917, ibid., p. 60, Wilson to Zayd, Wajh, June 22, 1917; F.O. 686/33, pp. 127-8, Wilson to Husayn, Sept. 29, 1916; ibid., p. 60 Wilson to 'Abdallah, Nov. 1, 1916; A.B. 36, Dec. 26, 1916, pp. 557-8; A.B. 51, May 24, 1917, p. 241. For Arab and British plans against Medina see F.O. 686/35, p. 36, Wilson to Director, Arab Bureau, Jiddah, July 21, 1917; ibid., p. 62 Husayn to High Commissioner, Mecca, June 16, 1917; ibid., p. 38, Husayn to Wilson, July 19, 1917; ibid., pp. 40-41, Zayd to Husayn 21 Ramadan, 1335 (=July 10, 1917).

<sup>94</sup>F.O. 686/38, p. 232, Wilson to 'Ali, Jiddah, 11.6.36 (=Mar. 24, 1918); F.O. 686/40, p. 121, Wilson to Husayn, Cairo, Oct. 18, 1918; F.O. 686/39 p. 145, Bassett to 'Ali, Jiddah, Aug. 14, 1918; ibid., p.136, Bassett to Husayn, Jiddah, Aug. 17, 1918; ibid., p. 107, Bassett to Husayn, Jiddah, Sept. 2, 1918; p 153, Wilson to Husayn, Arab Bureau, Cairo, Aug. 3, 1918; ibid., p. 286, 'Ali to Wilson 9.9.36 (received July 8, 1918). On the Turkish resistance, see also Bray, op. cit., chapter 10, pp. 135-145.



to Fakhri Pasha's agents in the vicinity of Medina.<sup>95</sup> Larger convoys reached Hail, Medina and Damascus from the east, either from ports on the Persian Gulf, especially Kuwayt, or from markets on the Euphrates such as Najaf and Basrah. To reach their destinations, these caravans had to pass through several tribal domains where local shaykhs imposed customs dues and often received direct payments from the Turks to expedite the passage of goods.<sup>96</sup> The amirs of Kuwayt and Najd, both of whom had treaties with Britain, at least passively condoned this trade through their territories and very probably derived considerable financial advantage from it.<sup>97</sup> And Nuri Sha'lan's supposedly benevolent neutrality did not prevent him from reaping similar profits, as one British telegram indicates:

Contraband traffic at Jauf is actively assisted by Nawwaf son of Nuri Shaalan. He takes a share of petroleum and levies a toll of one pound per camel. Sheikh Shawan, one of Nawwaf's men, gives conduct to caravans northwards. Baghdad reports that both Turks and Arabs are being robbed and blackmailed by Nuri.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> A.B. 93, June 18, 1918, p. 206; A.B. 56, July 9, 1917, p. 298; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 130 Wilson to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, Oct. 27, 1917; A.B. 95, July 2, 1918; A.B. 96, July 9, 1918, p. 243; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 37, Under-secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mussayd, to Wilson, July 8, 1918; A.B. 110, Apr. 30, 1919, p. 39

<sup>96</sup> For example, A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, pp. 185 and 198; A.B. 102, Sept. 3, 1918, p. 308 (on the 'Amarat); A.B. 61, Sept. 1, 1917, p. 358 (on the Hutaym; F.O. 371/2768, p. 212, the Idrisi Sayyid to his agent, Shaykh Salih Baleksha, Aden, undated; A.B. 11, July 1916, p. 3 (Aden); A.B. 22, Sept. 19, 1916, p. 279 (Bahrayn).

<sup>97</sup> The role of ibn Sa'ud, amir of Najd, will be examined in chapter 8. On contraband trade through Najd and ibn Sa'ud's role, see A.B. 86, Apr. 21, 1918, p. 128; A.B. 91, June 4, 1918, p. 178; A.B. 63, Sept. 18, 1917, 385; F.O. 686/6/2, ibn Sa'ud to Cox, 16 Rabi al-'Awal, (=Feb. 8, 1917), sent A.T. Wilson to Arab Bureau, Cairo, Mar. 18, 1917; on Kuwayt and the role of Shaykh Salim ibn Sabah, see F.O. 371/3047, pp. 417-18, Political Agent, Kuwayt, R.E.A. Hamilton, Kuwayt News to Feb. 19, 1917; F.O. 371/2768, Chief Political Officer, Basrah, Aug. 14, 1916.

<sup>98</sup> F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 96-98, Arab Bureau, Cairo, to Director of

Significantly this report was dated June 1918, on the eve of Nuri's active commitment to the Sharif's movement.

Certainly both the British and the Sharif's sons made strenuous efforts to prevent this trade, the former by attempting to enforce an embargo on contraband traffic at the ports of origin and the latter by intercepting the convoys before they could reach their destination. Until this could be achieved, all efforts to compel the surrender of Medina would prove fruitless. But the British blockade at Basrah and Kuwayt was frankly described as "ineffective," while 'Abdallah's temporary successes in cutting the Hail to Medina road only made the trade even more profitable for those who did manage to get provisions into the town.<sup>99</sup> Once the Hijaz railroad had been permanently cut, supplies increased according to market conditions to meet the greater demands of the Turks. The "considerable increase in convoy activity from the east to Medina" which was reported by mid-1918,<sup>100</sup> also coincided with the development of hostilities between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud, which diverted the attention of the southern army from Medina and encouraged anti-Sharifian tribes on the Najdi border to

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Military Intelligence, London, June 9, 1918; *ibid.*, High Commissioner, Egypt, to Baghdad, June 6, 1918; and Director of Military Intelligence, London, to Arab Bureau, Cairo, June 8, 1918; also A.B. 86, Apr. 21, 1918, p. 128.

<sup>99</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, pp. 140-1, Capt. Lloyd, Dec. 22, 1916; *ibid.*, p. 74 Joyce to Wilson, Rabigh, Feb. 9, 1917; F.O. 686/33, p. 25, Wilson to Faysal, Jiddah, Nov. 15, 1916, *ibid.*, p. 162, Wilson to Husayn (telephone), Sept. 9, 1916; F.O. 686/35, p. 24 Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Aug. 30, 1917; *ibid.*, p. 18, Wilson to Husayn, Sept. 1, 1917.

<sup>100</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 64, Bassett to Husayn, Jiddah, Sept. 16, 1918; *ibid.*, p. 32, Bassett to 'Ali, Oct. 5, 1918; Also F.O. 686/10/1, p. 28, Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Mussayd, to Wilson, July 8, 1918; *ibid.*, Wajh to Jiddah, July 15, 1918; *ibid.*, pp. 67-68, Wilson to Hedghog, Cairo, June 19, 1918.

facilitate the passage of caravans to the Turks. Where a profit was to be made there appeared to be an inverse relationship between the quantities of supplies that flowed from the local Beduin to the Turks, and the impending 'liberation' of their lands from their trading partners.

How then are we to evaluate the motives and actions of a tribal leader like Nuri Sha'lan in terms of the proclaimed objectives of the Arab revolt? Before he joined Faysal in July 1918, he and his son, Nawwaf, were portrayed as "sitting on the fence" while actively promoting enemy trade through their domains for their own personal gain.<sup>101</sup> Yet Lawrence described Nuri as intelligent, decisive, and "the best Arab sheikh I have ever met." "His tribe are like wax in his hands," he added, noting that the Ruwala were among the fiercest and most reliable fighters in the final stages of the Arab movement.<sup>102</sup> How are we to reconcile such apparently contradictory positions, both offered by British observers? Graves and Nutting claim the Nuri's nominal adherence and "show of friendship" toward the Turks for most of the war was a tactical ploy instituted "at Feisal's request."<sup>103</sup> However there is nothing in the British sources to support this assertion and the only recorded communications from Faysal to Nuri in fact requested armed assistance.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore his

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<sup>101</sup> A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, pp. 185 and 199.

<sup>102</sup> Lawrence, Seven Pillars, pp. 146-7; and in A.B. 106, Oct. 22, 1918, p. 346.

<sup>103</sup> Graves, op. cit., pp. 338 and 146; Nutting, Lawrence, p. 69.

<sup>104</sup> F.O. 686/6/1, intelligence report, Dec. 28, 1916; and ibid., p. 69, Lawrence to Wilson, Jan. 8, 1917.

promotion of trade with the Turks served to strengthen the 'enemy', to impede the progress of the revolt, and to obstruct Sharifian attempts to cut the Turks off from their supplies. One British report concluded that the loyalty of Nuri, Nawwaf and the Ruwala was doubtful if it conflicted with the profit motive or interfered with the contraband business in which they were engaged.<sup>105</sup> However this judgment was not necessarily inconsistent with Lawrence's high estimation of their qualities. Only a nationalist committed to the view that the Arab Revolt was fought for Arab liberation and unity would consider Nuri a scoundrel for his double-dealing and lack of commitment to the 'Arab cause'. According to the tribal standards of conduct by which Lawrence judged him, he was neither a hypocrite nor a traitor, but a fearless warrior who served the interests of his people, the Ruwala, above all else. If in fact we regard tribal interest as the motivating force, we find a remarkable consistency in Nuri's behavior throughout the war. From the safeguarding of his markets, and the maintenance of his people's security and economic well-being, through his eventual alliance with the victorious Arab army, events confirmed Lawrence's opinion of the shaykh as an able and powerful ruler "whose word was law and who could not be bullied or coaxed."<sup>106</sup> His actions appear contradictory only if we impose alien ideological standards.

The truth is that no appeal to sentiment was able to prevent a trade that was to the advantage not only of the merchants and consumers

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<sup>105</sup> A.B. 91, June 4, 1918, p. 180.

<sup>106</sup> Graves, op. cit., p. 146.

at either end of the road, but also of the countless middlemen through whose territories the caravans passed. We have pointed out that looting Turkish trains and pocketing British gold might not be inconsistent with the interests of the revolt; that if Arabs profited by inflicting damage on the Turks, then the Cause profited simultaneously. However we have been examining here the pursuit of objectives which, by prolonging the Ottoman resistance, were harmful to the progress of the revolt, objectives which a nationalist might even label as "treasonous" since they undermined the supposed goal of the 'national' uprising--"the expulsion of the Turks from the Arab countries."<sup>107</sup> If there was any single reason for the survival of Medina and the inability of the Sharif's forces to impose a successful siege of the town it was the extensive cooperation of the Arabs in supplying the Ottoman garrison. To their endless chagrin, the British found that the higher they raised the stakes by attempting to enforce the blockade on trade to enemy centers, the more profitable it became to the blockade runners. The ideology of Arab liberation was of no avail and punitive measures were only partially successful. Despite pressure, threats and material inducements, the British concluded that it was almost impossible to stop provisions reaching the enemy.

Arab trade with the Turks therefore illustrates both the positive and negative sides of our central hypothesis--the resilience of traditional tribal politics and the weakness of the doctrine of national liberation. John Waterbury has drawn attention to "a certain moral relativism" which

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<sup>107</sup> Sir Henry McMahon in his letter to Sharif Husayn, Oct. 24, 1915, quoted in J.C. Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record, vol. 2, 1914-1956. Princeton, N.J., D. Van Nostrand, 1956, p. 15.

is inherent in segmentary political systems, prompting each actor to "do all in his power to maintain some sort of contact with the group he has ostensibly excluded from his range of action."<sup>108</sup> It was therefore characteristic of the Arabian political system that many of the Sharif's supporters cooperated with the Turks while even his avowed enemies were not necessarily hostile to the aims of the revolt. Indeed we find the Turks' trusted ally, ibn Rashid, quite prepared to abandon his protectors should their cause become unprofitable. If his contraband goods from Kuwayt or his supplies from Ottoman markets were to be threatened, he would be only too willing to change his allegiance in order to gain access to Britain's Mesopotamian markets.<sup>109</sup> At the same time, so-called 'loyal' tribes engaged in illicit trade with the 'enemy,' not for love of the Turks or lack of sympathy for Sharif Husayn, but because of the "enormous profits" to be reaped.<sup>110</sup> Smuggling was an ancient and prevalent means of livelihood for the Beduin, and the war had simply made it more lucrative. Contrary to the expectations of ideological purists, neither the Ottoman nor the Anglo-Sharifian doctrinal positions could therefore assume precedence over tribal interests. By failing to sever his relations with either camp, the Arabian tribesman maintained his independence in relation to both.

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<sup>108</sup>John Waterbury, The Commander of the Faithful: The Moroccan Political Elite - A Study in Segmented Politics, New York, Columbia University Press, 1970, pp. 66 and 75.

<sup>109</sup>A.B. 91, June 4, 1918, p. 176; and A.B. 12, July 19, 1916, p. 2.

<sup>110</sup>A.B. 50, May 13, 1917, p. 225.

## PERSUASION BY THE SWORD

The importance of military strength in determining tribal allegiance

Having examined the power of the drachma, we turn now to the power of the sword as a strategic consideration in the mobilization of tribesmen for the revolt. While this occasionally consisted of a threat of overt coercion, it more frequently meant an evaluation by the tribes of the relative strengths of the two sides. Clearly, if material gain were an object of the participants, it would pay to be on the winning side, especially when the issue might be control of the means of economic livelihood. It is a tautology to say that in warfare profit is likely to be the preserve of the victor, at least in the immediate battlefield situation. But there were also sound political reasons for supporting the side that most convincingly demonstrated its strength. Here we may see both the flexibility in alliance formation which is characteristic of segmentary politics,<sup>112</sup> and also the critical role of strength in a system lacking a recognized extramural authority with the legitimacy to legislate over the primary units of that system. On both counts the parallels with international politics are striking and it is not far-fetched to view the international system as one of segmental opposition in which nations rather than tribes represent the competing segments.

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<sup>112</sup>Waterbury, op. cit., p. 7.

What is the role of strength in the process of alliance formation in such a system? In a world of nation-states, all ties to larger units are subsidiary and conditional, the bond between individual and nation remaining the ultimate standard by which political rights and obligations are defined. Whether such wider ties are multilateral alliances for mutual military or economic advantage (NATO, EEC, OAS), subscriptions to international treaties or organizations (United Nations, Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty), or bilateral agreements (Hitler-Stalin Pact, U.S.-Israel arms deal), the national units which comprise these associations retain at least theoretical sovereignty and the ability to withdraw or renege on their pledges at any time. In principle the bonds are 'voluntary' and there are no 'legitimate' or legal agencies of enforcement beyond the borders of the nation-state. This does not mean that stronger nations do not frequently force their will on weaker ones, but the ultimate sanction for such activity is certainly not legal, no matter what international 'guarantees' are invoked to justify the action. Appeals to extrinsic authority cannot be compared for example with the power of a nation-state to send an individual to jail or even to outlaw an organization. Beyond the borders of the nation-state, anarchy reigns, for the ultimate guarantor of international action is force. In the international arena Hobbes' laws of nature still prevail and mutual evaluations of strength rather than submission to higher arbitration govern relations among the units.

From this perspective, the tribal politics of the Arabian Peninsula at the time of the war and the role of the sword in securing tribal adhesion to a larger association, need seem no more morally reprehensible or rationally incomprehensible than the conduct of international affairs today. The "analysis



of strategic choices" which forms the basis of action among the Swat Pathans described by Frederick Barth, presupposes also a maneuverability in alliance formation which is evident in the constantly shifting coalitions of world politics and which was seen in the ability of the Arabian tribes to switch their allegiance with impunity after the First World War. Considerations of strength, ranging from overt coercion to a prudent assessment of advantage, were as crucial in the absence of an extra-tribal sovereignty, as they are today in the absence of a legitimate extra-national authority. This is not to say that ideological preferences were unimportant, and these will indeed be examined later, but it would be naive to suppose, as some writers do, that an ideological commitment either to Arab nationhood or to Islam, was in and of itself a sufficient explanation of tribal allegiance. The power of the sword as a determinant of political action in Arabia may be discerned in three patterns which, being ideal types, rarely appear in pure form: tribal shaykhs actively sought protection from a powerful regional leader, the latter used threats of overt physical coercion to compel allegiance, and shaykhs responded to persuasion and demonstrations of strength on the part of the larger corporate units by adjusting their support accordingly.

In the political system of Arabia, as in the international arena, perceived self-interest tended to govern the relations of tribal shaykhs with external sources of power, and dictated at least acquiescence in the rule of the strongest leader. Not only was such a leader more likely to offer material reward for this support but in return for the acknowledgment

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<sup>113</sup>Frederik Barth, "Segmentary Opposition and the Theory of Games: A Study of Pathan Organization," The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, vol 89 (1959), p. 5.

of suzerainty, the tribes under his aegis were assured of a measure of protection against their own rivals. Again the parallels in international politics are obvious. Thus for example Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Aydh, ruler of Ebhah in the disputed border region between the Hijaz and 'Asir wanted as much security as possible from a powerful protector coupled with a minimum of interference in his own affairs. He was willing to consider either Husayn or the Idrisi Sayyid as his overlord, and later to bargain with ibn Sa'ud as well, as Wahhabi influence penetrated along Wadi Shahran toward Ebhah.<sup>114</sup> As important as the satisfaction of material wants therefore was the physical protection which a strong sovereign could offer his supporters in case of blood-feud and warfare.

On the other hand, Turks, Arabs and British were all willing to employ physical intimidation as a last resort, to encourage the cooperation of those tribal sections which could not be bought or persuaded willingly to join them. In areas where the Sharif's control was uncertain or where the Turks were deemed likely to regain control, the fear of Turkish reprisals frequently inhibited support of the Sharif until his success was beyond doubt. The brutal massacre of the inhabitants of the 'Awali section of Medina following the first Arab assault on the town, was a grim warning to all of the Sharif's followers of the fate that might befall their own clansmen if the Turks should once again gain the upper hand.<sup>115</sup> This dread was even greater among the settled populations,

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<sup>114</sup> A.B. 111, May 24, 1919, p. 58; Notes on the Middle East, No. 4 June 5, 1920, p. 122; a similar example is in A.B. 112, June 24, 1919, p. 96

<sup>115</sup> Lawrence, Seven Pillars, p. 66; and Graves, Lawrence, p. 77; also I.O. L.P. & S./11/117, Fuad al-Katib, Under secretary for Foreign Affairs for the Arab Government, to H.H. Shaykh Jabar ibn al-Sabah, Prince of Kuwayt, Mecca, Nov. 29, 1916; and Fuad to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mecca, Nov. 28, 1916

especially in the north, where the villagers were more vulnerable than the mobile tribesmen of the desert. Anything short of a permanent occupation of their villages and towns by Faysal's army would not persuade them to cooperate in the revolt.<sup>116</sup> Of course the threat of force was not the prerogative of the Turks alone. When the opposition of the Bili tribe prevented the northward expansion of the Sharif's movement, the paramount chief of the tribe, Sulayman ibn Rifadah, was informed that coastal towns in his area would be reduced by bombardment from British ships unless he cooperated with Faysal to secure the peaceful surrender of the Ottoman garrisons there.<sup>117</sup> And in the last months of the war, with both Faysal and the British on the offensive in southern Syria, a Banu Sakhr shaykh found it necessary to warn villagers that they would be bombed by British planes if they did not support the Arab movement: "...An order has been issued for smiting all those disobedient ones who have not joined our Sayyid Feisal," he announced.<sup>118</sup>

However it was rare that such extreme measures were necessary, for the dictates of prudence and good political sense generally assured at least passive tribal support for the side which had the power to enforce

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<sup>116</sup> A.B. 66, Oct. 21, 1917, p. 470; A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, p. 185; for other examples of threatened Turkish reprisals, see F.O. 686/6/2, p. 78, proclamation by Fakhri Pasha to Ottoman troops, reprinted in al-Qiblah, No. 84, 9th Ragab, 1335, sent by Jiddah to Arab Bureau, Cairo, May 7, 1917; A.B. 16, August 18, 1916, p. 177; A.B. 18, Sept. 5, 1916, p. 210 A.B. 19, Sept. 9, 1916, p. 213.

<sup>117</sup> F.O. 686/54, p. 90, Wilson to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, Aug. 31, 1916.

<sup>118</sup> A.B. 93, June 18, 1918, p. 207; see also F.O. 686/6/1, p. 106, Joyce, Ra-high, to Capt. Young, Jiddah, Feb. 1, 1917.

its will in that area. Just as overt strong-arm tactics are rarer than subtle re-evaluations of alignment in international politics, so in the Arab revolt, tribal shaykhs more often carefully gauged the relative strengths of the Sharif and the Turks before committing themselves to either, than they invited a show of blatant force by their open resistance. It is a cliché to observe that nothing succeeds like success, and there is considerable evidence in the British sources to indicate that one of the most convincing ways of gaining support for the revolt was to show its strength and prove its success. When the Sharifian forces achieved victories and made territorial advances, new tribal groupings were induced to throw their support behind the revolt. In the wake of a defeat or increased Turkish pressure, tribal support tended correspondingly to disintegrate, and the movement more than once waned to the point of imminent collapse. "The Arab's intellect lies in his eyes," says the Beduin proverb.<sup>119</sup> And "the power of faith," which Antonius identifies with the cause of Arab national liberation,<sup>120</sup> was not in itself sufficient to maintain the uprising in the face of adversity nor to induce the rebels to keep fighting when the odds were against them.

Indeed a chronological account of the Arab movement reveals a close connection between the ebb and flow of tribal support for the Sharif and the military success and failures of the revolt. At the time of Husayn's proclamation of independence, one dispatch noted that the factor most

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<sup>119</sup> F.O. 882/3, AP/16/1, quoted by Col. Jacob in C. 273, Mar. 14, 1916.

<sup>120</sup> Antonius, op. cit., p. 219.

seriously militating against an active Arab uprising against the Turks was the Arabs' fear of not succeeding.<sup>121</sup> However early manifestations of weakness on the part of the Turks and the capture of Mecca, Jiddah and Yanbu' in the first days of the revolt, gave the movement an initial impetus which encouraged the adhesion of most of the Harb and Juhaynah in the central Hijaz.<sup>122</sup> These successes were immediately tempered by the failure of Faysal's first assault on Medina from which the Arabs retreated in disarray, terrified by the Turkish artillery and machine-guns.<sup>123</sup> The first Turkish counterattacks and the stalemate which developed at the end of 1916 produced a corresponding decline in morale which led to large-scale desertions as the Sharifian armies were reported to be "gradually melting away."<sup>124</sup> On January 25, 1917, Wajh was captured marking the first serious northward expansion of the movement and demonstrating its viability with a decisive show of strength which secured the support of many of the northern Hijaz

<sup>121</sup> A.B. 7, June 30, 1916, p. 5.

<sup>122</sup> A.B. 21, Sept. 15, 1916, p. 251, account by Mehmed Ziya Bey, Turkish acting governor of Mecca and commander of the garrison.

<sup>123</sup> Graves, Lawrence, p. 77.

<sup>124</sup> Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 79; F.O. 371/2774, telegram 741, High Commissioner to Foreign Office, Ramlah, Aug. 30, 1916, reporting Wilson's interview with Faysal at Yanbu', Aug. 28, 1916; A.B. 27, Oct. 26, 1916, p. 392; A.B. 35, Dec. 20, 1916, p. 535; A.B. 36, Dec. 26, 1916, p. 392; A.B. 14, Aug. 7, 1916, p. 153; A.B. 43, Feb. 28, 1917; F.O. 371/2775, Paul Cambon, French Ambassador to London, to Lord Hardinge, Sept. 19, 1916; F.O. 686/54, p. 11, 'Dufferin' to 'Suva' for Wilson, undated, probably Nov. 3, 1916, *ibid.*, p. 91, Wilson to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, Aug. 31, 1916; F.O. 371/2776, Wingate to Foreign Office, reporting Lawrence's views, Dec. 13, 1916; and see The Letters of T.E. Lawrence, edited by David Garnett, New York, Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1939, p. 211, Lawrence to Wilson, Dec. 6, 1916; *ibid.*, p. 213, Lawrence to Wilson, Dec. 22, 1916.

tribes. Until the moment of the town's capture, the powerful Bili tribe had been working with the Turks, switching allegiance to Faysal only when the revolt's success in their area seemed assured.<sup>125</sup> On July 6, 'Aqabah was captured, and again it was the physical presence of the Sharif's forces there which "created a great impression" among the Arabs further north and induced hitherto hesitant shaykhs to send emissaries to Faysal offering their submission.<sup>126</sup> As Arab forces probed into southern Syria the revolt gained significant momentum, but even at this late stage Faysal was not immune to the effect of apparent signs of weakness on his part. His withdrawals from the towns of Shobak, Karak and al-Salt damaged his prestige and discouraged tribes in the area from giving him their support.<sup>127</sup> Certainly the fluctuations in tribal support that accompanied each improvement or setback in the Sharif's fortunes rendered the Arab movement inherently unstable and threatened its very existence in its early stages. More importantly perhaps, this instability indicated the weakness of an extra-tribal nationalist ideology which

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<sup>125</sup> A.B. 41, Feb. 6, 1917, p. 55; F.O. 371/3049, "Arabia" printed series, sent by Director of Military Intelligence to Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office Feb. 15, 1917; I.O. L. P. & S./11/117, file 446, Wingate to Foreign Office, Cairo, Jan. 29, 1917; A.B. 48, Apr. 21, 1917, p. 178; F.O. 686/6/1, p. 9, Lawrence, intelligence report, al-'Ayin in Wadi 'Ais, Mar. 22, 1917; F.O. 686/6/2, p. 86, Newcombe report to Wilson, Apr. 25 to May 2, 1917; ibid., p. 160, Joyce, intelligence notes, Wajh, Apr. 9, 1917.

<sup>126</sup> A.B. 64, Sept. 18, 1917, p. 388; F.O. 686/6/1, p. 47, Major Vickery to Director, Arab Bureau, Wajh, Mar. 1, 1917; ibid., p. 46, Clayton to Wilson and Lawrence, Cairo, Mar. 8, 1917; F.O. 371/2779, Lord Grey to Lord Bertie of Thame, Sept. 11, 1916.

<sup>127</sup> A.B. 66, Oct. 21, 1917, p. 147; and A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, p. 185.

might have withstood temporary reverses with greater equanimity, and contained the seeds of the total disintegration of Husayn's support immediately after the war.

The pattern of military success followed by tribal adhesion may be observed in every part of Arabia where the war against the Ottoman Empire was being waged.<sup>128</sup> In the south for example, the Turks retained a strong foothold throughout the war backed by the allegiance of the Imam of Yemen, and Sharif Husayn had scant success in winning over tribes in that sphere of operations. When he sent a small expedition to the southern Hijaz in 1918 to consolidate his position there, the plan back-fired as the tribes in the area interpreted the size of the force as an indication of the Sharif's weakness. If he had sent instead, 2,000 armed men to oppose the Turks, concluded the writer of a dispatch from the area, the Banu Zayd and Balayr tribesmen would undoubtedly have come over to the side of the revolt.<sup>129</sup> As it was, they killed the commander of the expedition and attached themselves either to the Turks or the Idrisi Sayyid of 'Asir. Lest it be assumed that Britain was above being influenced

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<sup>128</sup>I.O. L. P. & S./11/116, Political Resident, Basrah to Foreign, India, Jan. 12, 1917, being transmission of report from Assistant Political Officer, Zubayr; A.B. 56, July 9, 1917, p. 303; A.B. 114, Aug. 30, 1919, p. 144; F.O. 882/2, p. 191, AP/16/1, telegram C. 273, Col. Jacob; ibid., p. 195; ibid., pp. 147-155, AP/15/8, Note by Major Gabriel, Nov. 21, 1915; A.B. 50, May. 13, 1917, pp. 218-20; I.O. L. P. & S./10/599, Brigadier-General 'Ali Sa'id Pasha, Commandant of the Islamic Ottoman Troops at Lahij, to Amir Ghalib ibn 'Awad al-Kayti, 16th Jamad Akhar, 1334, (=Mar. 20, 1916); F.O. 371/2771, Commander-in-Chief, India, to Chief of the Imperial General Staff, concerning the British Mesopotamian expedition, Jan. 27, 1916; see also Philip Graves, The Life of Sir Percy Cox, p. 183; A.B. 4, June 16, 1916, 1916, p. 33.

<sup>129</sup>A.B. 93, June 18, 1918, p. 210.

by such considerations of strength, it should be remembered that in our parallel with international politics, we noted that in an analagous extra-legal, essentially anarchic situation, nations act very similarly. When ibn Rashid routed a joint force of Ruwala and Huwaytat and occupied Jawf and Skakah oases after the war, Britain showed little remorse for its former allies and found it equally convenient to act according to the 'success ethic'. Since England's aim was to establish influence with those leaders who had proved their strength in the Peninsula, policy-makers noted that "the political situation in Arabia has changed somewhat since then, and an alliance with the Rashid would be of advantage from many points of view."<sup>130</sup> And in the Arab and Muslim worlds at large, the gospel of Arab liberation touched few responsive chords with the single exception of Syria, where nationalist ideas had in fact begun to take root.<sup>131</sup> Elsewhere, sympathy with the Sharif's cause was conditional rather on his ability to prove that he had supplanted Ottoman rule with his own "royal authority."<sup>132</sup>

Perceptions of strength and weakness were clearly important determinants of behavior, as the Hijaz tribes weighed their support for the Sharif. However, the need to be on the winning side did not necessarily coincide with the ideology of the revolt. Faysal's "message" was often secondary to concrete proof of his success.<sup>133</sup> In evaluating the degree to which the ideology of nationalism

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<sup>130</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 3, Apr. 1, 1920, p. 91.

<sup>131</sup>A.B. 9, July 9, 1916, pp. 3 and 6; A.B. 17, Aug. 30, 1916, pp. 189 and 195; A.B. 45, Mar. 23, 1917, p. 135; A.B. 49, Apr. 30, 1917, pp. 191-2.

<sup>132</sup>This is ibn Khaldun's argument. See The Muqaddimah, chapter 3.

<sup>133</sup>Antonius, op. cit., p. 219, sees propagation of the "message" as Faysal's main task.



had taken root in the Peninsula at the time of the revolt, it is instructive to compare the motivations which we have been discussing with de Gaury's analysis of the considerations influencing Harb participation in the Ottoman-Wahhabi conflict of a century earlier. He mentions the success of the side they join, money and material incentives, the desire for loot, and the ability of their overlord to mediate tribal disputes, as significant stimuli to action. It was finally a series of Ottoman victories which induced an alliance with Ibrahim 'Ali and Tusun Bey.<sup>134</sup> And when Lawrence sums up the conditions for allegiance of the Hijaz tribes to Sharif Husayn, he fails to mention nationalism, freedom or a bond of faith in the struggle against Ottoman oppression. Rather the four contingencies which he lists as most likely to threaten tribal adherence to the revolt are strangely reminiscent of Beduin attitudes a hundred or perhaps even a thousand years previously. These are a shortage of money in Mecca, Turkish occupation of the homes and palm groves of the tribesmen, a major defeat with large losses, and a loss of prestige on the part of the Sharif.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>de Gaury, op. cit., p. 233; see also chapters 13 and 14, esp. p. 215, comparing Muhammad 'Ali's role as mediator to that of Faysal.

<sup>135</sup>A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 479.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## FORGING A POLITICAL ALLIANCE

We have discussed the material and military inducements to tribal adhesion to the Sharif's cause and must look now to the political considerations present in forging the alliance against the Turks. For, while the importance of the 'drachma' and the 'sword' as motivations for joining the revolt have cast serious doubts on the salience of the nationalist ideology among the Beduin, we have not yet traced Arab participation in the uprising to the political system of the Hijaz. If, as was indicated in Chapter One, the tribe was the prime unit of authority and the focus of allegiance, if it jealously guarded its autonomy against intrusion from the central power, and if individual tribes were frequently divided by deeply-rooted disputes and blood-feuds, then we have yet to explain how it was possible for the Sharif to mold and maintain a political coalition even for the duration of the war. The answer must be sought within the existing system and may be approached from two different sides--by overcoming the divisions on the one hand, and by working within their limitations on the other. Both methods were employed and will be examined separately in this chapter. The process of alliance formation will reveal the salient characteristics of tribal organization in the Hijaz and enable us to evaluate the official ideology of the Arab revolt in terms of the values of the existing political system.

Overcoming the Divisions--The Mediation of Tribal Disputes and Feuds

While Lawrence was fond of claiming that the suspension of inter-

tribal conflicts in the interests of the Arab cause had produced "complete internal peace for the first time since Mohammad,"<sup>1</sup> the Sharif's achievements in this area were actually far more modest, as Lawrence in his more sober moments was prepared to admit. So intense and entrenched were some of these feuds, many of them with a history spanning generations, that the most valiant efforts could not hope to succeed in eliminating them entirely. The resilience and persistence of intertribal conflict in the Arabian political system on the eve of the war was related to the fierce competition for scarce resources that was endemic to the economic life of the Peninsula. By increasing the available resources it was therefore possible to ease one of the main pressures for the continued pursuit of these feuds. The massive infusion of British gold, supplies and weapons thus created a crucial precondition for the successful mediation of disputes. The fact that the material incentives which played an important role in persuading tribes to submit their disputes to arbitration were channelled through the peace-maker, gave his authority added weight. More often than not therefore, the political and material advantage of alliance exceeded the real issues at stake in the feud and the warring parties found it convenient to submerge their differences and submit them to settlement.

Blood enemies before the revolt, a temporary reconciliation was effected between the Bili, Juhaynah and Harb tribes, though this was occasionally marred by mutual raiding.<sup>2</sup> Within the Harb, the Banu Salim

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence, Evolution of a Revolt, pp. 84-85.

<sup>2</sup>A.B. 31, Nov. 18, 1916, p. 462, and A.B. 24, Oct. 5, 1916, p. 323.

section initially joined the Turks on account of their feud with the Masruh, who were with the Sharif. Intensive negotiation finally convinced the two sides to suspend their conflict and at the end of 1916 the Banu Salim were persuaded to defect from the Turks.<sup>3</sup> Further north, the Huwaytat made up their differences with their northern neighbors, the Banu Sakhr, largely because both feared their camels would be commandeered by the Turks, while the Sharif was offering handsome material rewards for their joint action.<sup>4</sup> Less amenable to solution was a bitter dispute between the two main sections of the Huwaytat. But at Faysal's request, 'Awda abu Tayih offered peace to his arch-rival, Hamad al-'Arar of the ibn Jazi section which had gone over to the Turks. Since 'Awda had killed Hamad's father in 1915 in revenge for the death of his own son, the personal and political aspects of this conflict had become so inextricably intertwined that it was not likely to be completely settled within the lifetimes of either of the shaykhs.<sup>5</sup>

It is now becoming clear why Faysal's negotiations with the tribes were so immensely complex and drawn-out. While offers of material support and assessments of military strength were relatively straight-forward issues, these cases hint at the core of the political process that was going on in Faysal's tent. "During the last few months" wrote Gertrude

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<sup>3</sup>Lawrence, Seven Pillars, p. 55; A.B. 28, Nov. 1, 1916, p. 401; see also F.O. 371/3046, file 7013, "Note on the Harb," dated Nov. 1, 1916, which lists the Banu Salim shaykhs with the Turks; sent by Cox to Director of Military Intelligence, Arab Bureau, Dec. 3, 1916.

<sup>4</sup>F.O. 371/3049, "Arabia" tribal report, printed, sent Director of Military Intelligence to Under-secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Feb. 5, 1917. And also: F.O. 371/3051, "Personalities of Southern Syria," Part 2, printed, p. 15, Arab Bureau, Cairo, April, 1917.

<sup>5</sup>A.B. 57, July 24, 1917, p. 309; and also F.O. 371/3051, ibid., pp. 14-15.

Bell in June 1917, "the Sherif and his sons have been engaged in trying to patch up tribal feuds in the northern reaches of the Hejaz railway as a preliminary to the smallest measure of combination."<sup>6</sup> During one six-day foray against the Turks in which no sharif was present, Lawrence remarked that he himself had to adjudicate twelve cases of assault with weapons, four camel-thefts, one marriage settlement, fourteen feuds, two evil-eyes and one bewitchment.<sup>7</sup> While all of Husayn's sons participated in this process in their respective spheres of operation, the chief agent in the mediation of tribal disputes was Faysal. The Arab Bulletin reported that he worked "every day and all day at this internal pacification," not only offering inducements to join his father's standard, but adjusting tribal and clan feuds and patiently listening to every petitioner and complainant who came before him.<sup>8</sup> Paradoxical as it may seem, if we evaluate the revolt from the perspective of Arab nationalism, Faysal's long delays at Wajh and 'Aqabah were probably his most valuable contribution to the cause of nation-building in the Arabian Peninsula. For while immersed in traditional political patterns, he was meanwhile transforming them irrevocably. Though his successes were neither permanent nor complete, Faysal set the first modest stage in the creation of a higher sovereignty which would only finally supersede the tribe when the provision of resources on a continuous basis was no longer dependent on the shaykh, but on the national ruler. This step in the process of

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<sup>6</sup>F.O. 882/3. AP/17/14, memorandum by Gertrude Bell, June 25, 1917, on Sykes' memorandum of AP/17/5.

<sup>7</sup>A.B. 66, Oct. 21, 1917, p. 413.

<sup>8</sup>A.B. 43, Feb. 28, 1917, p. 97; A.B. 36, Dec. 26, 1916, p. 550.

nation-building is confirmed by Lawrence's observations in the midst of the revolt:

[Faysal's] success in burying the innumerable hatchets of the Hejaz is the most pregnant indication of his future government....In all Arab minds the Sherif now stands above the tribes, the tribal sheikhs and tribal jealousies. His is the dignity of the peace-maker and the prestige of the independent super-imposed authority. He does not take sides or declare in their disputes: he mediates and ensues a settlement.<sup>9</sup>

But despite Faysal's undeniable achievements in this area, Lawrence's more extravagant claims that "complete internal peace" reigned in Arabia, must be modified by evidence that bitter disputes simmered not far below the surface even as tribes actively cooperated against the Turks. "One reason against Abdullah coming to Rabegh," said a British field report, "is...that his army is composed of Beni Ateibah while all Ali's men are Harb, and though the two tribes have officially buried the hatchet for the duration of the war, there is likely to be trouble from their too close contiguity."<sup>10</sup> Indeed the enmity between these two tribes was fanned by 'Abdallah's overt favoritism towards the 'Ataybah, making him a "tribal leader" rather than a "leader of the tribes," a designation Lawrence retained for Faysal alone.<sup>11</sup> "He declares that he is a Beduin and an Ateibah," Lawrence wrote of 'Abdallah after an interview in his camp, an attitude which may have contributed towards the disaffection of the Harb near the end of the revolt.<sup>12</sup> Relations between both these

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<sup>9</sup>A.B. 57, July 24, 1917, p. 309.

<sup>10</sup>F.O. 371/2776, Pearson to Arab Bureau, on board HMS Dufferin, off Rabigh, Oct. 7, 1916.

<sup>11</sup>F.O. 371/2776, Wingate to Foreign Office, reporting Lawrence's views, Dec. 13, 1916.

<sup>12</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, pp. 122, 124, Lawrence to Wilson, Wajh, Apr. 16, 1917; A.B. 80, Feb. 26, 1918, p. 60.

tribes and the Juhaynah were hardly better. The latter did not disguise their "contempt" for the 'Ataybah, and the Harb were threatening war against the Juhaynah before the ink was dry on the armistice agreements.<sup>13</sup> Internal struggles for power within the leadership of loyal tribes were another constant source of tension which sometimes spilled over into open hostilities.<sup>14</sup>

Far from being buried, the hatchet was kept within easy reach throughout the war, and the most delicate of negotiations was frequently insufficient to prevent old quarrels among the tribesmen who supported the Sharif from flaring to the surface. By the end of 1917 there were said to be "numerous feuds" still existing among Husayn's adherents.<sup>15</sup> At Wajh there was a large-scale fight between the Agayl and 'Ataybah tribesmen, while the truce between the Huwaytat and Banu Sakhr fell apart after a fight in which both sides sustained casualties.<sup>16</sup> On both these occasions and others, only Faysal's energetic intervention prevented his painstakingly wrought alliance from collapsing. The magnitude of the Sharif's task of intertribal reconciliation is demonstrated by a letter from Sulayman ibn Rifadah, paramount chief of the Bili tribe, to 'Abdallah,

<sup>13</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 90, Lawrence to Wilson, Wajh, Apr. 26, 1917; A.B. 51, p. 241; F.O. 686/10/2, pp. 267-268, H. Goldie to Wilson, Yanbu', Feb. 11, 1919.

<sup>14</sup>Examples of internal leadership struggles are in A.B. 42, Feb. 15, 1917, p. 82 (Bili); F.O. 371/3051, Personalities of Southern Syria, pp. 14-15, (Huwaytat); A.B. 45, Mar. 23, 1917, p. 134, (southern Huwaytat); A.B. 70, Nov. 21, 1917, p. 459, ('Amarat); A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 491, ('Anazah).

<sup>15</sup>A.B. 74, Dec. 24, 1917, p. 514; A.B. 28, Nov. 1, 1916, p. 401; A.B. 15, Aug. 10, 1916, p. 165; A.B. 20, Sept. 4, 1916, p. 233.

<sup>16</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 291, telegram 480, Wilson to Under-secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mecca, July 5, 1918; A.B. 43, Feb. 28, 1917, p. 97, reporting fight of Feb. 10, 1917, at Wajh; also I.O.L.P.&S./11/120, file 1341, Major-General Stewart, Aden Resident, to Wingate, Aug. 27, 1918.

in which he explained his inability even to visit Mecca by "the hostility that exists between us and the tribes of Beni Harb, Juheina and Anazeh."<sup>17</sup>

A terse marginal comment from a British observer noted that the letter "does not say much for the prospects of 'unity'."

That tribal affiliations still commanded more immediate attention than national ones is clear from the conditional clauses which so often hedged descriptions of tribal reconciliation in the British sources: "They have suspended their blood feuds for the period of the war, and will fight side by side with their old blood enemies if they have a shریف in supreme command."<sup>18</sup> The dispute, in other words, had been laid aside rather than resolved. The same report notes that the tribesmen were unreliable for a mass attack precisely because of the distrust among neighbors and the number of private family grudges. When the British withdrew their supplies and restricted their subsidy after the war, resources again became scarce and the Beduin "returned to their old methods of livelihood."<sup>19</sup> Concurrent with the reaction to economic adversity, the old ideology also reemerged, and conflicts that had been conveniently buried for the duration of the war, flared up again immediately after the victory. This realization was perhaps the moment of truth for Lawrence, who was at the same time an ardent apostle of Arab nationhood and also one of the most astute

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<sup>17</sup>F.O. 371/2768, p. 263; and I.O. L.P. & S./10/597, letter to 'Abdallah signed by "Sulaymann Rifadah, Sheikh of the Bani Salman Arabs," dated 27th Rabi Tani, 1334; unsigned note appended.

<sup>18</sup>A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 478 (emphasis added).

<sup>19</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 3, Apr. 1, 1920, p. 81, report by Col. Vickery; for the economic origins of tribal feuds, see F.O. 686/10/2, pp. 267-268, Goldie to Wilson, Yanbu', Feb. 11, 1919; F.O. 686/12/1, p. 68, Nasir al-Din to British Agent at Jiddah.



observers of tribal realities. For him the triumphal capture of Damascus, his dream of two years, also marked the defeat of his greatest aspirations. At that point he could no longer hope to reconcile an ideal conceived as a citizen of a European nation-state with the motivations of the Beduin tribesmen responding to the geopolitical realities of the Arabian Peninsula. The victory of Damascus witnessed the reopening of the wounds, factionalism among the Arabs at that vital juncture "rendering them incapable of becoming a nation."<sup>20</sup> The independence of the desert tribes had triumphed, but the nation was not yet born.

While Sharifian mediation and British provisions both contributed to the large-scale suspension of intertribal conflicts during the war, there were times when even the most skillful negotiation and the most tantalizing material inducements were insufficient to overcome the underlying cause of the dispute. In such cases, feuds often worked themselves out differently, becoming accentuated by the wartime divisions. "It is not an uncommon occurrence," remarked a British observer in eastern Arabia, "that when there are two rival sheikhs and one is for us, the other turns pro-Turkish."<sup>21</sup> And Frederik Barth has noted that it is characteristic of segmentary systems for rival units to establish "a net of political alliances with the rivals of allies of their own rivals."<sup>22</sup> Thus a quarrel within a Sharifian clan south of Mecca prompted one shaykh to seek refuge behind the Turkish lines with his men in order to

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<sup>20</sup>S. and R. Weintraub, in Lawrence, Evolution, p. 13; also Nutting, Lawrence, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup>A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, p. 190; and A.B. 13, Aug. 1, 1916, pp. 124-126.

<sup>22</sup>Barth, "Segmentary Opposition," p. 5.

escape the vengeance of his enemies, while during Faysal's northern campaign, the population of towns like Tafilah and Karak divided according to the existing internal factional struggle, in support of or in opposition to the revolt.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the war, with its massive arms flow and the sanctioning of military activity, might become not a unifying force but rather a useful means for a tribe to vent its wrath on an old blood enemy. The Huwaytat took the opportunity to attack two hostile sections of the Banu 'Atiyah which had not joined the revolt, while ibn Rashid's alliance with the Turks allowed for the settling of many old scores. The Masruh Harb, the Dhafir Shammar and Sa'ud ibn Subhan all joined the Sharif largely in order to pursue their various quarrels with the Amir of Jabal Shammar more effectively.<sup>24</sup> And while the British adhered to the ideology of Arab unity and national liberation, and the Turks stoutly professed to the end the myth of Islamic unity and loyalty to the Caliph, neither of the two principals in the war hesitated to exploit these existing tribal cleavages and enmities for their own purposes.<sup>25</sup>

The danger of accepting simple labels and outward professions of

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<sup>23</sup>A.B. 55, June 28, 1917, p. 290; A.B. 78, Feb. 11, 1918, p. 33; A.B. 88, May 7, 1918, p. 151; A.B. 51, May 23, 1917, p. 245.

<sup>24</sup>F.O. 371/3046, file 7013, Note on the Harb, Nov. 1, 1916, sent Cox to Director of Military Intelligence, Arab Bureau, Dec. 3, 1916, (Masruh); F.O. 371/2775, General Officer Commanding, Force "D", Basrah, to Chief of General Staff, Simla, (Dhafir); A.B. 57, July 24, 1917, p. 314, report by Gertrude Bell, (ibn Subhan); A.B. 50, May 13, 1917, p. 207, (Huwaytat); similar examples are in A.B. 72, Dec. 5, 1917, p. 485; A.B. 91, June 4, 1918, p. 174; A.B. 58, Aug. 5, 1917, p. 330.

<sup>25</sup>See for example A.B. 45, Mar. 23, 1917, p. 135; A.B. 42, Feb. 15, 1917, p. 82; F.O. 371/3046, Note on the Harb, Nov. 1, 1916; A.B. 50, May 13, 1917, p. 218; A.B. 51, May 23, 1917, p. 245; A.B. 31, Nov. 18, 1916, p. 447; A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, p. 188.

allegiance as actual designations of support for or opposition to the revolt is well illustrated by a report from the central desert, submitted to the Arab Bureau by R. Marrs, political officer at Zubayr.<sup>26</sup> In March of 1917, the major chieftains with their principal supporters were listed as follows:

- |            |                   |  |
|------------|-------------------|--|
| Anti-Turk: | 1. Sa'ud Subhan   | -- with some Dhafir, Budur and Aslam Shammar.                                      |
|            | 2. Nuri Sha'lan   | -- Ruwala-led 'Anazah levy, Sinjarah Shammar, and Huwaytat (under 'Awda abu Tayi). |
|            | 3. Ibn Sa'ud      | -- Najd levy, Mutayr, and some Aslam Shammar.                                      |
| Pro-Turk:  | 4. Fahad Hadhdhal | -- 'Amarat ('Anazah).  |
|            | 5. 'Ajaymi Sa'dun | -- 'Ajman, Zayyad and some Muntafiq.   |
|            | 6. Ibn Rashid     | -- Jabal Shammar levy, 'Abdah Shammar, some 'Ajman and Firidah Harb.               |

Upon closer examination, however, we find that this two-fold division which identifies the tribes by their attitude toward the Turks, is far more a reflection of internal conflict than of actual sympathies for or against the revolt. "While their operations will doubtless react upon ourselves and our enemies," warns Marrs, "they are directed primarily against one or more of the other Arab leaders, being, as usual, internecine." Thus we find that (3) is at war with (6), (5) is feuding with (1), (2) is struggling with (4) for control of the 'Anazah, and (1) hopes to displace (6) at Hail. Even within these six tribal combinations are shifting feuds and alliances which cross-cut the basic divisions: (1) wants to ally himself with (2) and (4) and the Zayyad in (5); (4) though against (2) is friendly with (1); and (6) is disputing control of the

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<sup>26</sup>A.B. 44, Mar. 12, 1917, pp. 117-121.

'Ajman and 'Abdah Shammar with (5) and (3).

Descriptions of fights among Arabs allied with opposite sides in the war abound with stories of treachery and revenge, raids and shifting alliances, personal family disputes and attempts to extend local influence --classic ingredients of the traditional blood feud. In accounts that often read like epic ballads, the Turks are barely mentioned and the destruction of Ottoman authority seems not to have been a preoccupation at all. Most remarkably perhaps, by contrast to the European war, the protagonists knew their enemies individually and could frequently identify by name those whom they had killed and whose flocks they had raided.<sup>27</sup> These reports are more reminiscent of the ancient tribal warfare of pre-Islamic times than of a war of liberation in an era of nation-states. Lest the salience of 'primordial' ties to clan and tribe in Arabia should cause surprise, it is worth recalling the disappointment of Marxists that class loyalties had not yet superseded the more ancient ethnic and national bonds which impelled soldiers to fight and die in the European war.<sup>28</sup>

The Sharif's revolt therefore propelled tribal feuds and political divisions in one of two directions--toward temporary resolution or

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<sup>27</sup>See for example, F.O. 686/10/1, p. 128, Shaykh Nahis al-Zuwaybi to Sharif 'Abdallah, dated 1.1.36, received in Jiddah Nov. 30, 1917; I.O. L.P. & S./10/601, description by Ibrahim al-Rawwaf, Damascus camel dealer, dated Nov. 15, 1916, sent Chief Political Officer, Basrah, to Director of Military Intelligence, Cairo; see also the feud between Shaykh Husayn ibn Mubayrik and the Sharif in A.B. 24, Oct. 5, 1916, p. 324; A.B. 23, Sept. 26, 1916, p. 301; A.B. 19, Sept. 9, 1916; A.B. 18, Sept. 5, 1916, p. 210; and A.B. 114, Aug. 30, 1919, p. 140.

<sup>28</sup>For a discussion of the persistence of such primordial ties as race, language, tribe, religion and ethnicity in new political structures, see Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution--Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in C. Geertz (ed.), Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa, New York, 1965, pp. 109-120.

heightened conflict. "The opposition between collaterals," Barth observed, "is a structural feature of any segmentary lineage system." But he also noted that this opposition might be "temporarily cancelled by a fusion of interests vis-à-vis larger groups."<sup>29</sup> This was the more common pattern in the revolt, rival factions submerging their differences for the duration of the war when the advantages of alliance and cooperation appeared to transcend the real issues at stake in the feud. This was especially true in the immediate staging area of the uprising where the physical presence of the Sharif's forces, the material inducements offered to the tribes and the arduous mediation of the Amir Faysal were most directly felt. However the crucial word in Barth's argument is "temporarily," and the dispute was likely to remain suspended only while the benefits continued to accrue. Where these benefits seemed less attractive, more especially on the periphery of the revolt, or where the factional enmity was particularly virulent, the existing conflicts tended to be exacerbated by the imposition of the wider divisions created by the world war. The inherent and vital clashes of interest among tribal groups were then grafted on to the macro-political structure and local disputes were inflamed and infused with added passion by the sharply drawn lines of the Anglo-Sharifian struggle against the Ottoman Empire.

Which of these patterns emerged, depended according to Barth on "whether the common interests of related segments, in their relation to larger units, are stronger or weaker than the opposition which divides them."<sup>30</sup> This being "an empirical question," there were in the Arab

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<sup>29</sup>Barth, "Segmentary Opposition," p. 9.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

movement many shades of grey between the two extremes of successful mediation on the one hand and accentuated rivalry on the other. Some disputes were diverted for the duration of the war but emerged again immediately afterwards, while others flared intermittently throughout the revolt. But in either case the uprising against the Turks demanded some response from the tribes in terms of the traditional rivalries which prevailed. Given the utility and persistence of the institution of the blood feud in the tribal form of government, the precariousness of the unity that was achieved by the Sharif should be neither alarming nor surprising. Rather, by looking at the revolt from within the existing political system, we cannot fail to be impressed by the extent to which these feuds were held in abeyance during the revolt.

#### The Maintenance of Tribal Autonomy, Organization and Leadership

We have seen that in order to establish their authority over the tribes of the Hijaz and to forge an effective alliance against the Turks, Husayn and his sons had to overcome deep rivalries and divisive blood-feuds.<sup>31</sup> To a large degree he was successful, but the task was immense. Husayn may have nurtured grandiose ambitions beyond his own borders, but he was too deeply immersed in the realities of domestic tribal politics to harbor illusions about the depth of jurisdiction of central control over the tribes. At no time do we find him pretending to direct rule over the inhabitants of the Hijaz outside the towns. Always he dealt, on a contractual basis, with the tribal shaykhs who

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<sup>31</sup>A.B. 57, July 24, 1917, p. 309, report by Lawrence.

were the direct leaders of the people. Therefore, to some extent, the Sharif could overcome tribal divisions, but he could also not help but work within them. This section of the chapter deals with the latter process--the formation and maintenance of a tribal coalition and alliance through the retention of the political integrity of the tribal unit. This process can be examined most directly by looking at the organization of the Sharif's army and its deployment in battle.

The very notion of an army takes us to the heart of the problem. In a modern national army, central political control is assumed. The commander in the field is merely the instrument of the state which represents the sole legitimate decision-making authority, and the soldier is the unquestioning subject of this overarching political power structure. In a national army it is inconceivable that the commander has a right to obey or disobey orders at his discretion or to make decisions in the name of any other group or interest. Should he do so he would be dismissed and probably court-martialled. But when 'Awda abu Tayih, chief of the Huwaytat, refused to attack the Turks at Fuwaylah on Sharif Nasir's order, he was simply asserting his absolute authority to take military or political action as he pleased. 'Awda chose to cooperate with, not to serve the Sharif, and it was "at Auda's pleasure" that he continued to do so.<sup>32</sup> In such an army conscription could not possibly be a prerogative to which Husayn could resort since it implies a direct relationship between ruler and subject, and the power of the central authority to compel individual obedience. To some extent Husayn had such jurisdiction within

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<sup>32</sup>A.B. 63, Dec. 16, 1917, p. 502; A.B. 58, Aug. 5, 1917, pp. 321-322.

the towns of the Hijaz but not over the tribes which constituted the backbone of the revolt. In the southern Hijaz, the Dhawi Hasan Ashraf responded to a Sharifian request for troops by refusing to send a single man to fight the Turks and renouncing their allegiance to Mecca entirely. The only punitive measure at the Sharif's disposal was to close his markets to the recalcitrant tribesmen, to which they replied by looting caravans to and from Mecca and levying tolls on all Hijaz dhows that put in at ports within their territory.<sup>33</sup>

Given this fierce spirit of tribal independence, how was it possible for the Sharif to form any kind of fighting force which owed him at least sufficient measure of allegiance to enable him to establish his authority firmly enough to prosecute an effective campaign against the Turks? This question is the core of Husayn's second major negotiating objective--to bring the tribes under his banner without threatening their own autonomy, a task no less arduous, delicate or time-consuming than the mediation of tribal disputes. Indeed there was a degree of incompatibility about the formation of a tribal military alliance with the very requirements of modern warfare that led the Sharif more than once to throw up his hands in despair. On one occasion he told the British to appoint their own Minister of War at Jiddah: "The King said that it was most difficult for him as neither he nor his sons knew anything about modern warfare but only Bedu fighting."<sup>34</sup> At a minimum a modern army

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<sup>33</sup>A.B. 103, Sept. 10, 1918, pp. 318-319. The tribe was at Lith, 80 miles south of Mecca.

<sup>34</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 225, Wilson interview with Husayn at Jiddah, July 16, 1918.



required a large standing force of trained and disciplined men, while as a mass, Lawrence noted, the Arabs were not formidable "as they have no... discipline or mutual confidence."<sup>35</sup> As we noted earlier in relation to tribal independence and the institution of the blood feud, the ecological, demographic and economic substructure of the Hijaz itself rendered the maintenance of a modern standing army unfeasible. The lack of water and forage made it almost impossible to move a large number of men at one time. One of the reasons for the delay in moving Faysal's army to Wajh was the necessity of sending small groups on separate journeys en route in order to find the scant patches of grazing land for their camels. Ironically therefore, the march on Wajh which constituted one of the largest movements of troops of the entire revolt also demanded the "delegation of wider powers to tribal commanders than has usually been the case."<sup>36</sup> Further east the problem was even more acute, Lawrence remarking that suitable grazing for camels was "mostly unobtainable in the eastern Hejaz, which makes it difficult for an Arab force of more than a dozen men to remain in action for half a day."<sup>37</sup> The most valiant efforts on the Sharif's part could not overcome such obstacles to unity.

Considering then the restraints within which he had to work, the Sharif's accomplishments appear remarkable. His solution was found firmly within the existing political system. A close look at the composition of

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<sup>35</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 118, Lawrence to Wilson, Yanbu', Jan. 8, 1917.

<sup>36</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 65, Lawrence to Wilson, sent by Cairo, Feb. 18, 1917.

<sup>37</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 100, Lawrence to Wilson, Wajh (?), Apr. 24 (?), 1917; diary entry dated 'Thursday March 29'.

Husayn's various armies shows that they were composed of separate but coherent units each under their own tribal shaykhs.<sup>38</sup> The integrity and autonomy of the tribe as the prime unit of identification was consistently reaffirmed by the method of deployment in battle. "It was impossible to mix or combine tribes," Lawrence observed later, "since they disliked or distrusted one another," and a shaykh from one tribe could under no circumstances give orders to men from another.<sup>39</sup> Where the necessity for a mixed force could not be avoided, only a sharif could be placed in command, since this at least would ensure the intactness of each unit and guarantee against possible interference by another tribe. Without denying tribal divisions, a sharif could thus rise above them. But unlike the process of mediation which attempted to reconcile differences, the Sharif's very position of authority in the battlefield situation in a sense affirmed those divisions. Thus when the Arabs of Karak and Bir Sab'a offered allegiance to Faysal they insisted that they would never submit to the chief of another tribe, and asked that a sharif be sent to them.<sup>40</sup> And Lawrence could note that the Juhaynah after six months in the field would salute Faysal and fall into line at his command, while still "preserving their tribal instincts of independence and order."<sup>41</sup> In some cases even Sharifian

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<sup>38</sup>A.B. 42, Feb. 15, 1917, p. 77; and F.O. 686/6/1, p. 117, Lawrence to Wilson, Yanbu', Jan. 8, 1917.

<sup>39</sup>Lawrence, Evolution, p. 115. Lawrence compiled these and other principles in "27 Articles on How to Deal with Hejaz Beduin," a guide for British officers in the field, in A.B. 60, Aug. 20, 1917, pp. 351ff.

<sup>40</sup>A.B. 64, Sept. 27, 1917, p. 388. A sharif was accorded a degree of noble standing by virtue of his claim to descent from the Prophet.

<sup>41</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 117, Lawrence to Wilson, Yanbu', Jan. 8, 1917.

control was too great a threat to tribal autonomy. In the south one tribe accompanied its proposal to fight the Turks with a request for rifles and a demand that no 'muqaddam' be sent to them, as they wanted no one to exercise authority over them.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile Lawrence remarked that the 'Ataybah worshipped their own leader, Sharif Shakir, "and obey his orders rather than Abdullah's,"<sup>43</sup> a statement of some significance as we have already noted that 'Abdallah openly favored the 'Ataybah and pretended to a special relationship with them. The cooperation of these tribes could therefore better be secured by a healthy respect for their local autonomy and leadership than by any imposition of external authority.

#### The Maintenance of Tribal Territorial Integrity

Tribal independence was also reflected in another aspect of the Arabian political system which provided an equally important motivation for action by the Beduin during the revolt. This was the preservation by the tribes of their territorial integrity, both against Sharifian encroachment and against any infringement on their lands by neighboring tribes. While it was not unusual for permission to be granted by one tribe to another to pasture in its territory, the right to confer or withhold this privilege was securely within the tribal domain. Ownership of wells and grazing lands was clearly defined and never relinquished to a 'national' sovereignty. Distrust between tribes led for example to the Harb and 'Anazah tribesmen attached to Faysal's forces being refused hos-

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<sup>42</sup>A.B. 71, Nov. 27, 1917, p. 477. 'Muqaddam' may be rendered as 'leader'.

<sup>43</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 125, Lawrence to Wilson, Wajh, Apr. 16, 1917.

pitality by their Juhaynah allies and a complaint by the Muahib Beduin to Colonel Newcombe that he has used Banu 'Atiyah in their territory.<sup>44</sup> But despite such instances, the record of cooperation was one of relative success, with the Sharif's authority once again being established not by challenging tribal authority, but rather by respecting the territorial rights guaranteed by the existing political system. Some shaykhs even saw in the revolt an opportunity to extend by warfare their dominion and control and to enforce their paramountcy over tribal elements on the periphery of their sphere of influence, ambitions which the Sharif did not hesitate to encourage in his attempt to build an alliance.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the most significant distinction between tribal and national warfare is the warrior's perception of his sphere of operation. In a war among nations, as was being fought in Europe, little heed is paid on the battlefield to the local concerns of the soldier. While he is mobilized in the trenches, his family and village are secondary to the needs of his country. But "the genius of the Arab," said Colonel Jacob, "is to defend his own hearth and home."<sup>46</sup> For the Hijaz tribesmen his home dira could never be relegated to minor importance, while action outside his tribal domain was more likely to be perceived as raiding beyond his borders than as service to a larger entity. Major Bray noted a "very decided disinclination on

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<sup>44</sup>A.B. 50, May 13, 1917, p. 214; also F.O. 686/6/2, p. 60, Newcombe to Wilson, May 4, 1917; and p. 73, Newcombe to Wilson (via Joyce at Wajh), May 8, 1917.

<sup>45</sup>See, for example, A.B. 47, Apr. 11, 1917, p. 168; A.B. 44, Mar. 12, 1917, p. 119; A.B. 65, Oct. 8, 1917, p. 408; A.B. 65, Oct. 8, 1917, p. 401; A.B., Oct. 8, 1917, p. 402; A.B. 66, Oct. 21, 1917, p. 412; A.B. 39, Jan. 19, 1917, p. 29; A.B. 38, Jan. 12, 1917, p. 20; and A.B. 29, Nov. 8, 1916, p. 422.

<sup>46</sup>F.O. 882/2, AP/16/1, telegram C. 273, March 14, 1916.

the part of the tribesmen to leave their home districts."<sup>47</sup> And Lawrence confirmed that the Beduin could not be used in areas belonging to another tribe: "Each [tribe] is available for service only in its own tribal district." The Beduin would, he said, "serve only under their tribal sheikhs and only in their home district or near it," obeying no order but that issued by their own leaders.<sup>48</sup> Of 6,500 men with Faysal at the end of 1916, only a third were said to be "available for operations far afield from this neighbourhood" (near Yanbu'). Zeal for the revolt was therefore largely dependent on the territorial issues at stake. In proximity to their homes, where they had vital personal and economic interests, there was a far more active involvement in the fight than at a distance. Thus we find nearly all the Harb and Juhaynah sections fighting vigorously in defense of their lands in Wadi Yanbu', but the 'Ataybah with 'Abdallah in Juhaynah territory "appeared to be without interest in the campaign" as they "knew nothing of the territory in which they were."<sup>49</sup> It is not surprising that the Juhaynah were reported to be "better behaved" than the 'Ataybah who "were not asked to do very much, and I do not think would have done it if asked." The Arab Bulletin noted that when the Beduin were far from their tribal districts, they became restless and nervous, and wanted to return home.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>N.N.E. Bray, Shifting Sands, p. 117. Dira may be rendered as clan or tribal domain.

<sup>48</sup>Lawrence, Evolution, p. 115; and A.B. 31, Nov. 18, 1916, p. 461. Also A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 483.

<sup>49</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 166, Intelligence Report, Dec. 28, 1916; A.B. 36, Dec. 26, 1916, p. 551; F.O. 686/6/2, p. 123, Lawrence to Wilson, Wajh, Apr. 16, 1917; A.B. 51, May 23, 1917, p. 240; A.B. 50, May 13, 1917, p. 214.

<sup>50</sup>A.B. 42, Feb. 15, 1917, p. 77.

How then did the Sharif achieve unity within the confines of such localized affiliations and manage to achieve the movement of his forces through various territorial regions? Specifically, how was Faysal's army maintained as the movement spread northwards? Clearly it was in a constant state of flux, as the force renewed itself with fresh men in each tribal area. The burden of battle shifted gradually from the Harb and 'Ataybah in the south, to the Juhaynah and Bili at Wajh, and finally to the Huwaytat, Banu 'Atiyah and Ruwala as the revolt moved north of 'Aqabah. Although the southern army under 'Ali, 'Abdullah and Zayd remained in the field with significant numbers of Harb and 'Ataybah tribesmen, it was largely static around Medina and Wadi 'Ays, participating in occasional raids and ambushes of minor significance. An analysis of the composition of the northern and southern armies confirms the distribution of the tribes according to their territorial domains. At Wajh for example, of the 10,446 men under arms nearly all were Juhaynah, while there were less than 400 Harb, the majority of that tribe having remained in the Yanbu' area. When Faysal reached the boundaries of Bili territory, the Juhaynah were sent back to join 'Abdullah's forces as soon as the Bili tribesmen had come in.<sup>51</sup>

While this process of transference and replacement appears fluid on paper, it was in actual fact cumbersome and a serious impediment to the progress of the revolt, as Faysal himself was only too well aware. Lamenting the absence of a regular trained army, the Amir complained to

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<sup>51</sup>Lawrence, *Evolution*, p. 115; *A.B.* 82, March 17, 1918, p. 88; *A.B.* 41, Feb. 6, 1917, p. 63; *A.B.* 42, Feb. 15, 1917, p. 82; Zayd later joined Faysal at 'Aqabah.

Colonel Wilson:

This is the point that troubles me. As you know, when I was at the Harb tribes' region, I formed there an army which I left under the command of someone else. Then I came to Yanbo where I formed another army which may be of some use anyhow but this I also left. Now I am trying to form a new army which I did not train and know its nature till now.<sup>52</sup>

No wonder then that the revolt proceeded in episodic bursts interspersed with long periods of waiting. While British officers complained of "abominably slow progress" and "nothing but talk,"<sup>53</sup> a tribal perspective on the revolt on the contrary shows Faysal achieving remarkable results against seemingly insuperable odds, by extraordinarily hard political work.

In the context of tribal warfare, the concept of desertion is quite different from situations of regular warfare and national armies. If every case of a tribesman or tribal section going home were so classified, then the history of the revolt would be the story of a continual mass desertion from the battlefield. The loss of Luhayyah to the Turks after the 'Ataybah deserted was attributed to the impossibility of sustaining an occupation by tribesmen far from their homes and an optimistic British assessment of the 8,250 men under arms in the Yanbu' area maintained that 96 per cent of the tribesmen "withdrew into their hills with their rifles, and stood on the defensive awaiting orders.....Apparently

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<sup>52</sup>F.O. 686/34, pp. 86-87, Faysal to Wilson, March 19, 1917.

<sup>53</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 39, Garland to Wilson, Cairo, March 6, 1917;  
F.O. 686/6/2, Davenport, report, Wajh, Aug. 8, 1917.

<sup>54</sup>A.B. 84, Apr. 7, 1918, p. 112; A.B. 96, July 9, 1918, p. 240;  
A.B. 41, Feb. 6, 1917, p. 61; F.O. 686/6/2, p. 157, Joyce to Director,  
Arab Bureau, Wajh, Apr. 15, 1917.

a great number of men and camels [Faysal] brought from Yanbo have retired to their villages and it takes time to collect more."<sup>54</sup> For British serving officers the "migratory nature" of their Beduin escorts could be a source of some frustration when they "evacuated without notice," leaving the Englishmen stranded.<sup>55</sup> In fact even within one tribal area the forces were constantly shifting. The sons in a family might serve in turn week by week and then go home, to be replaced by cousins and uncles. For certain periods a whole clan might rest, simply melting back into the hills, while their payments from Mecca continued.<sup>56</sup> Partly for reasons of economic necessity, traditional tribal wars were therefore brief and always within striking distance of their homes. In that sense, the Sharif's revolt represented an unusually prolonged conflict of a type unfamiliar to the tribal experience. Its unsettling effects provoked serious conflicts between the professed aims of the Arab movement and the values of the traditional tribal society, and it is to this problem that we now turn.

#### Tribal Military Performance and the Ideology of the Arab Revolt

We have drawn attention to several of the assumptions which distinguish a tribal political system from a national one: local versus centralized authority, disparate and scattered power centers versus a unified command structure, a particularistic concept of territorial in-

<sup>55</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 41, Major Roy, Commanding "C" Flight, No. 14 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps, Arabia, to Wilson, Apr. 21, 1917. Also, Garland, in A.B. 62, Sept. 8, 1917, p. 370.

<sup>56</sup>A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 477.



tegrity restricted to tribal domain versus a broader one embracing an entire nation. It has been shown also how through skillful negotiation and the infusion of external resources, the Sharif and his sons managed to bridge the gap between their own authority and that of the tribes. What we have not yet done is to make any explicit statement on the commitment of the Beduin to the goal of national independence and unity, for which they were supposed to be fighting. But this question leaves us with a basic dilemma. For on the one hand it remains an undeniable fact that large numbers of tribesmen fought in a movement whose leaders and planners had avowedly nationalist ambitions. On the other hand, Britain, for its own purposes, and Husayn, largely for expansionist reasons as we shall see in the next part, both pursued an objective whose accomplishment would result in the ultimate destruction of tribal power. Waterbury writes that "actors in segmentary systems have a zero-sum conception of power,"<sup>57</sup> and if there is any truth in this assumption, then an aggrandizement of the Sharif's power posed a serious threat to that of the tribal shaykhs. Yet to achieve this Husayn used the tribes themselves--surely an ingenious move! While there were many questions as to the Sharif's own subscription to nationalist ideals, he certainly did see the revolt as a very effective way to consolidate his own authority. Our problem here is: Did the tribes in fact subscribe to a movement which stood to nullify the base of their own power and which threatened the very existence of the system within which they operated?

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<sup>57</sup>Waterbury, op. cit., p. 65; see also Barth, "Segmentary Opposition," p. 15.

Ardor and zeal are difficult qualities to measure. Quantitative estimates of the intensity of an ideological commitment simply do not exist, so that judgments of Beduin devotion to the Arab 'cause' will be somewhat interpretative. We have explored in some detail the real economic and political interests which determined allegiance to the Sharif. But we know from the variety of Graham Allison's decision-making models, as they pertained to just one particular event, that a rational cost-benefit analysis is not necessarily sufficient to explain actions which may be based on other premises.<sup>58</sup> According to the calculations of his "rational policy paradigm," the Vietnamese or Algerian independence forces should have surrendered a dozen times over on any mathematical estimate of the ratio of losses to gains. However, one may speculate that in these cases the pursuit of the ideal of 'national liberation' produced a willingness to make sacrifices which no amount of French or American military materiel could crush. It is therefore legitimate to ask whether the Hijaz tribesmen displayed in battle such behavior as would be consistent with devotion to a higher ideal, to a state outside the self. Personal gain is only to be enjoyed by a man alive, as Lawrence recognized, but commitment to nation, race, religion or tribal honor has at various times produced a willingness to incur risks in war and even to die in the belief that an ideal beyond the finite confines of an individual life is served by such sacrifice. This was recognized by a British observer in Basrah who commented that one member of the Ikhwan, the spearhead of the Wahhabi religious revival in Central Arabia, was worth five ordinary Beduin in battle, because he was

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<sup>58</sup>Graham Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," in APSR, (American Political Science Review), Sept. 1965, pp. 689-718.

prepared to sacrifice his life for the "cause."<sup>59</sup> And, attempting to explain the collapse of the Sharif's forces in the face of ibn Sa'ud's conquest of the Hijaz after the war, Major Bray contrasts the religious zeal of the Ikhwan with the lackluster apathy of Husayn's "mercenary army."<sup>60</sup> What then do battlefield reports of Beduin behavior reveal of their attitude toward the proclaimed ideal of the struggle in which they were enrolled, namely Arab national liberation from Turkish "oppression"?

Before we attempt to answer this question a word must be said about methodology. There are few extant statements by tribal shaykhs either affirming or denying their commitment to the cause, but even if there were, such official pronouncements of ideology and opinion are hardly a reliable guide to real motivation. If, for example, the history of United States involvement in Vietnam were studied from the point of view of public declarations and official justification alone, a rather distorted picture would probably emerge. Actions are less deceptive than ideological statements, and a far more accurate standard by which to judge motivation. Shaykh Husayn ibn Mubayrik of Rabigh for example, took an oath of allegiance to Mecca, a solemn profession of intent which was later unmasked by his pirating of supplies intended for the Sharif's forces and by his subsequent alliance with the Turks.<sup>61</sup> The problem is

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<sup>59</sup>A.B. 112, June 24, 1919, p. 87. For a history of the Ikhwan (Brotherhood) and the Wahhabi movement see the report by Major H.R.P. Dickson, British Political Agent in Bahrayn, in Notes on the Middle East, Foreign Office, No. 4, June 5, 1920, pp. 103-112. See also A.B. 116, Oct. 22, 1918, pp. 351-356. And Gerald deGauray, *op. cit.*, chapters 12-14 on the Wahhabi movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

<sup>60</sup>Bray, *op. cit.*, p. 294; also J.C. Hurewitz, Middle East Politics: The Military Dimension, New York, Praeger, 1969, chapter 13.

<sup>61</sup>A.B. 24, Oct. 5, 1916, p. 324; A.B. 23, Sept. 26, 1916, p. 301; A.B. 18, Sept. 5, 1916, p. 210; and A.B. 19, Sept. 9, 1916, p. 227.

that we are testing for the attitudes and commitment of Arabs by examining their actions in the field as described by Englishmen. But while no no expressions of opinion have been taken at their face value in this analysis, there is also no reason to doubt the accuracy of the descriptive content of British reports of Beduin behavior. Judgmental statements associated with the accounts of these Englishmen certainly have no universal moral application, and must be accepted instead as evidence of differing perceptions and outlooks. Thus an officer's accusation of "disobedience" or "indiscipline" will not be taken as a statement of fact but interpreted rather as an exasperated reflex to a different authority structure or system of political organization. And beneath the admission of a British lieutenant that he is "almost bursting with anger and impatience" at the tribesmen,<sup>62</sup> lies the incompatibility between British and Arab military experience. This is in itself the surface manifestation of the fundamental distinction between a national and a tribal movement, which is the essence of this thesis. What is important about this method of analyzing actions is that we are not interested in the officer's personality or prejudices, and even less concerned about whether he is right or wrong in his judgments. Our aim here is not to reach any so-called 'objective' assessment of the worth of the Arab military effort. What one observer will call "lack of discipline,"<sup>63</sup> another might interpret as independence of spirit. Rather we are using the implicit gap between the perspectives of Englishman and Arab in order to explore more deeply the roots of the behavior which gave rise

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<sup>62</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 61, Lieut. H.S. Hornby to Newcombe, Abu Raya, May 17, 1917.

<sup>63</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 153, Newcombe to Wilson, Apr. 16, 1917.

to such expressions of anger and frustration in the first place.

Certainly the political imperatives of the tribal system of Arabia demanded a very different kind of warfare from that to which the British officers working with the Arabs were accustomed. Of all those who were in the field, Lawrence alone was really able to transcend the preconceptions and assumptions these men carried with them from the British Army and to look out from the inside, so to speak, from the perspective of the tribal political structure which was a necessary condition for all military action in the Hijaz. His "Twenty-Seven Articles on How to Deal with Hejaz Beduin" was a remarkable document for its attempt to bridge the gap between the political realities he perceived with such insight, and the nationalist ideals which he held for the Arabs, which were a product of his own European background.<sup>64</sup> This guide for British officers in the field attempted to transfer his astute observations of political reality to practical military tactics. While recognizing that a thousand Arabs in an entrenched position were ineffective against trained troops, he saw also that groups of three or four in their own valleys and hills could cause the Turks great bewilderment. Their strength lay in their mobility and the use of guerrilla tactics, with small parties raiding the Turks here and there, harrassing their lines of communication and then staging quick retreats. "The smaller the unit," Lawrence concluded, "the better."<sup>65</sup> This method of warfare allowed free play to all

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<sup>64</sup>The articles are quoted in full in A.B. 60, Aug. 20, 1917, pp. 351 ff.

<sup>65</sup>idem. And also see F.O. 686/6/1, p. 118, Lawrence to Wilson, Yanbu', Jan. 8, 1917, and F.O. 686/6/1, p. 164, intelligence report, Dec. 28, 1916.

the forces operating in the Bedu's normal environment. He could fight in his own territory, with his own kinsmen, under his own leaders, very much in the style of the traditional 'ghazzu,' to which he was accustomed.

Many of the most successful actions of the revolt were in fact accomplished by small groups operating almost totally independently. "The Turkish communications are daily harrassed by Arab parties, many of whom do not belong to the Sharif's forces but are working on their own," stated an early British dispatch from the Hijaz.<sup>66</sup> And a closer examination even of large-scale movements indicates that the military successes scored were largely the work of small groups raiding rather than the result of major battles. The two most important "conquests" of the revolt, at Wajh and 'Aqabah, were not achieved by the main body of Faysal's army. The Ottoman garrison at Wajh was overrun by a handful of Arabs landed at night from a British navy vessel and the town reduced by shelling from the ship's guns before Faysal's army of 8,000 men, parched with thirst, arrived on the scene.<sup>67</sup> And the victory at 'Aqabah was the work of a band of Huwaytat under 'Awda abu Tayih and accompanied by Lawrence, with Faysal's army following only after the town had been taken. Similarly 'Abdallah's capture of Taif on September 23, 1916, was accomplished with hardly any casualties among the Arabs, not by an all-out assault but by intermittent sallies and sudden retreats. In fact after a siege of months, it appears that the city fell more as a result of hunger than of Beduin pin-pricks

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<sup>66</sup>F.O. 371/2775, Wilson to McMahon, Jiddah, Sept. 28, 1916.

<sup>67</sup>For graphic descriptions of the Wajh campaign, see Bray, op. cit., Chapter 9, pp. 114-133; and Graves, Lawrence, pp. 140-141.

and occasional forays.<sup>68</sup> Throughout the war there were no large-scale confrontations or major battles between Arab and Ottoman forces except for Faysal's abortive storming of Medina at the very beginning of the revolt, which was quickly abandoned, and the final pursuit of the Ottoman Fourth Army in Palestine. No wonder then, that to the chagrin and disappointment of every British officer except Lawrence, the battle that would have been required to dislodge the one major concentration of Ottoman forces, at Medina, was never launched. Lawrence was content simply to bypass the city itself, harass the Ottoman lines of communication leading to it, and concentrate rather on the northward push.

And so, no Gallipoli or Dien Bien Phu or Battle of Algiers characterized the Arab Revolt of Sharif Husayn. Indeed Lawrence was the first to admit that the Arabs lacked the "corporate spirit"<sup>69</sup> necessary for any such large-scale endeavor, and corporate spirit is the sine qua non of 'nationalist' struggle whatever its form. But military tactics clearly have ideological implications, and assessments of Arab military performance from the vantage point of a tribal system will yield quite different results from those seen from the perspective of a nation-state. If we evaluate the revolt from the standpoint of the more individualistic and small-group military activity characteristic of tribal politics, we will find it not lacking in examples of valor and sacrifice. It is an unfortunate fact that the great majority of writers on the Arab revolt have attributed to it glories that simply did not exist, while ignoring the kind of zeal

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<sup>68</sup>A.B. 23, Sept. 26, 1916, p. 302; and A.B. 30, Nov. 15, 1916, pp. 438-439. This opinion was also expressed by Fetin Pasha, Amir al-Haj, in A.B. 29, Nov. 8, 1916, p. 416.

<sup>69</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 118, Lawrence to Wilson, Yanbu', Jan. 8, 1917.

and bravery that had its roots deeply within the history of the region.

The fierce élan of 'Awda abu Tayih of the Huwaytat was not born with the Sharif's revolt. As early as 1910, when Husayn was still fighting for the Turks in 'Asir, 'Awda was already raiding Ottoman outposts in the northern Hijaz. At that time Alois Musil wrote of the shaykh that we was "one of the boldest warriors" and "the most energetic chieftain of the Huweitat," being able to camp unmolested near an Ottoman position though the government had a price on his head.<sup>70</sup> Lawrence recounts that 'Awda claimed a personal kill of 75 Arabs since 1900 (he did not count Turks) as the result of raids, feuds and skirmishes. Since he had scores of enemies and loved to add more, the revolt was an "ideal excuse to take on the Turkish government" as well.<sup>71</sup> In fact Lawrence considered him the only reliable element for an offensive strike against the Turks, adding in the same breath however that he was unaccountable and "open to other than purely military considerations."<sup>72</sup> Whatever his motivations, the Huwaytat chief was certainly a mainstay of the revolt from the time of Faysal's long sojourn at Wajh until the entry into Damascus.

The source of 'Awda's commitment and courage, although difficult to evaluate quantitatively, sheds light on the ideological basis of the Arab movement. Dickson's description of traditional desert warfare, which incidentally is synonymous with the concept of "raiding," indicates well the values which underlay tribal military activity against the Turks.

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<sup>70</sup>F.O. 882/3, HM/16/1, report by Alois Musil, dated 1910, filed May 3, 1916.

<sup>71</sup>A.B. 57, July 24, 1917, pp. 309-311.

<sup>72</sup>A.B. 65, Oct. 8, 1917, p. 398; see also Antonius, op. cit., pp. 220-223.



Raiding is the breath of life to the Badawin....

A famous raider is honoured above all men, and boys and young men pine for the day when they will be allowed to accompany their elders on forays, and so win their spurs.

Raiding brings out all that is hard, brave and skilful in man, so the occupation is honoured and encouraged, just as everything tending to make a man soft and effeminate is despised by all true desert men.

Desert raids do not as a rule entail much bloodshed. Raiders are primarily inspired by greed for camels, and with this goes the desire to score off their enemies....

There is no such thing in ordinary desert warfare as men fighting "to the death" or making a "last stand" in defence of wives, children and stock....If he knows he can drive off the raider he will stand and do so; if, on the other hand, he sees that he has no chance, he will desert family and camels and bolt into the desert to live to fight another day. He knows his women and children will be safe, why then risk certain death by fighting against odds? He allows his camels to be taken knowing his turn will come another day. 'Nakhud wa nanwakhid' (We take and are ourselves taken) is his creed.

This is no reflection on the Badawin's courage. He is a brave man, but he has no false notions of standing up against an obviously superior force till he is killed.<sup>73</sup>

Examples of personal audacity, which are characteristic of this kind of traditional tribal warfare, abound in the British sources, and contrast with a marked lack of evidence of devotion to the "cause" of national liberation by the Hijaz tribesmen as a group. Shaykhs are described as having "grown gray in successful ghazzus," and their often daring individual exploits in the revolt stemmed from a frankly expressed

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<sup>73</sup>Dickson, op. cit., p. 341; see also pp. 347-348 and all of chapter 26.

pride in the raiding skill of the Bedu warrior.<sup>74</sup> One of the most dramatic incidents of the campaign was the charge into the lines of the Ottoman Fourth Army by Talal al-Haraydhin, shaykh of Tafas, recorded by Lawrence and immortalized in the film Lawrence of Arabia. But this was an expression of vengeance, personal grief and fury at the massacre of the inhabitants of his village by the Turks, an act which breached one of the fundamental laws of Beduin warfare--the inviolability of women and children.<sup>75</sup> Probably in no theatre of the First World War was military activity so personal or to such an extent the conglomeration of diverse actions by independent groups as the Hijaz. In stark contrast to the war of nations unfolding on Europe's battlefields, "the Arabs were not pressed men accustomed to be treated as cannon-fodder like most regular soldiers. The Arab army," wrote Robert Graves, "was composed rather of individuals, and its losses were not reckoned merely by arithmetic."<sup>76</sup>

But instances of individual valor tell us little about the military performance of the tribes as a whole. If we analyze group behavior and collective motivation, a very different picture emerges. Major Bray condemned the "sad lack of initiative" and determination that he observed among the Beduin and remarked that the failure to make sacrifices was "typical of the whole Arab force."<sup>77</sup> Indeed, the British sources are

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<sup>74</sup>See for example F.O. 686/6/2, pp. 97 and 91, Lawrence to Wilson, Wajh, Apr. 24 and 26, 1917.

<sup>75</sup>Talal's charge is described in Nutting, Lawrence, pp. 156-157, in Lawrence, Seven Pillars, pp. 580-581, and in A.B. 106, Oct. 22, 1918, pp. 347-348. All three reports are based on Lawrence's observations.

<sup>76</sup>Graves, Lawrence, p. 141.

<sup>77</sup>Bray, op. cit., p. 117; and pp. 130-133.

replete with references to the tribesmen's "instability of purpose," to their "slackness" and "inaction," to their total lack of "the offensive spirit" and to their unwillingness to attack when it was "too dangerous to do so."<sup>78</sup> Various shaykhs were accused of "indifference," lack of resolve, and of having no interest in the war.<sup>79</sup> Characterizing the Arabs on one expedition as "mostly three-quarter backs, no forwards," Colonel Newcombe reported that they were "frightened and have no intention of doing anything except for money....Hurting the Turk seems too risky for most Arabs."<sup>80</sup> Other groups of tribesmen were said to be "not at all disconcerted" by military failures, and often refused to take action even against numerically inferior Ottoman forces.<sup>81</sup> In the majority of cases the warrior ethic of the traditional ghazzu which inspired 'Awda, or the personal vengeance which motivated Talal, did not apply to a prolonged war against the Ottoman Empire. And for most officers the intrusion of tribal politics into the military campaign was a source of intense and continuous frustration. "Today's Great Thought," remarked Colonel Newcombe somewhat sarcastically: "If the Arabs had attempted to tire and to worry the Turks as they have

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<sup>78</sup>A.B. 51, May 23, 1917, p. 242, dispatch by Col. Newcombe; I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Sirdar to Foreign Office, Khartoum, Dec. 10, 1916; F.O. 686/6/1, p. 164, intelligence report, Dec. 28, 1916; A.B. 72, Dec. 5, 1917, p. 485, Lieut. Kernag (French artillery); and A.B. 49, Apr. 30, 1917, pp. 193-194, Newcombe report.

<sup>79</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 152, Newcombe to Wilson, Apr. 16, 1917; and F.O. 686/6/2, Davenport, Wajh, Aug. 8, 1917.

<sup>80</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, pp. 72, 81, 83, and 153, Newcombe to Wilson, May 8, May 4, report of Apr. 25 to May 2, and Apr. 16, respectively, 1917.

<sup>81</sup>A.B. 79, Feb. 18, 1918, p. 54; F.O. 686/6/2, p. 38, Newcombe to Wilson, Jaydah, July 18, 1917; F.O. 686/6/1, p. 41, Garland to Wilson, Cairo, Mar. 6, 1917; F.O. 686/39, p. 259, Bassett to Husayn, July 13, 1918; and F.O. 686/39, p. 212, Bassett to Husayn, Jiddah, July 25, 1918.

us, not a Turk would be left from Ma'an to Medina."<sup>82</sup> Plainly the kind of army we have been describing and the behavior of the Sharif's Beduin forces were perceived as both alien and unmanageable by these Englishmen who were accustomed to the framework of a national army with a central command structure.

The one officer whose remarks on tribal military performance were not overwhelmingly pejorative was Lawrence. As Major Garland wrote in an oblique criticism, "it is not given to every British officer to be able to sink his identity or to see the Arabs always through rosy glasses."<sup>83</sup> More directly Major Bray accused Lawrence of ignoring British interests by being too much "inside" the Arab revolt and therefore tending "too much to the Arab point of view."<sup>84</sup> Only an exceptional, and one may suspect slightly idiosyncratic individual, can in any situation transcend the belief system which colors his every action and lies behind every perception. By all accounts Lawrence was such an individual, and his remarkable ability to work within an alien system for the achievement of national aspirations which derived from his own background, provide both some of our most valuable insights into the nature of the Arab revolt and also a tragic epic of unresolved conflict reflected in his own disillusionment and in Husayn's ultimate downfall. However, having a real and immediate task to perform, even the other 'mortal' officers could not shrink from reality, so that their very "anger and disappointment" reveal important facets of the

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<sup>82</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 72; Newcombe to Wilson, via Joyce, Wajh, May 8, 1917.

<sup>83</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 18, Garland to Wilson, 'Ayn Tur'a, Aug. 14, 1917.

<sup>84</sup>Bray, op. cit., pp. 112-113.

system with which they had to deal. There is therefore as much to learn from the negative evaluations of Arab military performance by Newcombe, Garland, Joyce and others, as there is from Lawrence's enthusiasm. These officers have left behind a veritable catalogue of complaints in which the Arabs are accused of rank disobedience, lack of discipline, desertion and inaction, revealing at the same time the very imperatives of tribal organization which we have discussed.

If the authority of the Sharif of Mecca was as tenuous as we have seen and exercised only through the medium of tribal leaders, then that of a Christian foreigner, whose status derived from an agreement with Mecca rather than the tribes, was even one step further removed from real power. Newcombe complained of having "no power whatever" over the Beduin in his raiding parties, being completely dependent on the authority of headmen who altered, postponed and delayed every plan to cut the Hijaz railroad.<sup>85</sup> Garland reported similar experiences in which the Arabs nominally under his command "refused to cooperate" and "took matters almost entirely into their own hands." Describing the tribesmen as careless, incapable and insolent, he concluded that "they are becoming very independent and one has practically no control over them whatever."<sup>86</sup> But while foreign officers were totally excluded from the command structure of the Arab forces, such attitudes towards externally

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<sup>85</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, pp. 70, 72, 79 and 108, Newcombe to Wilson, May 5, May 8, May 4, Apr. 25, resp., 1917.

<sup>86</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, pp. 118-120, Garland to Newcombe, received at Jiddah, Apr. 25, 1917; *ibid.*, pp. 14-15, Garland to Wilson, 'Ayn Tur'a, Aug. 14, 1917; *ibid.*, pp. 53-55, Garland, Abu Markah, May 21, 1917; *ibid.*, Newcombe to Wilson, Apr. 16, 1917. Similar examples from other officers are in A.B. 79, Feb. 18, 1918, p. 54; A.B. 65, Oct. 8, 1917, p. 407; and A.B. 52, May 31, 1917, p. 254.

imposed authority also applied to Husayn's own representatives in the field. Even the Sharif's sons often had to defer to the leadership of the local shaykh and had little more ability to compel obedience in the face of the tribesmen's "mutinous spirit" than the British officers. 'Abdallah's Arabs were said to be neither "enterprising" nor "disciplined" while 'Ali's forces were "more volatile than ever." Bemoaning the "lack of discipline among the Bisha and Aegyl" one dispatch noted that they "will do what pleases them, and take no orders even from the Sherif."<sup>87</sup> All British officers including Lawrence, reported numerous instances of desertion, and Newcombe explained in exasperation that "[we] can destroy rails and telegraphs...much more simply by ourselves than with a gang of men who abandon us." The Beduin with Sharif Sharaf were reported to "desert him before he even gets near the railway" while Faysal encountered problems with shaykhs who abandoned him in battle with their men, with subordinates who promised action and did nothing, and with scouts who simply failed to return from missions, having absconded with their pay.<sup>88</sup> In considering why the Hijaz railroad was not finally cut until April 1918, it is not irrelevant to take account of comments such as that by Newcombe: "All the difficulties of cutting the line are from our side;...the Turks put far less difficulties in our way than our own people."<sup>89</sup> And finally there

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<sup>87</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Sirdar to Foreign Office, Khartoum, Dec. 10, 1916; A.B. 29, Nov. 8, 1916, p. 417; A.B. 35, Dec. 20, 1916, p. 535; F.O. 686/6/1, p. 1, Joyce to Wilson, Wajh, Apr. 1, 1917; A.B. 68, Nov. 7, 1917, p. 445; F.O. 686/6/2, Davenport, Wajh, Aug. 8, 1917; *ibid.*, p. 71, Newcombe to Wilson via Joyce, Wajh, May 8, 1917.

<sup>88</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, pp. 81, 70, 72, Newcombe to Wilson, May 4, May 7, May 8, 1917; *ibid.*, Davenport, Wajh, Aug. 8, 1917; *ibid.*, p. 61, Hornby to Newcombe, Abu Raya, May 17, 1917; F.O. 371/2776, Sirdar to Foreign Office, Dec. 8 and Dec. 11, 1916; I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Sirdar to Foreign Office, Khartoum, Dec. 10, 1916; A.B. 35, Dec. 20, 1916, p. 535; A.B. 73, Dec. 16, 1917, p. 502.

<sup>89</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, pp. 84 and 109, Newcombe to Wilson, report of Apr. 25 to May 2 and Apr. 25, resp., 1917.

were cases where the Beduin sold information to the Turks, and where "carelessness," "panic," and "stupidity" aborted planned Sharifian attacks.<sup>90</sup>

With their background of rigid military discipline, British officers were quick to accuse the Arabs of "treacherous behaviour" and of being "traitorously inclined."<sup>91</sup> It would perhaps have been comforting to these men had they known that the Turks were charging the Arabs under their orders with the same crimes. But the truth is that neither national independence nor loyalty to the Caliphate were causes that had a hold over the minds of the Beduin in the way that their own tribal system had. The very frustration of the officers in fact confirms the various aspects of that system which we have previously described. What they saw as "disobedience" and even "insolence" was the elevation of tribal authority over external forms of control. What they called a "lack of discipline" was also a spirit of tribal independence and the propensity toward centrifugation in segmental organization which will be considered below. When the British accused Arab leaders of "inaction" and meaningless "talk," they were drawing attention to the crucial negotiations which dramatized the relationship between local and central authority through the mediation of feuds and the establishment of a loose hegemony that did not infringe on tribal authority. What they referred to as "desertion" was a practical means of maintaining the tribal and territorial contiguity which was threatened by prolonged

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<sup>90</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, pp. 13, 20, 56, Garland to Wilson, Aug. 14, Aug. 16, May 21, 1917; *ibid.*, pp. 31, 153, Newcombe to Wilson, July 11, Apr. 16, 1917; *ibid.*, pp. 5 and 24-25, Davenport to Wilson, Wajh, Sept. 17, Aug. 8, 1917; F.O. 686/6/1, p. 40, Garland to Wilson, Cairo, Mar. 6, 1917; and A.B. 39, Jan. 19, 1917, p. 27.

<sup>91</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 79, Newcombe to Wilson, May 4, 1917; *ibid.*, p. 20, Garland to Wilson, Bir 'Amr, Aug. 16, 1917.

absences from the home dira. And "treachery" was often the safeguarding of tribal interests by maintaining some measure of contact with the opposing side. The battlefield therefore reflected the imperatives of a tribal political system, heightened perhaps by the very challenges to which they were subjected at a time of conflict.

It is difficult and probably inadvisable to attempt to distinguish between ideological factors and the precepts of tribal organization in explaining Arab attitudes toward the Sharif's movement. One British report, for example, states that "inaction is losing the Arab leaders many of their following, the tribes being unused to protracted operations especially operations of a nature unsuited to the Arab mentality."<sup>92</sup> Here the historical experience of the Beduin, which saw warfare in terms of the short, sharp ghazzu, produced an unwillingness to fight beyond the borders of their tribal domains and a corresponding lack of commitment to the Sharif's cause, characterized by what the British called "desertion." Contradictions which emerge in the information provided by the British officers therefore reveal the workings of tribal politics and at the same time allow us to draw inferences on the attitude of the tribesmen to the Sharif's cause. Garland for example accused the Arabs of not cloaking their movements, of alerting the Turks by firing off their rifles at inappropriate times and of camping in positions easily observable by the enemy, "though you'd think they'd know from experience in skirmishes with Turks and intertribal fights."<sup>93</sup> The point is that they certainly did know, and that it hardly makes sense for an Englishman to accuse Beduin

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<sup>92</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 164, intelligence report, Dec. 28, 1916.

<sup>93</sup>F.C. 686/6/1, p. 40, Garland to Wilson, Cairo, Mar. 6, 1917.



of "stupidity" in desert warfare. What the preceding evidence does show is that while the Hijaz Beduin certainly took the field against the Turks for the diverse political and material reasons we have described, they did not fight the Turks with the virulence with which they might pursue a blood feud or with the passion of a religious revival which at various times in the history of the Arabian Peninsula fired the imagination of the desert tribesmen. National liberation as an ideology was simply not yet able to inspire this kind of fervor in the Beduin. Indeed it was the British officers who were at fault here for judging Beduin fighting capabilities according to their own ideological preconceptions. The accusations cannot be taken as an indictment of Beduin courage in general for it is fair to presume that the same men who have been described here as slack, lazy and unwilling to incur risks and make sacrifices, would be utterly fearless in pursuit of a cause which was more meaningful to them. Lawrence frequently commented on the courage of individual warriors with whom he came in contact. But while he had a great respect for the individual, Lawrence also recognized the Bedu's lack of "corporate spirit" and "mutual confidence," and his unwillingness to succumb to any kind of large-scale organization which made him, by definition, unlikely to subscribe to a nationalist ethos.<sup>94</sup> It is instructive to contrast dispatches sent by allies of the Arabs in the revolt with descriptions of guerrilla behavior in a modern national liberation movement. In Algeria and Vietnam even their enemies were prepared to credit the rebels with resolve and determination, while vigorously denying the aim of that purpose.

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<sup>94</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 118, Lawrence to Wilson, Yanbu', Jan. 8, 1917.

Our emphasis on the tribal origins of the Arab revolt is not intended to imply that political processes in the Hijaz were static, and unchangingly followed time-worn patterns of behavior. The very imposition of the demands of modern warfare on the tribal system, no matter how incompatible with the existing order or how frustrating to its executors, could not help but have a lasting impact on the innermost fabric of Hijazi society. As we know too well from the history of the third world, when the forces of modernity once intrude, whether coercively or voluntarily, whether overtly or unobtrusively, they are not easily stymied and turned back. Such change, however, does not take place without major upheaval and it is the conflict between modernizing events and traditional institutions which is obscured when the existing political system is ignored. Our evidence has shown for example that in the perception of those who fought the revolt, the tribal shaykh still occupied center place in the chain of command. The error of those writers who have attributed overall control to the Sharif or Britain, without recognizing the salience of local power structures, is that they have looked only at the results, neglecting thereby the process by which the results were attained. They have assumed a centralization of authority which did not exist and have thus obscured the very dynamics of the movement, such as the painstaking negotiations for tribal allegiance, which gave the revolt its unique character.

Perhaps because they did not have to function within an alien reality and have observed the Arab revolt from a distance, contemporary historians have made a basic mistake which the British officers could not afford. They have brought to bear on the Hijaz of 1916, their own ideological

predispositions which have led them to make patently false interpretations of Arab military action and to see things that were simply not there. Thus they saw an overarching central command structure under Husayn and Faysal, an unquestioning response to their call for rebellion, a unity of purpose and action among their followers, and an unswerving devotion to the ideal of national independence which closer analysis of the primary sources shows to have been virtually irrelevant to the motivations of the tribesmen who fought the revolt. While the British officers whose writings we have been examining certainly shared the 'nation-statist' assumptions of these later writers, they were too close to the real situation to suffer from the same delusions. It is instructive that what Antonius, Yale and Nuseibeh celebrated as an awakening of nationalist sentiment, Garland, Joyce and Newcombe, who held the same political assumptions and who worked for the achievement of those same aspirations, experienced as a profound failure to accomplish their goals.

There is clearly a thin dividing line between economic and political organization on the one hand and values and ideology on the other. Far from being separate and discrete categories, Barrington Moore, in explicit historical studies, shows the connection to be a causal one. For example he traces the "Prussian" qualities of Germany on the eve of Nazism to Hohenzollern efforts to create a centralized monarchy, and the doctrines of racial superiority to the particular economic and political needs of the landed aristocracy of the nineteenth century.<sup>95</sup> Values and culture, Barrington Moore argues, are "acquired by man as a member of society," and

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<sup>95</sup>Barrington Moore, Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World, Boston, Beacon Press, 1966, pp. 435-436.

cannot therefore be taken as a given, but must be determined by a close examination of the social and political organization which has produced them. Taking values as an independent variable means that the investigator in fact buys the ideology of the ruling class and "succumbs to the justification that ruling groups generally offer..."<sup>96</sup> What we have seen Antonius, Zeine, Yale and other scholars do in the case of the Arab revolt is just that. They have accepted the *raison d'être* of the uprising precisely as the British and Sharif Husayn found it convenient to expound it for their own purposes. And by passing over the nature of the society in which the revolt took place, they have ignored the ideology of the Sharif's followers, those who did the actual fighting. The vehemence of the British accusations is clear indication of the gap between those who led the revolt and those who participated in it. The commitment of the Beduin to a cause which did not spring directly from their own tribal organization, but was imposed from without, was necessarily conditional and minimal. The tribesman of the Hijaz had the same capacity for valor and sacrifice as the most ardent nationalist, but exercised it in the service of those values which represented the political system in which he lived. However, this distinction between tribal motivations and the proclaimed ideology of the revolt also contained the seeds of destruction for the Sharif's wartime coalition, and it is to this process that we now turn.

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<sup>96</sup>ibid., p. 487.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## COLLAPSE OF THE ALLIANCE

Centrifugal and Anarchic Tendencies of the Tribal Political System

Every Bedouin is eager to be the leader. There is scarcely one among them who would cede his power to another, even to his father, his brother, or the eldest member of his family....Under the rule of the Bedouin, their subjects live as in a state of anarchy, without law, where everybody is set against the others. Anarchy destroys mankind and ruins civilization, since, as we have stated, the existence of royal authority is a natural quality of man....The Bedouin are of all nations the one most remote from royal leadership.

Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah.<sup>1</sup>

The characteristic of the Arabian political system to which Ibn Khaldun here draws attention, has been implied by our previous evidence but not hitherto stated explicitly. When British officers condemned the Arab offensive as "desultory," "disorganized" and "erratic,"<sup>2</sup> they were reacting with exasperation to a process that can best be characterized as one of centrifugation. Probably their most recurrent criticism was the lack of discipline of the tribesmen. Was this behavior, however, not merely a symptom of the anarchic forces set in motion by the unchecked pursuit of tribal autonomy? Military tactics cannot help but reflect political realities and the small-scale surprise attacks which Lawrence favored, were deplored by others as "temporary divergences" and "side-shows."<sup>3</sup> But what was deprecated as "general absence of definite plan,

<sup>1</sup>Ibn Khaldun, op. cit., pp. 119 and 121.

<sup>2</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 41, Major Roy, Royal Flying Corps, Arabia, No. 14 Squadron, to Wilson, Apr. 21, 1917; ibid., p. 20, Garland to Wilson, Bir 'Amr, Aug. 16, 1917; F.O. 882/3, AP/17/7, Clayton to Sykes, July 30, 1917.

<sup>3</sup>Bray, op. cit., ch. 12 on Lawrence, pp. 155-160, esp. p. 158.

and lightning changes of General Idea,"<sup>4</sup> was probably more in consonance with the values of tribal society than the major coordinated strategy suited to the endeavors of a national army. Similarly the reluctance of the Beduin to obey orders and their preference for independent action, as well as their propensity to wander off and leave the field after only a few days in action,<sup>5</sup> all indicated an impulse toward fission which denied the very direction of the nation building process.

But centrifugation taken to its extreme leads to a state of anarchy. For the British to have confronted directly such a principle held as a positive political value would have denied every aspect of the ideology they were propagating. Indiscipline and disobedience were at least concepts familiar to British officers, though certainly not on the scale and frequency with which they were encountered in the Hijaz; but anarchy was not. It is interesting that in Mesopotamia, where Arab national independence and unity were not cherished as ideals by the British, and where the colonial tradition was much stronger, administrative officers were also far less hesitant to draw the logical conclusions from the tribal behavior which they observed. There the tribes were reported to "favor anarchy with no capable government" and to be "revelling in the absence of constituted authority." Even when the British were in firm control after the capture of Baghdad, the same tribes were said to be innately hostile to domination in any form, preferring "to remain outside of all government."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 41, Roy to Wilson, Apr. 21, 1917.

<sup>5</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, pp. 151 and 83, Newcombe to Wilson, Apr. 16 and report of Apr. 25 to May 2, 1917; A.B. 66, Oct. 21, 1917, p. 417; and A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, p. 185.

<sup>6</sup>A.B. 8, July 8, 1916, pp. 1 and 5; A.B. 63, Sept. 8, 1917, p. 380; A.B. 55, June 28, 1917, p. 294.

The initial Turkish call to a jihad aroused some response among the tribes of Mesopotamia, but it was put down to "a natural desire to take a hand in any movement which gave pleasurable anticipation of lawlessness and loot."<sup>7</sup> It should be remarked here that the British authorities in Mesopotamia, attached to the Government of India, actually opposed Foreign Office support for Husayn.<sup>8</sup> Possibly because they never attempted to enroll the Arabs in a common struggle and thus had no stake in the ideology of unity, they also had less illusions about the attitudes of the tribes towards central authority of whatever hue, than their counterparts operating in the Hijaz. "Although at present especially anti-Turk," said one report of the loyalties of the Mesopotamian tribesmen, "they are probably...anti-any government, and wish to remain independent." Support of the British would simply be a change of masters from which little benefit was to be derived, and so their sympathies were classified as "quite unpredictable."<sup>9</sup>

A good example of this process of "centrifugation" is to be found in an historical account of the tribes of the Suq al-Shuyukh in Mesopotamia where "prevailing anarchy" and "chaos" were said to be the order of the day on the eve of the war:

The central authority was not strong enough to cope with the situation. The Ottoman Government could not master the lower Euphrates, rebellions were of constant occurrence, attempts to suppress the insurgents commonly ended in a draw if not in the discomfiture of the Turks, no official dues had been paid for 14 years before the

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<sup>7</sup>F.O. 371/3051, "A Tribe of the Tigris," memorandum by Gertrude Bell on the 'Albu Muhammad, sent Cox to Arab Bureau, Feb. 7, 1917.

<sup>8</sup>See Briton Cooper Busch, Britain, India, and the Arabs, 1914-1921, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971, chaps. 2 and 4.

<sup>9</sup>A.B. 8, July 8, 1916, p. 5.

outbreak of the war, and settled administration had scarcely so much as a nominal existence. Not only were the Suq tribes in perpetual conflict with their landlords and with the Government, but they were also ceaselessly in arms against one another. Roughly speaking they fell into two bitterly hostile confederations, the Beni Khaiqan...and the Mugarrah....Separate units had their own particular feuds and were yet further split into contending factions over which no single chief exercised control. Each petty shaykh would build himself a mud tower from which he defied, not unsuccessfully, such part of the universe as came within his ken. For example the Hasan, an unruly tribe on the Suq branch of the river, were divided into nine sections which were practically independent of one another and eternally at strife.<sup>10</sup>

As a postscript it should be noted that the imposition of British rule did little to change "the usual turbulent sort of existence" among the Suq tribes. "...It taxes all the powers of the civil authority to keep them at peace with each other," stated a field report, before going on to chronicle a dozen major disturbances which had occurred in the previous fortnight.<sup>11</sup>

While our examples here have been from Mesopotamia rather than the Hijaz, the 'anarchic' tendencies described were inherent in the tribal political system of Arabia as a whole. Colonel Joyce for example described the Huwaytat as very "anarchical," refusing at times to recognize even 'Awda as their paramount chief. And Faysal himself admitted candidly to Lawrence that the tribes of the central Hijaz--the Harb, Juhaynah and 'Ataybah--were difficult to hold and hard to rule.<sup>12</sup> Indeed the accusations of disobedience,

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<sup>10</sup>F.O. 371/3049, Report on Suq al-Shuyukh Qadhah, for Nov.-Dec., 1916; sent by Cox to Arab Bureau, Jan. 17, 1917 (emphasis added).

<sup>11</sup>F.O. 371/3049, Progress report on Suq al-Shuyukh, Sept., Oct., Nov., 1916; sent Cox to Arab Bureau, Jan. 17, 1917. Note that the previous report (footnote 10), although dated later, describes the situation as the British found it on the eve of the war.

<sup>12</sup>A.B. 71, Nov. 27, 1917, p. 473; F.O. 686/6/1, p. 121, Lawrence to Wilson, Yanbu', Jan. 8, 1917.



indiscipline and refusal to be subjected to external control, in the reports of officers stationed in the Hijaz, were merely the battlefield symptoms of a more deeply-rooted abhorrence to authority and centralization in any form. Possibly the reason that the Mesopotamian reports drew more explicit conclusions about the Beduin antipathy to government in any form is that the Arabs there were not the beneficiaries of a dramatic increase in resources as were their counterparts in the Hijaz. From the preceding descriptions it is apparent that economic variables played an important role in the splintering and disintegration of authority structures. In addition to the fierce competition for scarce resources which we have previously noted as an element in the tradition of tribal feuding, must be counted the resistance of the Beduin to the imposition of the taxes and dues which were levied by whatever central government had the power to enforce them. Several of the twelve disturbances in the Suq areas, mentioned in the last paragraph, had economic origins, involving land and boundary disputes and the piracy of crops and goods. The infusion of large quantities of British supplies and money as well as the Sharif's unwillingness to impose any tax on the Hijaz tribesmen relieved the economic pressures and temporarily diverted the anarchic proclivities of the Beduin, allowing them to surface merely as "indiscipline" in battle. When the palliatives were removed, the centrifugal forces reasserted themselves, dismembering in the process the tribal alliance so laboriously constructed by the Sharif and his sons.

### Tribes for the Turks

The elimination of economic incentives at the end of the war was only the final stage in the disintegration of the Sharif's support. For the fact is that tribal union, even for the limited duration of the revolt, was never complete. From the outbreak of hostilities there were Arabs at every level who actively supported the Turks. In the towns opposition to the Sharif's role was almost universal as we shall see shortly, and at the regional level support was fairly evenly divided, with the Amir of Jabal Shammar and the Imam of Yemen remaining loyal to the Ottoman Empire, and the rulers of Riyadh and 'Asir cooperating with the British if not always with Husayn. It is hardly surprising then to find tribal chiefs who opted never to join the Sharif's coalition in the first place. Since the tribes retained substantial freedom of action even at the height of the Sharif's power as we have seen, some shaykhs remained loyal to the Turks throughout the war while others switched their allegiance as circumstances dictated. Arab patrols were used to guard the Hijaz railroad and tribesmen were paid to maintain a continuous supply of food and camels to Ottoman outposts.<sup>13</sup> Some shaykhs, though certainly a minority, fought actively for the Turks and there were several reports of Sharifian raiding parties being attacked by Beduin especially in the early stages of the revolt.<sup>14</sup> In the border regions

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<sup>13</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 108, Newcombe to Wilson, 15 miles west of San'a, Apr. 25, 1917; F.O. 371/3051, pp. 15-16 of "Personalities of Southern Syria," printed memorandum of Arab Bureau, Cairo, dated April, 1917; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 134, Bassett to Husayn, Jiddah, Oct. 23, 1917; A.B. 93, June 18, 1918, p. 206; A.B. 110, Apr. 30, 1919, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup>A.B. 27, Oct. 26, 1916, p. 393, report dated Oct. 9, 1916; F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 196-197, Assistant Director of the Arab Bureau, Cairo, report of Aug. 1, 1916; F.O. 686/35, p. 30, Sharif Nasir ibn 'Ali to Husayn, telegram sent by Wilson to Husayn from Jiddah, July 24, 1917, having been transmitted via Suez; F.O. 686/33, p. 25, Wilson to Faysal, Jiddah, Nov.

between the Hijaz and Jabal Shammar there were tribal sections who opposed the revolt by allying themselves with ibn Rashid.<sup>15</sup> Indeed the same factors which were seen earlier as influencing allegiance to the revolt, such as political rivalry, material incentive and considerations of strength also induced some tribes to remain loyal to the Turks. Internal feuding and leadership struggles within the Huwaytat for example probably explain why Shaykh Hamid ibn Jazi was being subsidized and decorated by the Turks in 1917, at a time when his family rivals had declared for the Sharif.<sup>16</sup> And the appointment in Istanbul of Sharif 'Ali Haydar to replace Husayn as Amir of Mecca was initially successful in winning over some tribesmen to the Ottoman side.<sup>17</sup> The move failed because Sharif Haydar did not succeed in establishing himself as an armed physical presence in the Hijaz itself. South of Mecca however, rival Sharifian clans successfully defied Husayn until the end of the war.

But probably the two most significant defections from the Sharif's cause within the immediate staging area of the revolt were those of the

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15, 1916; F.O. 686/6/1, p. 222, Arab Bureau to Wilson, undated; ibid., p. 233, Wilson to Faysal, Nov. 14, 1916; ibid., p. 229, Arab Bureau to Wilson, Cairo, Sept. 28, 1916, and Pearson to Husayn, Dec. 20, 1916.

<sup>15</sup>F.O. 371/3046, "Note on the Harb," Nov. 1, 1916, memorandum listing shaykhs and their loyalties, sent Cox to Director of Military Intelligence, Arab Bureau, Dec. 3, 1916; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 214, Arab Bureau to Young, Feb. 9, 1917; ibid., p. 150, Arab Bureau to Wilson transmitting report from Joyce containing message from Faysal to Husayn, Sept. 13, 1917; ibid., p. 126, Goldie, intelligence report, Jan. 5, 1918.

<sup>16</sup>F.O. 371/3051, "Personalities," memorandum, Apr. 1917, Cairo, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup>F.O. 371/2775, Ibrahim Dimitri, Aug. 24, 1916; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 16, Bassett to Arab Bureau, July 26, 1918; and F.O. 686/10/2, p. 350, Goldie to Bassett, 'secret,' Aug. 30, 1918.

shaykh of the strategic port of Rabigh, Husayn ibn Mubayrik, and the paramount chief of the Bili tribe, Sulayman ibn Rifadah. A brief examination of their actions will pinpoint some of the holes in the Sharif's coalition and prepare the way for an understanding of the collapse of his alliance. On the eve of the revolt the Sharif and his sons assumed the support of both these chiefs and sent supplies and money in an effort to seal their cooperation. However the optimism was soon shattered and early claims of the Arab movement to unanimity could not be maintained in the face of glaring evidence to the contrary. By August ibn Mubayrik was retaining supplies and rifles which had been landed for the Sharif's forces and deliberately damaging those weapons that had been forwarded to Faysal. Labelling the shaykh "an enemy of Your Highness and a good friend to the Turks," Wilson told the Sharif that the Turks hoped to break through toward Mecca "and are counting on finding all these supplies at Rabegh and to be joined there by Sheikh Hussein and a large number of Arabs."<sup>18</sup> Here was a major breach in the Arab alliance almost before the revolt could get off the ground, for the Sharif's forces depended for their supplies on the crucial artery afforded by the port facilities of Rabigh. Earlier we noted that neither the Turks nor the British nor the Grand Sharif shrank from the use of naked force to coerce obedience if gentler methods of bribery and persuasion failed. When the Sharif dispatched a

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<sup>18</sup>F.O. 371/2773, 'Ali to Husayn, Medina, 26th Ragab, (May 26, 1916); F.O. 686/54, p. 92, Wilson to Husayn (telephone), Aug. 29, 1916; F.O. 371/2775, Wilson to McMahon, sent McMahon to Foreign Office, Aug. 30, 1916, being report of Wilson's interview with Faysal at Yanbu', Aug. 28, 1916; A.B. 18, Sept. 5, 1916, p. 210; A.B. 23, Sept. 26, 1916, p. 301; Lawrence, Seven Pillars, p. 51.

strong force to Rabigh under Zayd and threatened to use British ships to bombard the port, ibn Mubayrik bowed to pressure and took an oath of loyalty to Mecca. His allegiance was short-lived, however, for he fled Rabigh with his men, attacked Harb tribesmen attached to the Sharif inflicting many casualties, and proceeded to Medina to join the Turks.<sup>19</sup> Further north, ibn Rifadah was still "making up his mind," although by early 1917 he was described as definitely "hostile," with the majority of his tribe "untrustworthy" and "pro-Turk."<sup>20</sup> Both chiefs were honored and subsidized by the Turks for their "loyalty to the Caliph and the Empire."<sup>21</sup>

These defections raise an important question. What induced one shaykh to join the Sharif and another to turn against him? Neither the

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<sup>19</sup>F.O. 686/54, p. 93, Husayn to Wilson by telephone, Aug. 29, 1916; and p. 90, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Aug. 31, 1916; F.O. 686/33, p. 147, Zayd to Husayn, 11th Zul Qaydah, 1334 = Sept. 7, 1916, from the Qadimah camp; *ibid.*, pp. 156-157, Husayn to Zayd, Sept. 6, 1916, and pp. 148-149, Zayd to Wilson, Sept. 7, 1917, and Wilson to Zayd, Sept. 8, 1916. See also I.O. L.P. & S./10/601, Wilson to Zayd, Qadimah, Sept. 8, 1916; F.O. 371/2775, Wilson to McMahon, Sept. 9, 1916; I.O. L.P. & S./10/601, Wilson to McMahon, Jiddah, Sept. 28, 1916; and Political Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign, Simla, Oct. 7, 1916, commenting on a Cairo report of Oct. 5, that Shaykh Husayn was en route to Medina. Also I.O. L.P. & S./10/602, Parker to Wilson, Oct. 9, on the fight with the Harb.

<sup>20</sup>F.O. 686/33, p. 84, Husayn to Wilson (telephone), Aug. 18, 1916; *ibid.*, pp. 23-24, Faysal to Husayn, Nov. 6, 1916; F.O. 686/6/1, p. 61, Lawrence to Wilson, sent by Cairo, Feb. 28, 1917; A.B. 31, Nov. 18, 1916, p. 464; I.O. L.P. & S./11/119, file 747, Arab Bureau, Cairo, to Arab Bureau, Basrah, Feb. 16, 1917. F.O. 686/35, pp. 10-12, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Sept. 19, 1917. F.O. 371/3049, "Arabia," tribal report, sent by Director of Military Intelligence to Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Feb. 5, 1917. A.B. 28, Nov. 1, 1916, p. 403.

<sup>21</sup>A.B. 27, Oct. 26, 1916, p. 409 quoting a Syrian newspaper dated Sept. 24, 1916; A.B. 19, Sept. 9, 1916, p. 227, quoting Syrian newspaper dated May 6, 1916.

ideology of the Arab cause nor a belief in the Caliphate and Ottoman authority appear to have played a role in either case. Yet both are clearly comprehensible in terms of the material and political imperatives of the tribal system which we have examined. Between ibn Mubayrik's family and that of the Sharif there was a long-standing blood-feud which stemmed back to the previous century. Although the shaykh hoped to use his alliance with the Turks to avenge himself against the Sharif, the dispute culminated in his own murder in Mecca after the war, which intensified the hostility between the two families. At the same time, evaluations of comparative strength convinced the shaykh that the Turks would win the war and that the Arab movement was a lost cause.<sup>22</sup> As late as June, 1918, when the Sharif offered Husayn a pardon if he acted against the Turks, the shaykh announced that he had received a letter from ibn Sa'ud saying that the latter was really with the Turks, and that he had agreed with ibn Sa'ud, Sulayman ibn Rifadah of the Bili, ibn Rashid, and Imam Yahya to be on the Turkish side against the Christians.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, except for ibn Sa'ud, these other leaders had all openly espoused the Ottoman cause and it was not unreasonable even for a chieftain within the Hijaz to assume that the revolt would fail.

In the case of the Bili, both intra and intertribal rivalries were at work. In an effort to lure the Bili away from their chief, the Sharif appointed a family rival, Hamid ibn Rifadah, as paramount shaykh of the tribe in Sulayman's place. However, the resultant split among the

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<sup>22</sup>A.B. 24, Oct. 5, 1916, p. 324; A.B. 114, Aug. 30, 1919, p. 140; Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>23</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 103-104, Wilson to Arab Bureau, June 18, 1918, based on report of Shaykh Muhammad ibn Urayfan who had interviewed Shaykh Husayn.

tribesmen was based more on internal divisions and local considerations than on any shift in their ideological convictions. An astute observer of the northern Hijaz tribes almost a decade earlier had noted that the various subdivisions of the Bili were always at war with one another "and acknowledge no lord," not even Sulayman. He added that the tribe was considered by its Banu 'Atiyah neighbors to be "...an underhand, treacherous crew, to whom neither hospitality nor the right of sanctuary are sacred!"<sup>24</sup> Sulayman himself admitted to 'Abdullah that hostility existed between his tribe and several of those allied with the Sharif, and even in the last year of the revolt, a British dispatch stated that the tribe as a whole had been of little use since the beginning.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless such cases of overt hostility to the revolt were the exception rather than the rule, and in order to understand the destruction of the Sharif's power we must turn now to the erosion of support among the "loyal" tribes.

#### Disaffection and Desertion at the End of the War

Almost all contemporary accounts of the Arab Revolt follow the progress of Faysal's armies northwards to Damascus neglecting internal developments in the southern area. From there they proceed to the postwar negotiations with the great powers, paying scant attention to affairs in the Hijaz. It is as if the revolt, having fulfilled certain objectives in the larger scheme of Arab nationalist history, had neither cause nor

<sup>24</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, Bassett to Arab Bureau, being reports to Faysal from Husayn, containing Zayd's opinions, Mecca, undated. Alois Musil, 1910, in F.O. 882/3, HM/16/1, p. 122, May 3, 1916.

<sup>25</sup>I.O. L.P.&S./10/597, Sulayman ibn Rifadah to 'Abdullah, dated 27th Rabi Tani, 1334. Also in F.O. 371/2768, p. 263.

consequence at its own roots. But what preceded and what followed the uprising illuminates its very nature. Rather than leap to Damascus and on to London and Versailles, we shall follow the course of events in the Hijaz through 1920, with a view to understanding more clearly the political system which spawned and nurtured the revolt in the desert.

Earlier it was noted that the suspension of payments to inactive tribes in the southern sphere of operations played a role in creating severe discontent among the Beduin. However, it will be necessary to amplify that evidence here, for what took place in the final stages of the revolt was more than simple opposition to or disagreement with the policies of Mecca. By early in 1918, there were reports of disaffection among the Harb and Juhaynah whose domains had been in a state of relative calm since the fighting had spread northwards into southern Syria after the capture of 'Aqabah.<sup>26</sup> The seriousness of the erosion of support among those tribes in the Hijaz proper can be gauged by a telegram from Major Davenport:

Farhan al-Aida and Aneizeh said to have gone over to Turks. Nearly all Juheinah have disappeared from Abdullah's force and are reported hostile. Huteim generally reported to be assisting Turks in every way. This is confirmed by Capt. Depui. Local Bedouin practically played out and almost all hostile owing to no pay and partly to being sick of campaigning. All information in Abdullah's camp points to hostility against Sherif on part of ibn Saud...<sup>27</sup>

Rebelliousness and desertion among the Arabs with both 'Ali and 'Abdallah

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<sup>26</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p. 111, File 11/3, Report by Capt. Goldie, undated, probably Jan. or Feb., 1918.

<sup>27</sup>F.O. 686/48, p. 2, telegram W. 537, sent Bassett to Arab Bureau, Feb. 26, 1918.



was reported to have reached such proportions by March that the specter of civil war loomed in the region.<sup>28</sup> And when two sections of the Harb were openly defiant of the Sharif's authority, Husayn attempted to placate them with money, supplies, and a letter of mild censure urging the tribesmen to "part from suspicious and evil thoughts..."<sup>29</sup> But such ameliorative action could not by its very nature avert the ultimate collapse of the alliance, for the tribes had no interest in their tie to Mecca beyond the immediate advantages to be gained from it. Thus, continuing payments of this kind could only paper over the cracks and temporarily defer the inevitable day when the British subsidy would cease and Husayn would be left without anything to offer the tribes in return for their allegiance.

The Sharif was therefore clearly playing his game in two directions, towards the tribes on the one hand and the British on the other, and the two were mutually interdependent. The tribes would continue to back the Sharif as long as the British continued to provide money, weapons and supplies, and the British would aid the Sharif as long as he had the support of the tribes, this being necessary to achieve their goal of defeating the Turks. Since the rhetorical bridge across which Husayn and the British communicated was that of Arab independence and unity, it was crucial according to this standard for the Sharif to prove that he still had the

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<sup>28</sup>F.O. 686/38, p. 235, British Agent, Jiddah to Director of Arab Bureau, March 20, 1918, forwarding correspondence from Husayn to the British Agent; ibid., p. 241, Bassett to Husayn, Jiddah, 4.6.36 (=March 17, 1918); F.O. 686/48, p. 4, telegram D.64, Davenport to Bassett, Feb. 21, 1918.

<sup>29</sup>F.O. 686/38, pp. 243-244, Husayn to al-Hawazim and al-'Ahamdah Harb, dated 5.5.36, (=Feb. 17, 1918); and 'Ali to Husayn, 25.5.36 (=March 8, 1918); and Husayn to Bassett, received in Jiddah by British Agent, March 19, 1918.

backing of the Beduin. He could not afford to admit any flagging in support for this cause, and this led him to minimize and even deny the reports of tribal discontent which were filtering into his hands in ever increasing quantities. In his correspondence with the British during this period he was less than candid, but while he denounced the rumors of Beduin disaffection as "untrue" and "unimportant," he desperately sought assurances that Great Britain would help him "even if a civil revolt should take place."<sup>30</sup> By the middle of 1918 pretenses could no longer be maintained, and the Sharif admitted that all of 'Abdallah's energies were directed toward quelling an open revolt at Khurmah near the Najd border, and in soothing the tribes in the area.<sup>31</sup>

The discontent of 1918 was mitigated by the flush of Faysal's northern advances and his stunning victories in conjunction with General Allenby's forces. But the failure to acknowledge the early breaches in the Sharif's alliance only accentuated the disintegration of his base of support immediately after the war. The gradual weakening of those bonds which had temporarily tied the tribes to the central authority accelerated, and precipitated a return to almost totally uncontrolled tribal independence. If anything, the centrifugal tendencies inherent in the tribal system were exaggerated by the unsettling consequences of a war which had raised expectations, disrupted normal life in the Peninsula, recast old allegiances and challenged traditional modes of behavior. Before the ink was dry on the ceasefire agreements, tribes in the northern and central Hijaz were "openly defying the authority of the King," while further east they became

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<sup>30</sup>F.O. 686/38, p. 239, Husayn to Bassett, 5.6.36 (=Mar. 18, 1918).

<sup>31</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p. 20, Wilson to Arab Bureau, July 20, 1918. The confrontation at Khurmah will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 9.

more inclined to accept the rule of Najd as the authority of Mecca steadily waned.<sup>32</sup> The deterioration was rapid. By early 1920 conditions were frankly described as "worse than before the war," and the general situation was declared "hopeless."<sup>33</sup> The roads from Medina to Mecca and Yanbu' were unsafe and occupied by hostile tribes, while the population of Taif was on the verge of starvation because caravans of foodstuffs and supplies could not get through. Little more than three years earlier Lawrence had written "that the Sherif's supply columns are everywhere going without escort in perfect safety." Yet the Sharif was now so weak that the "entire power" of his army could not prevent even small tribes from molesting the roads and plundering at will.<sup>34</sup>

[There is] the impression that the destruction of Turkish power in Arabia has not been for the good of the people. In the Hejaz matters are so bad that the son of the King could travel safely from Mecca to Medina only by careful concealment of the route he was to take, and so strong was the opposition of the Arabs his father is supposed to rule, that a body of 600 of his followers were unable to join him at Medina. Highway robberies are reported on the route from Mecca to Jedda.<sup>35</sup>

How could Husayn react to the state of near anarchy that prevailed in his new kingdom? He initially attempted a variety of stick and carrot measures which had some immediate results, but which were also of such a stop-gap and arbitrary nature that they merely avoided the root causes of

<sup>32</sup>F.O. 686/10/2, pp. 266-267, Goldie to Wilson, Yanbu', Feb. 11, 1919.

<sup>33</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 3, Apr. 1, 1920, p. 81, report by Col. Vickery. F.O. 686/12/2, p. 146, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, Apr. 8, 1920.

<sup>34</sup>ibid., pp. 143-145; F.O. 686/12/2, pp. 99-100, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, May 29, 1920; A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 479, report by Lawrence.

<sup>35</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 3, Apr. 1, 1920. Quotation is on end papers, beginning in Notes No. 3 and continuing at end of Notes, No. 4. The page numbers are unclear. The reference is to Sharif 'Ali.

the unrest and served primarily to intensify tribal hostility to his rule. He summoned Beduin shaykhs to Mecca where he ordered them to make daily appearances "to keep them under proper control," rewarding them with gifts and supplies for their compliance.<sup>36</sup> He threatened punitive expeditions against recalcitrant tribes and took hostages as guarantees "for their good behaviour."<sup>37</sup> Wheat shipped from Egypt was impounded at Jiddah and then distributed to "those who are favourably known to the Arab Government," while supplies were deliberately withheld from Beduin who were openly hostile to Mecca, and severe restrictions were placed on the purchase of foodstuffs at open bazaars. As a method of bringing the tribes to heel, the denial of food supplies had some temporary effect, but reports reached Jiddah that many Beduin were actually dying of hunger as a result.<sup>38</sup> Some of the Sharif's actions succeeded only in splintering the tribes still further and accelerating the anarchic tendencies in progress. On one occasion for example he dismissed certain shaykhs who had been blocking the road from Yanbu' to Medina, and appointed new ones in their stead. Even the latter, however, were unable to open the road, for caravans under their protection were then robbed by their own tribesmen, thereby accentuating existing internal divisions in the tribe and creating new ones. That these measures could not prevent the disintegration of Husayn's power was soon apparent. An Arab observer noted that the Hijazis would accept "any pro-

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<sup>36</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, p. 103, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, May 29, 1920.

<sup>37</sup>F.O. 686/12/1, p. 37, Nasir al-Din to British Agent, Mecca, Jan. 29, 1921; and ibid., p. 50, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, Dec. 29, 1920.

<sup>38</sup>F.O. 686/12/1, pp. 65-66, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, Nov. 29, 1920; ibid., p. 14, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Jiddah, Apr. 4, 1921; also F.O. 686/12/2, p. 103, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, May 29, 1920.

tector and supporter who may furnish them with foodstuff. They are ready to gather and fight under anyone against King Hussein whether it may be Ibn Saud, Idrissi or anyone else."<sup>39</sup>

Clearly there were both immediate and long-term reasons for this collapse of the wartime alliance that had been forged so painstakingly just three years before. These have all been touched on, but it is as well to draw them together here. To some extent the reassertion of tribal over central authority was the result of the cessation of British payments to Husayn in gold and the consequent suspension of subsidies to the tribes.<sup>40</sup> The Sharif and his sons were heavily in debt to many of the tribes, and the refractoriness of the Beduin was certainly exacerbated by the shortages of foodstuffs and supplies. The power of the sword was again revealed by a report that "the turbulent spirit subservient in the Arabs" had been inflamed by the success of the revolt at Khurmah and that "the unsuccessful attempts of the King to quell [the rebellion] are regarded by the tribes as a sign of his prestige and power decaying."<sup>41</sup> While Husayn proved himself unable to maintain order in his own domain, the Khurmah dispute escalated into an open confrontation with Najd in which the Sharif's forces suffered disastrous defeats. This in turn fostered an increasingly truculent attitude among the tribes whose independent instincts might earlier have been blunted by the very success of the Sharif's movement at a time when his ability to compel obedience was greater. Finally the unifying political principles which Faysal and Lawrence had understood and applied so

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<sup>39</sup>F.O. 686/12/1, p. 14, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Jiddah, Apr. 4, 1921.

<sup>40</sup>A.B. 108, Jan. 11, 1919, p. 1; Notes on the Middle East, No. 3, Apr. 1, 1920.

<sup>41</sup>F.O. 686/10/2, pp. 266-267, Goldie to Wilson, Yanbu', Feb. 11, 1919.

effectively were temporary ones which derived from within the tribal system itself, and could not realistically have been expected to create an entirely new system. As no shaykh was willing to serve under another in the war against the Ottoman Empire, the ashraf had been the means by which disparate clans and tribes were unified. Sharifian control over the Beduin was thereby strengthened, and tribal respect for central authority temporarily increased. When the purpose of the unity, viz. the defeat of the Turks, was no longer there, this control and respect diminished accordingly. After the war it was said "that the Arabs do not respect [the ashraf], and if a sherif himself be not accompanied with sufficient armed persons, the Arabs will have no hesitation in robbing him."<sup>42</sup>

Considerations such as food, supplies and assessments of strength and weakness therefore combined with the more deeply-rooted imperatives of the Arabian political system to produce a reassertion of tribal authority. The Hijaz had certainly become independent of foreign rule, but its own corporate sense of nationhood was as elusive as that of the 'Arab nation' as a whole. It was not only British duplicity that deprived the Arabs of their national freedom. Arabia, after all, had been spared the cutting edge of the Sykes-Picot carving knife.<sup>43</sup> Had a new allegiance to a united Arab nation replaced the local ties of preceding generations, we would expect the alliance to have outlived the achievement of the immediate goals sought by the participants in the revolt. Yet the closer the Arab armies came to victory, the greater were the strains and fissures that appeared in

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<sup>42</sup>F.O. 686/12/1, p. 3, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Jiddah, Apr. 14, 1921.

<sup>43</sup>Text in Hurewitz, Diplomacy, Vol. 2, pp. 18-22. See also Antonius, op. cit., pp. 248 ff; and Zeine, Struggle, pp. 12-14.

the Sharif's coalition. And within two years after the apparent success of the revolt and the elimination of four centuries of Ottoman rule, the Sharif's tribal alliance had disintegrated entirely. But what was chaotic by the standards of centralized government was also a reaffirmation of tribal independence and the primacy of tribal politics. Far from having created a new unity, the Hijaz tribesmen, cut off from British money and supplies, had simply returned to their "old methods of livelihood."<sup>44</sup> Ibn Khaldun saw this clearly more than half a millenium earlier in a description of Beduin behavior which might have been an almost literal account of tribal activity in the postwar Hijaz:

They neglected religion and forgot the principles of government, returning to the [rules] of the desert and causing their factional loyalties to oppose the interests of the state, leading them to insubordination. They reverted to nomadism as they had been before, retaining nothing of the discipline of sovereignty except the memory of their descent....<sup>45</sup>

#### A Traditional Tribal Revolt?

The very term "Arab Revolt" now seems to be a misnomer. It implies a popular national uprising by the "Arabs" of the type which might with hindsight be associated with more recent African and Asian risings against the European imperial powers. However, while nationalism may be a modern phenomenon, oppressive authority and rebellion are not. In the fourteenth century ibn Khaldun constructed a theory of dynastic decay, tribal revolt and empire building based on his observations of political

<sup>44</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 3, Apr. 1, 1920, p. 81.

<sup>45</sup>Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, here quoted in Wilson Bishai, Islamic History of the Middle East, Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1968, pp. 367-368.

reality at the time. If the Sharif's movement did not correspond to models of contemporary uprisings for national independence, as the evidence has made clear, was it then more akin to the kind of tribal rebellion which had been a feature of the Arabian political system for centuries past? In this section we shall examine the "traditional" aspects of the Hijaz revolt both by comparison with some of its historical precedents and in relation to certain aspects of ibn Khaldun's model.

The history of the Arabian Peninsula is replete with examples of tribal uprisings against the central power, whether to defy its encroachment on tribal authority and autonomy, or to protest taxes and levies. As early as 747 (Marwan) and 845 (al-Wathiq), the Arab Empire was busy suppressing revolts in the Hijaz.<sup>46</sup> For the next thousand years, as Arab rule spread, then splintered, and finally succumbed to foreign domination, the tribes remained the prime units of organization in the Peninsula, jealously guarding their independence and their freedom of action against whatever power pretended to suzerainty over them. Often they rebelled and occasionally they joined in a temporary coalition when the rewards were sufficiently attractive. That the tribal unity achieved by Husayn and Faysal in 1916 was neither unique nor "modern" may be seen by comparison with the strategy of another master politician at war in the Peninsula a hundred years earlier. In 1815, Muhammad 'Ali also succeeded in forging a network of alliances by the complex process of bargaining, persuasion, inducements and promises of gold, rifles and booty, in his campaign against the Wahhabi rebels of Najd.<sup>47</sup> In their tactics at

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<sup>46</sup>Bishai, op. cit., describes these two revolts on pp. 205-206 and 259-260.

<sup>47</sup>de Gaury, Rulers of Mecca, p. 215 on Muhammad 'Ali and p. 273 on Faysal.



least both Faysal and Muhammad 'Ali responded to a political system older than Islam itself.

The fact of an "Arab" rebellion against the "Turks" does not in itself distinguish the Sharif's action as a "new milestone...of Arab nationalism," as Nuseibeh claims,<sup>48</sup> for both the Imam Yahya in Yemen and the Idrisi Sayyid in 'Asir had revolted against the Ottoman Empire years before Husayn. The Sayyid was said to have been "more or less in a state of active revolt against the Turks since 1892."<sup>49</sup> Of the Imam Yahya one observer wrote that his "forbears have stoutly disputed with the Turks the mastery of the Yemen," the Arabs there having been "in constant revolt against the Turks for two generations at least."<sup>50</sup> And since the Wahhabi rebellion, Najd had been kept from open revolt only by Ottoman subsidies and internecine feuds. What is more, these uprisings had been launched without foreign assistance, as Britain at that time still adhered to Palmerston's dictum that "Turkey is as good a guardian of the route to India as any Arab would be."<sup>51</sup> If Husayn's was an "Arab revolt," how are we to classify the uprisings of 1891, 1903 and 1911 in Yemen, and of 1909-1911 in 'Asir? Vatikiotis notes that Yemen had been in revolt more or less since 1850, the Turks having unsuccessfully attempted to subdue it in 1904 with 'Abdul Hamid having finally given up in 1905. The Young Turks tried again to bring it under control in 1908, but finally signed a peace treaty with

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<sup>48</sup>Nuseibah, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>49</sup>F.O. 371/2773, secret memorandum: "The Sharif of Mecca and the Arab Movement," of the General Staff, War Office, July 1, 1916, for Sir E. Grey.

<sup>50</sup>A.B. 49, Apr. 30, 1917, p. 198; and F.O. 686/6/1, p. 127, Capt. G. Lloyd, Dec. 22, 1916.

<sup>51</sup>Quoted in Monroe, op. cit., 1963, p. 11.

the Imam in 1911.<sup>52</sup> If the Sharif's movement was a "new milestone" of nationalism, does not then the Imam of Yemen also deserve to be hailed as one of the earliest apostles of Arab nationhood?

Ireland is not to be taken seriously when he asserts that the revolts in Yemen and 'Asir "were taken as indicating the Arabs' desire for independence."<sup>53</sup> Whatever his meaning of the word "independence" here, there is certainly no indication that "the Arabs" in these areas perceived of themselves as a collectivity at all in relation to the Sublime Porte. While there is little doubt that Yahya and the Idrisi Sayyid were pursuing an age-old policy of asserting their autonomy from Istanbul, it is hardly likely that a remote corner of the Arabian Peninsula almost totally isolated from European influence should produce the Arab world's first popular nationalist uprising, and it is in this context that Ireland refers to these rebellions. For the same reason, The Encyclopedia of Islam, while correctly identifying the Wahhabi uprising of the eighteenth century as "an Arab movement opposed to the remote and vitiated rule of the Ottomans," also mistakenly concludes that it was a predecessor of "the nationalistic tendencies developing among the Arabs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."<sup>54</sup> Historians of modern Arab nationalism agree that the phenomenon had its origins in the Fertile Crescent, especially Syria, and that it was directly related to European influences, such as the influx of Christian missionaries. Yet in the early part of this century that area was quiescent,

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<sup>52</sup>P.J. Vatikiotis, Conflict in the Middle East, London, Allen and Unwin, 1971, pp. 47-49. See also Antonius, op. cit., pp. 123-124.

<sup>53</sup>Phillip Willard Ireland, Iraq: A Study in Political Development, London, Jonathan Cape, 1937, p. 222.

<sup>54</sup>The Encyclopedia of Islam, new edition, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1960, vol. 1, p. 554.

while tribal domains which had never previously been visited by a European were in active revolt against the Ottoman Empire.

This apparent paradox is only troublesome if our model is that of a modern national liberation movement. But if we refer again to the fourteenth century and to ibn Khaldun's description of the role of traditional tribal revolts in the disintegration of empires, we shall see that the rebellions in 'Asir and Yemen were not unusual. A dynasty begins to crumble as a consequence of its "senility," the historian wrote in what is essentially a cyclical theory of growth and destruction of political power. This breaking up process begins at the extremities of the empire, for these areas are necessarily weaker than the center. If it is a large dynasty then this collapse from the outside moving inwards will take a long time, as the authority of the ruling house is narrowed down by successive stages. Indeed the disintegration will be further slowed by the habit of subservience and submission to the ruler which has been bred into the subjects. Furthermore, wrote ibn Khaldun, a dynasty rarely establishes itself firmly in lands with many different tribes which each have 'asabiyyah (group feeling), for in such areas, especially if remote, there will always be opposition and rebellion. Where there are fewer tribes and a large number of settled and town dwellers, as in Egypt, authority may be more easily established. Possible claimants to the ruler's position begin their uprisings in the border regions and then gradually consolidate their new dynasty at the expense of the old.<sup>55</sup>

According to these criteria, it is clear that while Ottoman power

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<sup>55</sup>Ibn Khaldun, op. cit., pp. 105-106, 108; 127-142, esp. pp. 130 and 133; 244-255, esp. pp. 252-255.

was still capable at the turn of the century of enforcing its will in Damascus and Bayrut, towns closer to the center, it was less strong in the mountains and deserts of Yemen and central Arabia. Furthermore the former were relatively heterogeneous and settled areas, ground into submission by four centuries of Ottoman rule, whereas the nomadic tribes, less susceptible to outside domination in any circumstance, were still the primary units of organization at the extremities of the Ottoman Empire retaining their own "asabiyyah" by strong blood ties. But even in 'Asir and Yemen continuous rebellions succeeded only in a gradual weakening and contraction of central authority rather than the immediate collapse of the "sick old man" who became the standard caricature of the Sublime Porte.

That there were "traditional" "Arab" revolts for local autonomy rather than national liberation prior to Husayn is therefore quite clear. What is necessary now is to reexamine the Sharif's movement from both an historical and a theoretical perspective to determine whether it also was a tribal rebellion rooted in the political imperatives of the area, or whether it represented a new consciousness of Arab nationalist solidarity in partial response at least to recent currents from the West. Perhaps the most damning piece of evidence from the perspective of a nationalist position was Husayn's earlier alliance with the Turks against his Arab brethren who were supposedly struggling for "independence." Antonious conveniently ignores the fact that the Sharif joined the Ottoman forces of 'Izzet Pasha in suppressing the revolt in 'Asir in 1911, after the Committee of Union and Progress had already alienated the Arabs of the Fertile Crescent with its pan-Turanian philosophy and had suppressed the Committee of Arab Brotherhood.<sup>56</sup> Indeed the Sharif's own justification

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<sup>56</sup>A.B. 77, Jan. 27, 1918, p. 26; Antonious, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-107; and A.B. 90, May 24, 1918, p. 165. The Committee, formed in 1908, was sup-

for rebelling against the Ottomans was that the Young Turks, with their "pretence of Islam" had supplanted the "great Sultans of the family of Osman,"<sup>57</sup> an event which had taken place fully three years before he helped these "infidels" crush an Arab uprising on his own borders. Yet it must be stressed again that this is a condemnation, or perhaps an embarrassment, only to those who would attempt to explain Husayn's 1911 action in terms of his 1916 "nationalism." From this stance we would have to label him an opportunist or a hypocrite, or else a naive believer in Ottoman integrity who himself was converted to the "Arab cause" rather precipitately on the eve of the war. As Barrington Moore has shown, consistency of action cannot be sought in an ideology which has been haphazardly applied as "an independent causal factor in its own right."<sup>58</sup> If on the other hand, we look at the Sharif's alliance with the Turks in terms of the historical conditions and traditional politics of the Arabian Peninsula, his action immediately makes sense. The Idrisi Sayyid's forbears were relative newcomers to the region who had established their hegemony over an area on Husayn's southern borders which had long been in dispute between the Hijaz and Yemen. The containment of his southern neighbor was therefore a high priority for the Sharif, and it appeared in 1911 that jurisdiction over certain tribes and coastal ports in the border regions could be settled in his favor by his alliance with 'Izzet Pasha. It was still a fairly good rule in the political system of that time that the enemy of an enemy,

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pressed in April, 1905.

<sup>57</sup>A.B. 6, June 23, 1916, Appendix, quoting the letter of the amirs of the Holy Land; and A.B. 25, Oct. 7, 1916, p. 342, Husayn's supplement to his Proclamation of Independence, issued Sept. 9, 1916.

<sup>58</sup>See Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 487, for a discussion of this theoretical issue.

especially a neighbor, was a friend.

That the Hijaz revolt, like those in Yemen and 'Asir, was of a traditional nature was perceived more clearly by observers at the time than by more recent writers concerned to find explanatory antecedents for present phenomena. Several tribal leaders in the Hijaz who joined the Sharif's movement were described as having "always" fought the Turks, and even the Ottoman commander of Mecca in 1916 saw no new elements in Husayn's action: "Knowing that all the rebellions in the past had been for the purpose of forcing the government to accept certain propositions, we had the idea that this rebellion too was for a similar purpose."<sup>59</sup> Abroad, Arab reaction was not very different, with Mesopotamians belittling the revolt as the "usual bickering" between the Holy Places and the Turks, and the North Africans dismissing it as an "habitual" Arab revolt "to be judged only on its issue."<sup>60</sup> Lest this evidence be adduced as support for the India Office claim that ibn Sa'ud's strength "was far more solidly based and more genuinely representative of Arab sentiment and aspiration than that of Husein of Mecca,"<sup>61</sup> it should be noted that the "nationalist" component of the Wahhabi movement was, if anything, smaller than that in the Hijaz. More will be said of this in the next part. Here it is merely interesting to note that British observers in 1917 described the Ikhwan as manifesting the "usual features of an Islamic revival," and in

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<sup>59</sup>A.B. 55, June 28, 1917, p. 409; A.B. 21, Sept. 15, 1916, p. 260, quoting Mehmed Ziya Bey, acting governor and commander of the Ottoman garrison at Mecca.

<sup>60</sup>A.B. 16, Aug. 18, 1916, pp. 164 and 157.

<sup>61</sup>Philip Graves, The Life of Sir Percy Cox, 1941, p. 206, quoting Cox's opinion.

terms that fit more appropriately into ibn Khaldun's discussion of the "desert qualities" of a strong claimant to "royal authority," than into any definition of modern nationalism.<sup>62</sup> Two of the most astute British observers of the time saw clearly the connection between the Sharif's movement and earlier tribal uprisings in the Peninsula. In 1917 Capt. Hogarth hoped for a "repetition" of the successful anti-Ottoman risings of 1904 and 1911 in southern Arabia.<sup>63</sup> And Capt. George Lloyd characterized the revolt as the

resumption on a larger scale of a struggle which has been going on between Turks and Arabs for generations....Thus it is that all Arab revolts have taken place in remote regions, in the extremities of Ottoman rule, like the Yemen, Asir and the Jebel Hauran. Peace has been the result of Arab impotence, not content, and a Turkish overweight in the accessible areas. The feelings therefore which have prompted the Arabs of the Hejaz to revolt are common to all Arab areas, in which it may be said that there is a diversity of opportunity but the same spirit.<sup>64</sup>

Except for one factor, namely foreign intervention, Husayn's revolt corresponded both to its predecessors and to ibn Khaldun's specifications. It was firmly based on the tribes, it originated in the extremities of the Empire, and it was a direct response to the manifest weakness of the central power. It is an interesting fact that the "nationalist" demands formulated in Damascus rather than Mecca, were never presented by the Sharif to the Turks from whom he was demanding autonomy, but to Britain after the latter expressed an interest in alliance. Indeed, 'Abdallah's first contacts with Storrs and Kitchener in Cairo in February, 1914, in which he initially

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<sup>62</sup>A.B. 73, Dec. 16, 1917, pp. 505-506; and ibn Khaldun, op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>63</sup>A.B. 52, Aug. 31, 1917, p. 257. Hogarth also discusses here the traditional rebellions of the past in the Central Highlands of Yemen and the first Imamic submission to the Turks in 1849 (p. 255).

<sup>64</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 127, Lloyd, Dec. 22, 1916.

sought British support for a local rebellion against the Turks, never mentioned the conditions of Arab independence laid down a year later in the Damascus Protocol. Furthermore, a reading of the military facts shows clearly that, had it not been for the world war and massive British aid, the Sharif's movement would have achieved scattered, episodic successes and then stalled. The tribal forces could not have been kept in the field for as long as they were without the continued infusion of British arms, gold and supplies, and it is very probable that a compromise with Istanbul would have ended the affair, if the revolt would not have been crushed entirely. The Hijaz uprising would then have continued the process begun in 'Asir and Yemen of eroding and weakening Ottoman authority at its extremities and represented another stage in the gradual disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, the only element of ibn Khaldun's model to which the Sharif's movement does not conform is the suddenness with which the dynasty was swept away, and this was certainly precipitated by the world war as a whole rather than by unrest in the desert fringes of the Empire.

#### "Independence" and "Unity" Reconsidered

The concept of the nation, wrote an Arab nationalist thinker at the end of the war, rests on "a twofold idea--unity and independence."<sup>65</sup> And much of the confusion surrounding the ideology of the Sharif's movement arises from the misuse of these two terms. Describing the impact of the revolt, Antonius states: "The national movement was now a force,

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<sup>65</sup>Khairalla Khairalla, Les Régions arabes libérées, 1919, quoted in Hans Kohn, Nationalism and Imperialism, p. 117, fn. 60.



with the plank of Arab unity as well as independence in the forefront of its aims."<sup>66</sup> Yet Lawrence's observations led him to remark that any empire or organized state was anathema to the instincts of the tribesmen. "Their idea of nationality is the independence of tribes...and their idea of national union is episodic combined resistance to an intruder."<sup>67</sup> Certainly independence was an aim of the tribesmen, and a sufficient measure of union was achieved to expel the Turks from the Hijaz. But our observations in this chapter, of the centrifugal forces inherent in a segmentary tribal society, compel a fundamental redefinition of these two concepts.

Despite his own firm belief in the ideal of Arab nationhood, Lawrence confessed that tribal independence was "the negation of central power."<sup>68</sup> In a reference to the 1920 uprising in Iraq, which was actually truer of the 1916 revolt, John Glubb confirmed this view that the Beduin were "not inspired by nationalist ambitions, but by opposition to government control in any form."<sup>69</sup> At the time of the First World War, he claimed, no Arabs "...dreamed of ridding themselves of Turkish rule and replacing it by 'Arab' governments." Indeed throughout the revolt we have found tribal chiefs wielding their authority as if they were not beholden to any higher power. An issue of the Arab Bulletin in November, 1916, concluded that the Sharif had political sovereignty abroad in his relations with outside powers, but that home affairs were under the jurisdiction of the tribal shaykhs.<sup>70</sup> If

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<sup>66</sup>Antonius, op. cit., p. 249.

<sup>67</sup>Lawrence, Seven Pillars, p. 74; A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 483.

<sup>68</sup>idem., and see F.O. 686/6/1, p. 94, Lawrence to Wilson, Wajh, Apr. 24, 1917.

<sup>69</sup>Glubb, Short History, pp. 249 and 279.

<sup>70</sup>A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 483.

independence was a motivating force in the revolt, it was not in the sense of "the independence of the Arab nation," which has been its usual interpretation by historians of the revolt. From the Bedu's perspective, the term is a misnomer unless defined as the maximum freedom from authority, as the greatest degree of tribal autonomy, as ibn Khaldun saw:

The Bedouin enjoy [savagery], because it means freedom from authority and no subservience to leadership. Such a natural disposition is the negation and antithesis of civilization....It is difficult for them to subordinate themselves to each other, because they are not used to any control and because they are in a state of savagery.<sup>71</sup>

A similar distinction must be made for the concept of unity, for although the apostles of nationalism differ widely in their interpretations of the ideal, they all agree that unity is as indispensable a criterion of modern Arab nationalism as independence. Even the function of Islam, according to reformists, is to revive the bond of solidarity inherent in the definition of the ummah,<sup>72</sup> and when the mandatory system after the war created a constellation of regional states instead of a single united Arab state, this was seen as a fundamental blow to the ideal of national unity. However the temporary union that was achieved for a time during the Arab revolt was more in the nature of a traditional tribal alliance than the welding together of parts to form an indivisible whole. From this perspective it may be useful to distinguish between "union"--being a process or act, and "unity"--being a result or state. The latter as an end, has been a basic aim of Arab nationalism which runs counter to the values and centrifugal forces which propel tribal politics, while the former, as means, is not incompatible with the dynamics of tribal society and might

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<sup>71</sup>Ibn Khaldun, op. cit., pp. 118 and 120.

<sup>72</sup>Sylvia Haim, Arab Nationalism--An Anthology, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1962, p. 24.

even be employed to resist the encroachment of central authority.

Instances of temporary union in Arabia were not in fact unique and did not require an ideological commitment to the bond of national sentiment. In the traditional politics of the Peninsula it was not unusual for an amir, when he was strong, to be able to unify the tribes under his command and expand his territory. Both the nineteenth and twentieth century manifestations of Wahhabi revival in Najd were examples of tribal union in the interests of a Sa'udi expansion of power, while the Rashidis of Hail at the end of the nineteenth century were able to achieve similar results at the expense of the Sa'udis without recourse to what ibn Khaldun refers to as "religious propaganda."<sup>73</sup> Even more commonly, tribal shaykhs banded together to preserve their independence, as an example from the revolt itself indicates:

While the clans quarrel among themselves, the whole of the Dhawi Hasan and the Dhawi Baraqat would make common cause against the Sherif of Mecca if need be. At the present time, the sentiment of both tribes seems to be in favour of acquiescence in the Sherif's rule as the weakest form of central government obtainable, and so far, preferable to domination by the Turks or the Idrissi. They have refused to contribute men to the Sherif's forces acting against Medina.<sup>74</sup>

Being however equally "intolerant of control, whether Turkish or Sherifian," neither clan hesitated to make overtures to the Turks as soon as Husayn attempted to assert his authority near the end of the war. Recognizing

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<sup>73</sup>See for example Gertrude Bell's account in A.B. 38, Jan. 12, 1917, pp. 15-16. For a detailed account of the Sa'udi-Rashidi conflict, and several historical examples of temporary tribal unification, see de Gaury, Rulers of Mecca; Ibn Khaldun, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>74</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, Lieut. G.W. Murray, Typographical section, to F.E.B. Haselfoot, Lieut.-Commander, Royal Navy (in charge of survey, H.M.S. Enterprise, June 9, 1917; A.B. 55, June 28, 1917, pp. 288-289; A.B. 99, Aug, 6, 1918, p. 272.

the wartime coalition therefore as a conditional alliance based on temporary union, Lawrence described the Sharif's state as "a loose hegemony of Beduin tribes," and concluded that "unity" could be achieved only through the settled population of Arabia or by foreign imposition and control.<sup>75</sup>

British analysts of the Sharif's movement who were not directly involved in it, but who had wide experience in other parts of the Arab world, generally had a clearer perception of the limits of the unity that was achieved during the war, than both the policymakers at Whitehall and the Cairo-based Arab Bureau staff and officers who had engineered and guided the revolt from the beginning. Gertrude Bell wrote:

Political union is a conception unfamiliar to a society which is still highly coloured by its tribal origins and maintains in its midst so many strongly disruptive elements of tribal organization. The Pan-Arab leaders have not succeeded in calling the scattered bones to life.... The Arab movement cannot therefore be looked to for present political purposes as a bond of union in the Arab provinces.... There are individuals inspired by devotion to the Arab cause, but they have no administrative or organizing capacity to weld together and to move the mass of their countrymen.<sup>76</sup>

Capt. George Lloyd made a similar observation when he noted that the spirit of revolt "has only one point of unity, namely hatred of Turkish rule, and if ever the emancipation of the Arabs is achieved, the only unifying factor will have been eliminated. Outside of this common effort

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<sup>75</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 123, Lawrence to Wilson, Wajh, Apr. 16, 1917; A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 483.

<sup>76</sup>F.O. 882/3, AP/17/14, Bell, memorandum of June 25, 1917; see Elie Kedourie, In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and Its Interpretations, 1914-1939, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp. 112-113; also pp. 7, 71 and 93 for a similar assessment of the views of British observers attached to the Indian Government compared with those of their counterparts in Cairo and London.

there is no sign of cohesion among the various Arab tribes and peoples."<sup>77</sup>

What distinguished the unity of the revolt from that of the nationalists was precisely its transience. The cement of the "message" which Faysal preached to the tribes cracked before the last shots were fired. Political allegiance was temporary and precarious, as enduring only as the political interests which could be served by the alliance. "There is no scrap of paper quite so scrappy as a Bedouin alliance, and we must be prepared for anything in the Desert," remarked the British Political Officer at Zubayr.<sup>78</sup> And when 10,000 Beduin with 'Abdallah "melted away" in a confrontation with ibn Sa'ud's forces at Turabah early in 1919, the Arab Bulletin recorded: "Everything points to the majority of tribal elements which profess allegiance to King Husein being absolutely unreliable."<sup>79</sup> The French apparently had the same experience, in the words of their military attaché in Jiddah: "Celui qui compte sur l'appui des Bédouins rassemble à un homme qui voudrait bâtir sa maison sur l'eau."<sup>80</sup> By drawing attention to the divisive and anarchic tendencies of the Hijaz tribes, however, we are not belittling the Arab war effort against the Ottoman Empire. On the contrary, given this essential and intrinsic feature of the Arabian political system, the Sharif's achievement in forging and maintaining an effective tribal alliance appears all the more remarkable. To attain at least a minimum basis for cooperation among mutually antagonistic segments in the traditional system, we have seen

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<sup>77</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, pp. 127-128, Lloyd, memorandum of Dec. 22, 1916.

<sup>78</sup>A.B. 44, Mar. 12, 1917, p. 121, report by R. Marrs.

<sup>79</sup>A.B. 112, June 24, 1919, p. 85.

<sup>80</sup>Brémond, op. cit., p. 32.

that the time-honored method of third-party mediation was used in order to resolve or at least suspend disputes. At the same time the coherence and separateness of tribal entities was respected and, where possible, adapted to the military tasks at hand. When these tasks had been accomplished however and benefits were no longer to be obtained, there was no reason for the tribal alliance not to be renegotiated. And since we began this discussion on the tribes with an introduction on the negotiations which created the alliance of 1916, it will be appropriate to end here with a word on the postwar negotiations in Arabia.

In considering the kind of administration that would be imposed in Arab areas upon the expulsion of the Turks, at least some British policy-makers were realistic enough to understand that any centralized and unified government was inimical to tribal aspirations. Warning that the tribesmen were skeptical of British aid and "suspect that our ultimate object is to make territorial gains at their expense," Captain Lloyd advised that British assistance be kept as far in the background as possible and advocated respect for the sovereignty of "modified tribal law." He counselled "the restoration of power to local sheikhs" and their "responsibility for the behaviour of their feudatories" as "the best road to good Government."<sup>81</sup> But no matter how jealous of their own autonomy the tribes were, the revolt in the desert was not likely to free them totally from the shackles of central authority. As one dispatch after the war pointed out, the flagrant application of President Wilson's doctrine of self-determination to Arabia would have resulted in the creation of thousands of petty independent rulerships.

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<sup>81</sup>F.O. 882/3, AP/17/7, Capt. G. Lloyd, memorandum, June 7, 1917; and F.O. 686/6/1, p. 129, Lloyd, memorandum, Dec. 22, 1916.

As an alternative the British suggested that tribes in provincial border areas be allowed to choose which of the amirs to serve, and that their choice, once made, was irrevocable.<sup>82</sup> Even this proposal was unrealistic in that allegiances traditionally fluctuated depending on the relative strengths of the various princes. If we ask what kind of government the Beduin preferred, the answer must be: that which preserved the maximum amount of their freedom, and hence that which was weakest and most distant. On the eastern border, the 'Ataybah, Subai', Buqum and Dawasir tribes of the Khurmah area, which had traditionally been disputed by the Rashidis, Sa'udis and Hashimites, expressed a "preference for authority remote." As Riyadh was further away from Mecca or Hail they tended to gravitate towards Najd, from which they expected less interference, though this allegiance was by no means permanent.<sup>83</sup>

The very process by which individual tribes were able to bargain with their suzerains in the postwar negotiations not only affirmed that their principal concern was the preservation of the greatest degree of tribal integrity, but also demonstrated the reality of their autonomy. The tribes submitted as entities and often negotiated for the best deal, skillfully playing off one ruler against another. The tribesmen did not face the amirs as individual citizens of the Hijaz or Najd or 'Asir, which were territorial entities of little meaning to them, but as members of an intervening entity which claimed absolute authority unto itself. And in the realignment of forces that took place after the war the bargaining

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<sup>82</sup>A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 105.

<sup>83</sup>A.B. 104, Sept. 24, 1918, p. 329; A.B. 114, Aug. 30, 1919, p. 136.

counters were the same as those which had initially influenced tribal allegiance to the Sharif--strength, material incentives, intertribal rivalries and political advantage.

In that light, perhaps the most revealing facet of these first steps in the establishment of independent Arab rule in the Peninsula was the irrelevance of the wartime ideology in the eyes of the tribes. In the interests of tribal autonomy and power, alliances were made and unmade without reference to pro or anti-Ottoman activity during the war. Groups that had fought with the Turks thought nothing of allying themselves with the Sharif, while the strongest supporters of the revolt became deadly enemies almost as soon as the armistice was signed. For the sake of political expediency the enemy of yesterday could become a friend today if there were dividends to be gained within the framework of tribal politics, an operating principle which Waterbury considers intrinsic to all segmentary systems:

...In a system of segmented politics defeat is seldom total, and the vanquished group is only temporarily so....Members of this system must remain ambivalent both towards outside groups and towards their own, their enemies and allies being chosen according to their own advantage in a particular situation....They must protect all flanks against friends who may be enemies and maintain communications with enemies who some day may be friends.<sup>84</sup>

While ideological issues such as a blood-feud or a religious revival have had a great impact in the Peninsula at different times, there is no doubt that the implacable ideological hostility which motivated the nation-states of Europe during the First World War was not felt by the Arabian tribes. Being essentially conditional, the tribal alliance produced a union that

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<sup>84</sup>Waterbury, *op. cit.*, pp. 75 and 66; for Britain's greater ideological rigidity toward "disloyal" tribes, compared with the attitudes of the Sharif and the Idrisi Sayyid, see A.B. 111, May 24, 1919, p. 67; and A.B. 112, June 24, 1919, p. 100.



was neither permanent nor complete.

Strictly speaking therefore, it is somewhat erroneous to speak of the "collapse" of an alliance which by its very nature was not intended to outlast the fulfilment of the limited goals for which it was formed. What we have referred to as the disintegration of the Sharif's power might more accurately be considered the resurgence of tribal power. Such a formulation would reaffirm the applicability of the zero-sum conception of power to segmentary systems which both Barth and Waterbury have observed.<sup>85</sup> An unusual and externally imposed expansion of resources, as occurred during the revolt, enabled tribal power and Sharifian power to expand concurrently, simulating momentarily the sustained economic growth which Daniel Lerner has identified as distinctive to modern industrial states.<sup>86</sup> Zero-sum power clearly applies only when the quantity of resources is constant as in a subsistence economy and, as a direct result of the British subvention, the Hijaz ceased temporarily to be a subsistence economy. In that sense it was the expansion of Sharifian authority which was the aberration, while the reassertion of tribal authority after the war, as the Beduin "returned to their old methods of livelihood," was the norm. The crucial distinction between the modern state as defined by Lerner, and the temporary growth of central power in the Hijaz, is that the economic growth of the former is "self-sustained," while the latter was a response to an external infusion of resources. One may speculate that it is this change in the economic base of Arabian society that has

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<sup>85</sup>Barth, "Segmentary Opposition," p. 15; Waterbury, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>86</sup>International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, article on "Modernization," by Daniel Lerner.

enabled the Sa'udi state to consolidate its power and successfully embark on a nation building program in the Peninsula.

The "collapse" of the tribal coalition, the "disintegration" of central power, and even the prevailing "anarchy" and "chaos" in the Hijaz at the end of the war therefore assumes a different perspective. The evidence in this chapter is indicative of a "destructive" process only if we view the Sharif's authority within his domain in the light of nationalist aspirations. By contrast, Evans-Pritchard has observed that competition and conflict among corporate segments is the cement of tribal systems, that endemic rivalries, feuds and even intertribal warfare maintain rather than destroy the social structure. Where a central authority is either weak or non-existent, the political system is maintained by a process "of fission and fusion, of relativity and opposition of segments."<sup>87</sup> Since gross imbalances of power cannot be tolerated in such a system, it was the growth of the Sharif's power rather than its collapse which was destructive to the tribal structure of Hijaz society. Or as ibn Khaldun said,

A dynasty rarely establishes itself firmly in lands with many different tribes and groups...because each group feeling under the control of the ruling dynasty thinks that it has in itself enough strength and power.<sup>88</sup>

The decay of order and central authority that was inimical to the establishment of a national government was affirmative of a tribal society "sewn together by its inner conflicts"<sup>89</sup> and sustained by the interaction of

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<sup>87</sup>M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.), African Political Systems, Oxford, 1940, p. 296; also Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer, Oxford, 1940, p. 150; and The Sanusi of Cyrenaica, Oxford, 1949, p. 59.

<sup>88</sup>Ibn Khaldun, op. cit., p. 130; for the adverse tribal reaction to the postwar aggrandizement of Husayn and his family which was linked to fears of too great a centralization of power, see Notes on the Middle East, No. 3, Apr. 1, 1920, p. 79.

<sup>89</sup>E.A. Ross, quoted in Waterbury, op. cit., p. 65.

diverse "group feelings." The process of temporary union, intrinsic opposition and perpetual fission emerges even more dramatically on the regional level. And when we consider Husayn's relations with the other principalities in the next part of this study, we will observe the same impulses toward a conditional alliance for mutual advantage followed by political realignments in apparent contradiction to wartime ideology which we have seen in this section. For the present it is clear that any application of the nationalist definitions of independence and unity to Arabia during the war, must be qualified by the declaration of 'Ajaymi Sa'dun, who remained loyal to the Turks, and which might have been echoed by 'Awda abu Tayih or any of the Hijaz chiefs: "I am an absolute ruler."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>A.B. 44, Mar. 12, 1917, p. 119, 'Ajaymi Sa'dun in letter to ibn Sa'ud, Jan. 11, 1917.

## CHAPTER SIX

A NOTE ON THE PARTICIPATION OF  
OTHER GROUPS IN THE ARAB REVOLT

To this point our discussion has focused on the tribesmen of the Hijaz, their motives, perceptions, political interests and behavior. This is as it should be since they bore the brunt of the uprising and sustained it until the triumphal entry into Damascus on October 1, 1918. Ultimately the Hijaz was a tribal society and the success or failure of the Sharif's movement was dependent upon his ability to maintain the support of the tribes. As ibn Sa'ud perceived correctly: "The Sherif's position depends upon...the Bedouin. If they support him, he will not be in any danger from the Turks, but if they abandon him and side with the Turks, then the position of the Sherif in the Hejaz will be worth nothing."<sup>1</sup> However three other groups must be briefly considered at this point--the townsmen, the Sharifian nobility at Mecca, and the regular army. Although all three were more tangential to the outcome of the revolt than the tribes, they were nevertheless significant groups and their role in the rising cannot be ignored.

The Townsmen<sup>2</sup>

Three factors bear significantly on the role of the settled population in the revolt and although these have been mentioned

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<sup>1</sup>P.O. 371/2776, ibn Sa'ud to Cox, July 20, 1916, pp. 99-100 of printed extracts.

<sup>2</sup>When we speak here of townsmen, we are referring primarily to the people of Mecca, Medina, Jiddah and Taif, although also more

earlier as characteristics of the political system of the Hijaz, they must be reconsidered here as determinants of loyalty and behavior during the war: the relationship between town and tribe, the economic and social structure of the towns, and the racial composition of the inhabitants. Of these, the first is the most important. Writers since ibn Khaldun have drawn attention to the historical and economic cleavage between the "desert life" and the "sedentary culture" of the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> But the tensions and hostility that had traditionally existed between tribesmen and townspeople for economic reasons also had profound political implications. For the pursuit of the trade and commerce on which they depended, the townsmen needed peace and order, and were therefore far more "conservative" than the Beduin, whose interests were nurtured by war. The merchants tended always to support the established, constituted authority and sought protection from the kind of strong central government that was anathema to the desert tribes.<sup>4</sup> Raiding, looting and opposition to the encroachment of external power, had been the mainstays of tribal existence for millenia. The Beduin were warriors, not because they were innately more blood-thirsty than their urban brethren, but because it was the

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peripherally to the smaller towns, such as Wajh, Yanbu' and Rabigh, that existed primarily on the coast and were therefore also drawn into such 'urban' activities as trade and commerce.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Khaldun, op. cit. p. 136 ff; See Gertrude Bell, memorandum, June 25, 1917 in F.O. 882/3, AP/17/14, pp. 49-57, for another excellent description of this cleavage.

<sup>4</sup> Sir John Bagot Glubb, A Short History of the Arab Peoples, 1969, pp. 238 and 250.

means to their survival. They plundered caravans and extorted payments from travelers, merchants and pilgrims on the roads that passed through their territory. The weaker the central government and the more anarchic the political situation, the more profit the Beduin reaped. For the townsmen, the "Arabs" were lawless thieves who interfered with trade and could only be controlled by strong government. In inverse proportion to the Beduin, the town dwellers prospered when the trade routes were safe-guarded and their goods were not prey to the marauding nomads. Even in the normal commercial interaction between the two groups at the market place, they represented opposite sides of every transaction and there was the additional antagonism that has divided buyer and seller in every society in human history. As British war dispatches from all parts of the Middle East frequently pointed out, town and tribe "despise each other."<sup>5</sup>

In 1916 therefore the inhabitants of the major towns of the Hijaz did not welcome an armed uprising of the Beduin which threatened to disrupt the stability on which their livelihood depended. The danger and uncertainty which the Sharif's declaration of independence foreshadowed, aroused almost universal opposition among the town dwellers. British sources, based on the reports of Arab informants, captured Turkish prisoners, and pilgrims, without exception describe the populace of Mecca and Medina as being pro-Ottoman, while Taif was said to be alive with anti-Sharifian intrigue.<sup>6</sup> The people of

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<sup>5</sup>See for example A.B. 55, July 1, 1917, pp 292-4; A.B. 69, Nov 14, 1917, p. 453; A.B. 85, Apr. 15, 1918, pp. 116 ff. A.B. 88, May 7, 1918, p. 147.

<sup>6</sup>A.B. 1, June 11, 1916, p. 47; A.B. 29, Nov. 8, 1916, p. 421; A.B. 41, Feb. 6, 1917, p. 58; A.B. 5, June 18, 1916, p. 47; A.B. 22, Sept. 19, 1916, p. 277.

Jiddah were apparently ready to welcome English control of the town as an acceptable alternative to Ottoman authority which would still safeguard their interests. Their only fear was that they would be delivered into the hands of the Sharif's Beduin.<sup>7</sup> At Rabigh and Yanbu', Husayn's authority was said to be "weak" while his hold on the coast generally, where the settled population was greater, was far more tentative than inland.<sup>8</sup> Later in the year when there was a very real danger that an Ottoman force would advance from Medina towards Rabigh in an attempt to recapture Mecca, the Foreign Office informed the French Government that, "The Sharif's movement can in no sense rely upon support from the townsmen of the Hijaz, and the mainstay of his revolt will always be the tribal army of three thousand to four thousand strong under Sidi Feisal."<sup>9</sup> And one British dispatch in December remarked that "...no very large [Ottoman] force would probably be required to take Mecca owing to the local feeling there, which is on the whole, pro-Turkish."<sup>10</sup>

The universality of this mutual enmity between the town dwellers and the desert tribesmen was demonstrated by the fact that this pro-Ottoman sentiment was not restricted to the Hijaz alone. Indeed, in every part of Arabia to which the revolt spread, the Sharif's forces were identified as representing the tribes against the towns and feared

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom, p. 42; A.B. 7, June 22, 1916, p. 8; A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 474.

<sup>8</sup> F.O. 371/2773, McMahon to Foreign Office, Ramlah, July 9, 1916; A.B. 9, June 17, 1916, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> F.O. 371/2776, Foreign Office to Lord Bertie (Paris) for French Government, Nov. 22, 1916.

<sup>10</sup> F.O. 686/6/1, p. 135, Lloyd, Dec. 22, 1916.

as bringing in their train disorder and anarchy. When Faysal's army entered Palestine in 1918, the nomads and villagers were said to be generally pro-Sharifian while the towns preferred Ottoman or British control, either of which could protect them from Beduin raids and extortion.<sup>11</sup> That Sharifian influence could not in fact assure the security of the townsfolk and their property was dramatically demonstrated when 'Ataybah tribesmen fired the market at Qunfidhah before defecting, and also in the looting of Medina after the war.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the Arab world, the Beduin had everything to gain by a continuation of the war and nothing to lose, while the town dwellers supported whichever party would grant them peace and order. In the Peninsula in particular, the massive influx of food supplies, money and weapons in quantities rarely if ever experienced before, provided an abundance of all the commodities that were the foundation of tribal existence. This in addition to opportunities afforded for loot and 'legalized' raiding, by all accounts made the war a profitable and according to Lawrence even an enjoyable enterprise for the Beduin.<sup>13</sup> By direct contrast to the disruption which promoted these tribal objectives, ibn Khaldun tells of the preference

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<sup>11</sup>A.B. 83, Mar. 27, 1918, p. 92; A.B. 79, Feb. 18, 1918, p. 53; A.B. 88, May 7, 1918, p. 152.

<sup>12</sup>F.O. 371/2774, Wilson to McMahon, Aug. 6, 1916, A.B. 37, Jan. 4, 1917; A.B. 112, July 24, 1919, p. 91; A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p 127.

<sup>13</sup>Robert Graves, Lawrence, pp. 108-109.



of sedentary cultures for the "leisure, tranquillity...contentment [and] peacefulness" necessary for the development of wealth and prosperity in the towns.<sup>14</sup>

It was not therefore the Sharif per se to whom the townsmen objected, or his cause or his personal objectives. Rather it was their fear of Beduin, their recognition that Husayn's position rested on a tribal base and their preference for established authority that prompted the majority of town dwellers to favor the Turks. Indeed there is evidence that as the Sharif's government became more securely established at home, the opposition to his rule diminished. Once the merchants found that they could trade in peace and continue to reap their customary profits, their reasons for hostility to the revolt dissipated. After Britain lifted her blockade of the Red Sea ports, trade was revived and the influx of hajjis, or pilgrims, resumed. In the latter case, the Sharif's revolt was seen as directly responsible for the restoration of the Hijazis' only major internal source of income, of which they had been deprived for two years.<sup>15</sup> There were still complaints and we read for example that "the Indian merchants at Mecca were discontented with the Sherif because prices were controlled, the pilgrimage a small one and the Turks had been good customers."<sup>16</sup> But generally until mid-1918 at least, Husayn

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<sup>14</sup> ibn Khaldun, op. cit. p. 140 and 142.

<sup>15</sup> F.O. 371/3042, p. 121, J.S. Kadri, Aden, Nov. 8, 1916; A.B. 41, Feb. 6, 1917, p. 58, reports that the sentiments of the population of Mecca were gradually shifting in favor of the Sharif.

<sup>16</sup> F.O. 371/2776, Diary of Risaldar-Major Gul Nawaz Khan, in Bray to Director of Military Intelligence, War Office, Cairo, Oct. 19, 1916.

managed, with the help of British resources and supplies, to keep the Beduin in the field against the Turk rather than harrassing the caravan routes. In the towns there was relative stability and reasonable public security which gave the merchants little cause for complaint. If anything, the inflationary prices which resulted from the British subsidy and subsequent gold payments to the Beduin, together with the encouragement of trade with India and the other British colonies, enhanced the prosperity of the towns.

However we have seen that this state of affairs did not last even until the defeat of the Turks. By mid-1918 there were already reports of Beduin raids on Sharifian caravans and supply stores, and the atmosphere of severe discontent among the tribesmen, which we have examined, had an immediate effect on the settled population. Within a year security had deteriorated to such an extent that the roads linking the major towns were almost impassible and, by contrast to the well-organized pilgrimages of the war years, the Sharif in 1920 did "not wish to openly admit his inability to safeguard the [pilgrim] routes."<sup>17</sup> An Arab correspondent reported that there was "no responsible government" in Medina and that every merchant and businessman there had to buy protection for himself from one of the powerful tribesmen surrounding the city, these payments and claims being settled by the Beduin shaykhs and not by the government.<sup>18</sup> There were shortages

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<sup>17</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, p. 43, Nasir al-Din to British Agent, Sept. 10, 1920.

<sup>18</sup>F.O. 686/12/1 pp. 65,66, Ihsanullah to British Agent Mecca, Nov. 29, 1920, and F.O. 686/12/2, p. 45, Nasir al-Din to British Agent, Mecca, Aug. 31, 1920.

of food and supplies and widespread hoarding. Robberies were said to be rampant in Mecca and Medina and shopkeepers were fined, flogged and imprisoned for economic crimes as Husayn attempted to institute monopolies on vital commodities. By the end of 1920 the British agent in Mecca; was so fearful for his own safety that he requested the evacuation of his family and only succeeded in smuggling reports to Jiddah concealed in shipments of shawls and silk.<sup>19</sup>

Predictably the attitudes of the populace fluctuated accordingly. The Sharif became increasingly unpopular and there were rumors of plots and conspiracies to dethrone him. By early in 1920 it was estimated that ninety percent of the population of Jiddah, fifty percent of Mecca, and seventy percent of Medina were against the present administration, and in Medina, 'Ali as governor faced such severe criticism and challenge from the official classes that it appeared he might not be able to return there after a brief trip to Mecca. Anti-government rumors were apparently being spread by high officials and ministers who believed that Turkey was still as strong as before the war and would soon recapture the Holy Cities. News of Turkish nationalist success in Anatolia in 1920 and 1921 were welcomed and "the latent pro-Turkish feelings" of the town dwellers were said to be coming to the fore.<sup>20</sup> However it is an interesting sidelight of the postwar situation that despite all their grievances against the Sharif,

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<sup>19</sup> F.O. 686/12/1, pp. 57 and 60, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, Dec. 8 and Dec. 10, 1920. There are numerous similar reports by Nasir al-Din, Ihsanullah and Ayyub Khan, British Muslim agents in Mecca, dated 1919 to 1921, in F.O. 686/12/1 and F.O. 686/12/2.

<sup>20</sup> F.O. 686/12/2, p. 146, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, Apr. 8, 1920; and elsewhere.

the townsmen stood in even greater fear of the "wild men" from Najd and recalled bitter historical memories of the plunder of the Holy Cities by the Wahhabi tribesmen a century earlier. And indeed, ibn Sa'ud's conquest of Taif was marked by a massacre of the inhabitants, who had been characterized as kafirs, or infidels, by the Ikhwan.<sup>21</sup> The Wahhabis represented par excellence the desert qualities described by ibn Khaldun and the very antithesis of what he calls "civilization."<sup>22</sup> In the conflict with ibn Sa'ud as we shall see, it was Husayn's strength which lay in the towns and settled areas, while the Wahhabi doctrine had its greatest hold on the desert tribesmen. In that struggle, the Sharif represented the party of order and established authority, while his rival's power was based almost exclusively on the Beduin.<sup>23</sup>

A further reason for the dependence of the town dwellers on central authority for order and security, was the racial composition of the main centers of the Hijaz. Because of their blood ties and kinship relationships, the tribes had the organizational ability to act as self-sufficient military units and to protect their own interests. By contrast, Mecca with 150,000 people was said to consist principally of "Indians, Javanese, Yemenese, Turks and Arabs etc.", while Jiddah with 20,000 inhabitants had a mixed population of Persians,

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<sup>21</sup>De Gaury, Rulers of Mecca , p. 276

<sup>22</sup>Ibn Khaldun, op. cit. pp. 118-119.

<sup>23</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 3, Apr. 1, 1920, Cairo, p.87.

Egyptians, Javanese, Sudanese, Abyssinians and Indians in addition to the Arabs.<sup>24</sup> Such a cosmopolitan and racially diffuse population which Hurewitz traces to the pilgrim traffic,<sup>25</sup> could be expected to have little sympathy for an 'Arab' revolt even on its most basic ideological level. According to ibn Khaldun, 'asabiyyah, or group feeling, derives first and foremost from a blood relationship and cannot exist without it.<sup>26</sup> Ideological bonds such as religion, could be useful tools in promoting unity, but they were never more than an overlay for an essential and irreplaceable bond of kinship between a leader and his followers. In the 'ulama proclamation, declaring Husayn King of the Arabs, the Sharif's claim to that title was justified by his direct descent from the Prophet in the Quraysh lineage.<sup>27</sup> And ibn Sa'ud's patriotism was said to be a "pride in the Feisal dynasty" and a promotion of the interests of the House of Sa'ud.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>The Encyclopedia of Islam, vol.1, p. 546; also F.O. 686/6/1, H. Ruhi, report, Jiddah, Oct. 25, 1916 (on Mecca); F.O. 371/3047, p. 121, J.S. Kadri, Aden, Nov. 8, 1916 (on Jiddah); A.B. 41, Feb. 6, 1917, p. 58; A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 483; Glubb, A Short History of the Arab Peoples, p. 250.

<sup>25</sup>J.C. Hurewitz, Middle East Politics: The Military Dimension, N.Y., Praeger, 1969, pp.241-2.

<sup>26</sup>Ibn Khaldun, op. cit. p. 99.

<sup>27</sup>I.O. L. P. & S./10/645, extract from the Qibla of 3rd Moharram 1335 (=Oct. 30, 1916) A.B. 33, Dec. 4, 1916, p. 508, Al Qibla, No. 24; See also Ch. 7.

<sup>28</sup>F.O. 371/2769, J. Keyes to M. Sykes, Bahrayn, Jan. 19, 1916; See also Ch. 8.

Such hereditary ties were meaningless to the heterogeneous populace of the towns, which felt a greater affinity for the Ottoman claims for possession of the Holy Land based on a looser Islamic unity than to any racial definition from which they were necessarily excluded. Their very diversity prevented any independent mobilization for war or self-defence, while a tribal shaykh could instantly summon his clansmen to arms. In any situation of military confrontation, the townsmen were therefore necessarily at the mercy of the tribes. The racial composition of the major Hijaz towns therefore explains why the inhabitants of Mecca, Medina, Jiddah and other center were frequently described as being afraid of and opposed to the "Arabs," that term being use exclusively to describe the Beduin.

And finally we must refer back to the social structure of the Hijaz towns and indeed of most of the major urban centers of the Middle East, which we described in the first chapter. Lest it be assumed that the towns stood outside the traditional political system of the Arabian Peninsula, it should be remembered that the inhabitants were organized into medieval guilds which were as ancient as Islam itself. Unlike Bayrut and Damascus where the penetration of Western influence had begun to transform the traditional structures and to create the conditions that were to make these two cities active centers of Arab nationalism, the towns of the Hijaz had, by virtue of their greater isolation, maintained their historical relationship with the tribes and been unaffected by the new currents which had begun to sweep the Fertile Crescent. Urbanization and centralization are two processes which almost inevitably accompany the growth of nationalism, for they

break down the intermediary loyalties and affiliations that stand between the individual and the central authority. However the existence of fairly large towns and the presence of trade and commerce in themselves are not evidence of these processes. The primary allegiance of the artisans and merchants of Mecca, as we saw, was to the professional and territorial division of the town which corresponded to their occupation. In the towns of the Hijaz as in the Moroccan cities described by Waterbury, there was considerable friction and sometimes intense rivalry between these separate quarters or haram, the "corporate fraternity" of each providing a social structure as internally segmented as the divisions of clan and tribe in the desert.<sup>30</sup>

There is no reason to suppose therefore that the concepts of nationalism and unity had any greater appeal to Hijazis who lived in the towns, by virtue of that fact alone, than to those who lived in the desert. Organization according to tribe and according to guild were two parts of the same traditional political system, and both units had been in constant, and generally antagonistic, interaction for centuries. The social and economic processes necessary to the growth of nationalism had not yet penetrated the Arabian Peninsula, so that the official ideology of the Sharif's movement in itself was as incapable of rousing allegiance to the 'Arab cause' in the towns as it was among the tribes. Ultimately the revolt depended for its support on being able to satisfy the needs and interests of its followers, and herein, as we have seen, it was infinitely more successful among the Beduin than among the townsmen. The traditionally

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<sup>30</sup>Waterbury , op.cit., pp. 71-72

distinct interests of town and desert were still further apart and more powerful motivations than the unifying force of any potential national bond.

#### The Nobility of Mecca.

We have examined the Sharif's bases of support among the populace of the Hijaz, hitherto taking for granted his own leadership at Mecca. Since Husayn was already in power, albeit under Ottoman dominion, at the time of his negotiations with Britain, writers on the Arab revolt have generally not thought to question his claim to the amirate. The truth was however that Husayn's own position as Grand Sharif and Amir of Mecca was not unchallenged. In their search for a candidate to lead the Arab rebellion against the Ottoman Empire and to defuse the Sultan's call to jihad, the British were initially impressed by Husayn's religious and political credentials both as guardian of the Muslim Holy Cities and as a direct descendant of the Prophet. However it soon became clear that there was nothing very sacrosanct either about the Sharif's genealogy or about his political position. In April, 1917, Hogarth noted that there were in fact numerous ashraf, or descendants of the Prophet, and that a blood connection to Muhammad was a cheap claim among the nobles of Mecca as well as in the Hijaz as a whole. Rather, the present Meccan ruling house owed its elevation and wealth to the "Albanian Pasha of Egypt", Muhammad 'Ali, while Husayn himself had been appointed by the Sublime Porte. There were other powerful contenders for the title of Sharif and Hogarth commented that Husayn's status actually derived from something more potent and less honorable than Quraysh blood:



"King Hussein will have to rely on very much more than his pedigree if he is to be the agent of a new Arab unity."<sup>31</sup> Internecine feuds between the various Sharifian clans were endemic to the history of the Hijaz, and, as de Gaury's account of the rulers of Mecca from the time of Muhammad clearly shows, assassination and civil war were not uncommon outcomes of the struggle for power in the Holy Cities.<sup>32</sup> One Arab Bureau observer described the strife among the ashraf as "an old and ineradicable feature of Meccan life," and one, it might be added, which casts further doubt on contemporary conceptions of the Arab revolt as a modern nationalist uprising.<sup>33</sup>

Before examining the internal challenges to Husayn's authority, derived as they were from ancient animosities and competition, let us see how the Sharif's relationship with the Turks prior to the revolt confirmed the insecurity of his position and created a vital concern to legitimize his own leadership. Husayn and his predecessors were appointees of the Sublime Porte who could be dismissed and replaced at Istanbul's behest without regard to hereditary claims.<sup>34</sup> It had been a perpetual preoccupation of the Sharifs of Mecca to maximize their real power under the Ottoman Empire, and of the Ottoman valis, or governors, to curb that power and bring it into line with the policies of the Sultan. One of the most potent weapons at the disposal of the Porte in this continuing struggle was its ability to play off the Sharifian clans

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<sup>31</sup>A.B. 48, Apr. 21, 1917, p. 177.

<sup>32</sup>de Gaury, op. cit., see for example p. 166 and pp. 240 ff.

<sup>33</sup>A.B. 29, Nov. 8, 1916, p. 421.

<sup>34</sup>John Marlowe, Arab Nationalism and British Imperialism; A Study in Power Politics, London, Cresset Press, 1961, Chapter 2.

against each other. At the time of Husayn's appointment in 1908, direct Ottoman power over Mecca was considerable, and in order to assert his own rule, he inevitably continued the traditional Sharifian resistance to Ottoman interference. It was his deliberate attempt to restore the influence of the Sharifate at Mecca which led to a Turkish plan to depose Husayn on the eve of the First World War.<sup>35</sup> Certainly he had knowledge of this plan before the negotiations with McMahon and he hoped that his alliance with Britain would preempt his own deposition and eliminate once and for all the constant threat of potential intervention from his overlords at Istanbul. In his prewar correspondence with the Porte, Husayn's prime objective had been to secure Ottoman guarantees for succession to the Sharifate in his own lineage, in other words, to make the title hereditary. This assurance the Turks were not prepared to give primarily because it would remove their principal lever for control over Hijaz politics.<sup>36</sup> It is not surprising therefore that one of Husayn's main demands from Britain, and perhaps more important to him than all the provisions of the Damascus Protocol, was to secure this recognition of the hereditary status of his position.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>De Gaury, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-60, 262 and 268-9; for other accounts of prewar conflicts between Husayn and the Ottoman vali at Mecca, see *A.B.* 50, May 13, 1917, p.266; and *A.B.* 21, Sept. 15, 1916, p. 251, views of Bimbashi Mehmed Ziya Bey, acting governor and commandant in Mecca.

<sup>36</sup>*A.B.* 25, Oct. 15, 1916, p. 341. In return for this recognition Husayn had even offered to help the Turks in their expedition against Egypt in 1914.

<sup>37</sup>Sachar, *op. cit.*, p. 130. It is noteworthy that this concern for hereditary title was also ibn Sa'ud's main demand in his treaty negotiations with Great Britain in 1915. See Hurewitz, *Diplomacy*, vol. 2, pp. 17-18.

After the declaration of revolt in June 1916, Ottoman accounts emphasized that the Sharif was merely a replaceable official whose function was to look after the pilgrimage. It was "ridiculous," the Turks said, "to represent the disobedience or mutiny of an official who was led astray by his ambition or by English influence as a revolt of the Arab nations or of the Mussulman world against the Ottoman Caliphate."<sup>38</sup> If one aspect of the revolt was therefore the Sharif's attempt to establish a greater independence from Ottoman interference in his own domain, then it may be usefully compared to the motives of the Imam of the Idrisi Sayyid in their earlier rebellions in Yemen and 'Asir. It also confirms our earlier evaluation of the Sharif's movement as a 'traditional' revolt, 'traditional' here meaning the pursuit of objectives which had historically motivated the amirs of the Peninsula, and certainly the jockeying for power between Sharif and Vali dated back to the earliest days of the Ottoman Empire.

However the Sharif's concern to legitimize the hereditary right of his family to the Sharifate of Mecca was clearly not aimed at diminishing Ottoman authority alone. As we saw, the latter was exercised partly through the ability to exploit rival aspirations to the position, and in a sense, those claims from among the ashraf of Mecca represented a far more immediate threat to Husayn's power than the more distant influence of Istanbul. For information on the power struggle in Mecca itself we depend largely on the reports of Arab correspondents, since British officials themselves were unable to visit the Holy City and examine the political situation at first

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<sup>38</sup>A.B. 25, Oct. 15, 1916, p. 341.

hand.<sup>39</sup> At the time of the Sharif's revolt, the Qararah and Shanabrah sects of the ashraf were said to be almost unanimously and actively opposed to Husayn. One clan of the Qararah sect, the Dhawi Zayd, had vigorously competed for the title with Husayn's clan, the Dhawi 'Awn of 'Abadilah,<sup>40</sup> when the Young Turks took power in 1908. One reason for the Ottoman decision at that time against the Dhawi Zayd candidate, 'Ali Haydar, may have been that the latter had taken the extraordinary step of marrying an Englishwoman. The Dhawi Zayd had in fact held power before Husayn's clansmen were appointed by Muhammad 'Ali in 1827 and had supplied most of the rulers of Mecca since the seventeenth century. Their historical claim to the title was therefore at least as good as that of the Dhawi 'Awn. The bitterness of the feud between them at the time of Muhammad 'Ali is graphically depicted by de Gaury who writes of the Dhawi Zayd: "... both their Meccan and clan pride combined to strengthen their hatred."<sup>41</sup> Twice since that time the Dhawi Zayd had been reinstalled, from 1851 to 1856, and most recently with the appointment of 'Abd al Mutalib

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<sup>39</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 176, Ruhi, Jiddah, Oct. 25, 1916; A.B. 29, Nov. 8, 1916, pp. 421-2; A.B. 91, June 4, 1918, pp. 181-2. See de Gaury, Rulers of Mecca, pp. 136-7, 164, 176, 190 and 243, for genealogies of the Dhawi 'Awn, Dhawi Zayd and Dhawi Baraqat ruling clans. These three had supplied almost all the Sharifs of Mecca from the seventeenth century to the 20th.

<sup>40</sup>De Gaury, *op. cit.*, p. 131. The Dhawi 'Awn was the most important offshoot of the 'Abadilah clan in the sixteenth century and is considered a clan in its own right.

<sup>41</sup>De Gaury, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

as Sharif in 1880. When Husayn proclaimed his revolt it was therefore quite logical that the Turks should issue a firman deposing the Sharif and appointing 'Ali Haydar of the Dhawi Zayd in his place. The latter then proceeded to Medina so that in mid-1916 there were two rival Sharifs, one ironically with an English wife and under Ottoman sponsorship, who was exhorting ibn Sa'ud and other Arab chiefs to expel the infidels from the Holy Land.<sup>42</sup>

After the appointment of 'Ali Haydar, Mecca was alive with intrigue. Far from presenting a united Arab front against the Turks, Husayn was being actively opposed by powerful forces in the very heart of his kingdom and the seat of his government. The Dhawi Zayd and their supporters began to organize actively against Husayn and there was soon reported to be a strong Meccan "coterie", including several influential local notables, which supported 'Ali Haydar's claims to the Sharifate.<sup>43</sup> It will be remembered that Mecca was divided into thirteen quarters or haram, each presided over by a shaykh al-harah, and each with its own flag, administration and watchmen. These divisions lent themselves to conspiracy, and ashraf with influence in particular quarters attempted to sow distrust and discontent, offering material inducements to local officials who cooperated in fomenting unrest against the new government. We have the details of one major plot in which the dissident ashraf

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<sup>42</sup>F.O. 371/3047, 'Ali Haydar to ibn Sa'ud, 14th Shawal, 1334, in handwriting, sent ibn Sa'ud to Cox, 13th Zul Qaydah, 1334, (=Sept. 12, 1916).

<sup>43</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 176, Husayn Ruhi, Jiddah, Oct. 25, 1916; F.O. 686/6/1, p. 128, Lloyd, Dec. 22, 1916; F.O. 371/2774, Wilson, Erkowit, July 7, 1916.

attempted to influence nine of the shuyukh al-harah to cooperate in a plan to seize the Grand Sharif and hand him over to the Turks.<sup>44</sup>

One of the principal devices of anti-Sharifian agitators in the capital was to spread false rumors about the progress of the war and to disseminate propaganda heralding the impending defeat of the British and the crushing of the Sharif's revolt. Magazine articles, letters and wall posters were circulated announcing German victories and Allied defeats, and calling on all Muslims to unite with the Caliph to overthrow the Sharif and to free themselves from British, French and Russian tyranny in their own lands.<sup>45</sup> Because this subversive activity was being conducted secretly it is difficult to determine exactly who was involved, to what extent and what the motives of the conspirators were. The reports of Britain's Meccan agents do contain the names of both ashraf and prominent citizens suspected of being responsible for the rumors and agitation. And circumstantial evidence points to a connection between the propaganda we have described and the historical internecine feuds of the Sharifians clans. But it is impossible to draw definite conclusions as to the precise nature of the involvement of the Meccan nobility.

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<sup>44</sup>A.B. 29, Nov. 8, 1916, pp. 421-2; A.B. 77, Jan. 27, 1918, p. 32; F.O. 686/6/1, pp. 176-9, Ruhi, Jiddah, Oct. 25, 1916; *ibid.*, p. 35, Meccan Agent's report, Mar. 4, 1917, via Ruhi, Jiddah, Mar. 12, 1917; F.O. 686/12/2, pp. 88-92, Ihsanullah, Mecca, to British Agent, May 19, 1920.

<sup>45</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 29, Cyphers of Feb. 28 and Mar. 2, 1917 from Meccan agent; F.O. 686/48, p. 24, M.N., Oct. 18, 1917; F.O. 371/3049, Wingate to Balfour, Cairo, Jan. 28, 1917, sends memorandum on Dutch representative, Herr Rinke, dated Jan. 22, 1917; F.O. 686/6/1, pp. 36-38, Meccan Agent's report, cyphers of March 7 and 9, 1917 via Ruhi, Jiddah, Mar. 12, 1917; also F.O. 686/6/1, pp. 176-179, Ruhi, Juddah, Oct. 25 1916.

What is certain is that Mecca was bristling with intrigue throughout the war, though particularly in its first months, and that 'Ali Haydar retained the support of a substantial section of the Meccan nobility, especially those tied to him by blood through the Dhawi Zayd clan.

The Sharif retaliated decisively, though not always effectively, against conspirators in his capital. Raiders were frequently seen in the first months of the revolt breaking into shops and houses while police and even the local shaykh al-harah stood by and gave protection to the bandits. Enquiries made by the British agent revealed that the raids had been ordered by the Sharif against those suspected of supporting the Turks.<sup>46</sup> The Government of India recommended deporting those Indian Muslims involved in the conspiracies and interning them in Egypt, though by the end of the war no action seems to have been taken on the proposal.<sup>47</sup> And one dispatch notes that Husayn through moderation and skill, was uncovering plots against him and often pardoning the schemers, thus winning over formerly hostile elements to his side. The same report however shows that inter-family feuds concerning the rival claims to the amirate continued unabated in Mecca.<sup>48</sup> As conditions deteriorated after the war and the basis of the Sharif's power disintegrated, new plans were hatched among the nobles to dethrone the amir, who reacted increasingly harshly until the capital was reported swarming with secret police and the

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<sup>46</sup>ibid., Ruhi, pp. 176 ff., Oct. 25, 1916.

<sup>47</sup>F.O. 371/3046, Viceroy, Delhi, to Secretary of State for India, Dec. 21, 1916.

<sup>48</sup>A.B.41, Feb. 6, 1917, p. 58.

British Agent himself felt he was being watched constantly. By 1920, Husayn was being described as

a second Sultan Abd al-Hamid on a miniature scale, surrounded as he is by spies, suspicious of everybody, a despot, found of centralizing both executive and administrative control in himself.<sup>49</sup>

From all the reports received in Jiddah in the year following the war it was apparent that an atmosphere of increasing intolerance, authoritarianism, and corruption was being created in Mecca to compensate for the Sharif's loss of real control and the growing opposition to his rule. Yet through it all, it is impossible not to sympathize with the man who, while fighting the Turks in the north and ibn Sa'ud in the east, and negotiating endlessly to gain and maintain the tenuous support of tribes, could not rely on a united and cohesive front at the very center of his power.

That the divisions among the Sharifian nobility of the Hijaz were a feature of the traditional political system throughout Arabia is confirmed by the existence of such palace intrigues in the capitals of almost every other amirate in the Peninsula. In chapter eight for example we shall see the ramifications of the struggle for power in the ruling house at Hail. There were also serious challenges to the Idrisi Sayyid's authority in 'Asir, while the internal divisions of the various branches which claimed the Imamate

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<sup>49</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, p. 81-82, Nasir al-Din to British Agent, Jiddah, June 24, 1920, which also reports on an active conspiracy under the leadership of the Keeper of the Keys of the Haram; also *ibid.*, p. 131, Ayyub Khan, Cairo, summary of his two months in Mecca, Apr. 10, 1920.



of the Yemen were even more complicated than the conflicts in Mecca.<sup>50</sup> What emerges from our account is that parochial attachments at every level of the political system including the center of power itself, superseded and precluded any possibility of creating a union based on concepts as wide as Arabism or nationalism. Even Husayn's own motives, as we have seen here, in joining the British and openly confronting the Turks while his opponents in rival Sharifian clans took the opposite course, were influenced at least to some degree by the internal power struggle at Mecca. To increase and consolidate his own power and that of his family at home, and to eliminate the threat of outside interference, was a primary objective which his alliance with Britain was intended to serve.

The Arab Regular Army.

Both in their organizational structure and in their military activities, the Sharif's tribal forces were "irregulars." The tribesmen served only under their own shaykhs and in their own territory generally arranging for their own food and transport. Each shaykh had about a hundred men under his control, and in the few cases in which larger operations were carried out, a sharif temporarily took command. As the revolt moved northward, the composition of the Sharif's forces changed continuously, and although the tribesmen with Faysal at any given moment may be said to have constituted an "army," they were, in Lawrence's opinion, "too independent to fight a pitched battle under a single command."<sup>51</sup> In no sense was there

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<sup>50</sup>For challenges to Imam Yahya's authority at San'a from rival clans and lineages, see Hogarth's report on the Yemen in A.B. 52, May 31, 1917, pp. 254-257.

<sup>51</sup>Graves, Lawrence, pp. 108 ff.

a single unified structure in the tradition of a national army, and Faysal's role was that of supreme mediator and coordinator rather than commander-in-chief. The army rarely if ever acted as a unit, but served rather as a loose framework for small groups carrying out lightning raids and quick withdrawals, usually accompanied by some looting. However there was another element involved in the Arab war effort and one which has sometimes mistakenly been credited with the movement's major successes. This was the regular army consisting of Arab prisoners of war from the Ottoman armies, and fallahin, townsmen and slaves from the Hijaz. Several writers, by omission rather than deliberate misstatement, imply that this was in fact the Sharif's army, for they do not indicate that the tribes as such had anything to do with the revolt. Briton Busch, for example, accurately chronicles the recruiting efforts for the regular army but does not mention tribal recruitment at all. By contrast, our treatment of the regulars here will be somewhat perfunctory, firstly because their actual role was peripheral to the revolt, and secondly because in their composition, they were largely extrinsic to the political system of the Hijaz, which is the focus of this study. There were three separate attempts to build a largely non-tribal force, two at the end of 1916 and one in mid-1917, and we shall evaluate these in terms of their objectives, the recruitment of soldiers, the cleavages and divisions they produced, and the military performance of the force.

What was the purpose of creating a regular army? After the early successes of the revolt, the disadvantages of the Arabs were

summed up by the Arab Bureau as a "lack of regulars, shortage of artillery, lack of common plan and danger of melting away...."<sup>52</sup> The Beduin were regarded as incapable of sustaining a major attack or of withstanding an assault from disciplined troops. Toward the end of 1916, the Turks were reported to be planning an advance on Rabigh as a stepping stone to the recapture of Mecca. Three thousand tribesmen in the hills were the "sole Arab defence against a Turkish advance south." These were thought likely to fade away in the event of a determined Ottoman attack, and both British and Arab observers feared that the revolt was on the verge of imminent collapse.<sup>53</sup> The first object therefore in the formation of a regular army was to provide a trained and organized Arab force to garrison Rabigh and to guarantee that the Sharif's forces would resist an Ottoman thrust toward Mecca. While the desert fighters continued to harrass the Turks "by raids and sudden alarms," a standing army would be ready to wage conventional warfare and to engage substantial concentrations of Turks in the kind of pitched battles which guerrillas invariably avoid.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, such a force was intended to supply the reliability and stability which the irregulars lacked. Since the tribes in effect carried their own social structure into the military apparatus created by the Sharif,

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<sup>52</sup>F.O. 371/2776, Arab Bureau to Sirdar and Director of Military Intelligence, Cairo, Oct. 30, 1916.

<sup>53</sup>F.O. 371/2776, Sirdar to Secretary etc., Simla, Nov. 9, 1916.

<sup>54</sup>Graves, op. cit., p. 110.

a regular army necessarily depended on peasants and townsmen who were less independent as units and therefore more susceptible to direct control. These non-tribal elements were to be organized into battalions according to the European model, irrespective of their parochial affiliations and with a hierarchy of officers and ranks each responsible to their superiors. At the end of 1916, the Sharif's War Minister, 'Aziz 'Ali al-Misri tried to build such an army at Rabigh from the Syrians and Iraqis in the British internment camps in Egypt, Mesopotamia and India. And in Yanbu' at the same time, Faysal was organizing his "peasants, slaves and paupers" into regular battalions in imitation of 'Aziz's model.<sup>55</sup>

However by the middle of 1917, after the immediate danger had passed, the lack of cohesion amongst the tribesmen was still blamed for the movement's lack of progress. The lengthy negotiations with the northern shaykhs had caused long delays in the military operations, and British officers complained that local animosities and grievances invariably had to be settled before new groups would participate in the revolt. In order to remedy these drawbacks and and transform "a spasmodic and inharmonious" uprising into a "whole-hearted and cohesive effort" against the Turks, Sir Mark Sykes at the Foreign Office proposed to create an Arab Legion, again drawn primarily from Arab prisoners and deserters.<sup>56</sup> The new force was intended to supersede the "purely local grievances and ambitions" of Beduin divided by jealousies and tribal feuds, with a spirit of

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<sup>55</sup> ibid., p. 117.

<sup>56</sup> A.B. 53, June 14, 1917, pp.263-4.

"unity and enthusiasm" through a sense of "Arab nationality," and therefore to serve both a military and a political function. It was to provide a well-equipped and disciplined attack force to stiffen and support the irregulars and thereby to act also as an agent of Arab unity capable of overcoming the factionalism and the innumerable divisions that were impeding effective action on the part of the Sharif's forces. Especially the use of Syrians and Iraqis in the regular army cooperating with Hijazis in a common struggle, was expected to foster a sense of Arab union and national destiny.

These fond hopes were shattered in the first recruiting efforts among the Arab prisoners of war, for most expressed "extreme reluctance to go" and many had to be embarked to the Hijaz by force. The Sirdar was certain that when these officers and men saw with their own eyes that the Arab revolt was a reality, eighty percent would be willing to join. At Rabigh however, all the men who had been chosen refused absolutely to fight for the Sharif, stating "that they could not take service against their own Government, the Turks."<sup>57</sup> Representatives of the Sharif addressed the prisoners but to no avail, "the men being not only unwilling, but hostile in their attitude and demeanour." After many attempts to handle the recruitment in various ways and through different mediators, the plan was declared a "dismal...total failure."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> I.O. L.P. & S./10/643, Viceroy, Foreign to Sirdar, Nov. 23, 1916, ibid., Sirdar, Khartoum, to Secretary etc., Simla, Nov. 1, 1916.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Parker, H.T. Mandua, to Arab Bureau, Cairo, Dec. 6, 1916; ibid., Government of India, Foreign and Political Department to Austen Chamberlain, Secretary of State for India, Delhi, Feb. 23, 1917.

The initial goal for the regular army was five thousand officers and men, but this figure was now drastically modified, and both 'Aziz and Faysal turned to other sources as the revolt virtually ground to a halt in December 1916. Britain sent nine hundred camel corps and three hundred troops from the Egyptian army to Rabigh but these served under their own officers and were never integrated into the Sharif's forces. In the end only local sources seemed capable of supplying the basis of a regular army. The Sharif attempted to collect villagers and townsmen from throughout the Hijaz, offering attractive material inducements to those who enlisted. Drawn by the promise of food and high pay, hundreds of paupers joined the Sharif's forces. In addition Faysal recruited fallahin and slaves from among the Juhaynah tribe whose territory was between Yanbu' and Wajh and which therefore had many settled cultivators in the coastal regions of its domain. Unlike the Arab prisoners who had served in the Ottoman army however, these peasants and townsmen were completely untrained and it was some time before they were ready to take the field.<sup>59</sup>

By mid-1917 the Arab army was still predominantly tribal with the regulars having taken little active part in the fighting. Wajh had been taken by a small strike force of tribesmen, while 'Aqabah was captured by Lawrence and the Huwaytat. The formation of a regular army appeared to have made no impression on either the

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<sup>59</sup> F.O. 371/2776, Sirdar to Secretary etc., Simla, Nov. 9, 1916; and Graves op. cit. p. 117; A.B. 34, Dec. 11, 1916, p. 530; F.O. 371/2776, Arab Bureau to Sirdar and Director of Military Intelligence, Cairo, Oct. 30, 1916; A.B. 34, Dec. 11, 1916, p. 530; and Graves op. cit., pp. 116-7.

organization or tenor of the Sharif's movement, and was barely mentioned in the British sources for the first half of 1917. All the successes had been of a "guerilla nature" with the Arab forces still displaying a "lack of the most elementary disciplined behaviour."<sup>60</sup> New proposals to recruit Arab prisoners met with considerable skepticism both in India and the War Office in view of the failure of the previous experiment, and it was only Sir Mark Sykes' determination to create an Arab Legion which resulted in a serious effort to carry out the plan.<sup>61</sup> In August 1917, it was reported that 23 officers and 285 rank and file prisoners from India had agreed to serve the Sharif, while several more were enlisted in Mesopotamia, for a total of 450 officers and men. This was however the apparent limit that could be mustered and Indian officials stated that they did "not expect to get any more recruits at present."<sup>62</sup> Offers of good pay attracted 226 additional recruits from Aden and Yemen who were frankly described as "purely mercenary" with no interest at all in "Arab unity"<sup>63</sup>

By the time the Arab Legion was being trained in Egypt by British officers at the end of 1917, its original plan and purpose were said to have been "drastically modified." The political objective

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<sup>60</sup> A.B. 53, June 14, 1917, pp. 263-4.

<sup>61</sup> I.O. L. P.& S./10/643, Director of Military Intelligence to Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, May 26, 1917; ibid., J.E.G., minutes, London May 22, 1917; ibid., Sykes to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, sent by Wingate, Cairo, May 18, 1917; for Sykes' message to officers of the Arab Legion see F.O. 882/2, A1/17/14, pp. 90-91.

<sup>62</sup> I.O. L. P.& S./10/643, Viceroy, Army Department, to Viceroy, Political Department, Aug. 1, 1917, pp. 471-2.

<sup>63</sup> A.B. 71, Nov. 27, 1917, pp. 471-2.

to have the Legion act as an agent of Arab union was abandoned entirely and even the military goal of joining the Sharif's forces was moderated. Unlike earlier attempts to induct the regulars directly into the Arab army at Rabigh under the Sharif's own commanders, they were now responsible to European officers and had no contact as yet with Husayn or any of his representatives. Even in Egypt there were indications that the Syrian and Baghdadi officers were disturbed at the prospect of being sent to the Hijaz, while the Yemenis served only under their own chiefs. Certainly no report gives any indication of pan-Arab or pro-Sharifian sentiments on the part of any of the Legion's officers or men, and one presumes that British observers would have been quick to take note of the expression of such feelings.<sup>64</sup> As Faysal's army moved into the settled regions of southern Syria early in 1918, the need for trained soldiers became greater and several units of the Legion were sent to 'Aqabah, where they were integrated into the regular force under Ja'far Pasha's command, though the entire regular army in the north probably never exceeded seven or eight hundred men at its greatest strength.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., and F.O. 686/36, p. 18, Clayton to Faysal, Oct. 17, 1917; F.O. 686/47, pp.22-23, Clayton to Wilson, Cairo, Aug. 28, 1917; I.O. L. P. & S./10/643, Consul-General and Agent to the Government of India in Karasan, Meshed, to Secretary etc., Simla, May 26, 1918 and July 12, 1918.

<sup>65</sup> Aldington, op. cit., pp. 212, 233 and 274, gives the figure as 600.



Having examined the purposes for which an Arab regular army was formed and the manner in which these objectives were modified by the very process of recruitment, let us now look at the involvement of this force in the revolt itself. Far from acting as a stabilizing element capable of overcoming the divisions inherent in a tribally-based army, the regulars were plagued by cleavages of their own which were as serious as those that had thwarted cohesive action on the part of the Beduin. In Syria and Mesopotamia, clan, village and regional loyalties were still more powerful than the appeal of Arab unity, and nationalist affiliations had not yet taken hold even in the settled areas. Throughout the revolt the regular army was troubled by disputes between Syrian and Baghdadi officers, and both were in constant conflict with the Hijazis. From the formation of the first units at Rabigh at the end of 1916 through the long stay at 'Aqabah and until the capture of Damascus itself, numerous dispatches indicate a constant state of friction and intrigue within the ranks of the regulars.<sup>66</sup> Lawrence advised that Beduin not be mixed with Syrians, nor trained men with tribesmen, partly because townsmen and tribesmen naturally despised each other and partly because the ex-officers of the Ottoman Army were "hopeless" in dealing with the desert warriors.<sup>67</sup> The "refined" Syrian had nothing but scorn and disdain for the "dirty" Bedu, while

<sup>66</sup>See for example A.B. 29, Nov. 8, 1916, p. 29; A.B. 80, Feb. 26, 1918, p.59; A.B. 95, July 2, 1918, pp. 223-226; A.B. 108, Jan. 11, 1919, p. 12, all deal with disputes and quarrels between the Syrian and Baghdadadi officers. Further reports are in F.O. 686/6/1 and 2.

<sup>67</sup>A.B. 70, Apr. 20, 1917, p. 352, report by Lawrence.

the latter regarded the Damascene as "effeminate."<sup>68</sup> The situation was probably worse among the regulars with 'Ali and 'Abdallah than in the north for it appeared that Faysal had first choice of the deserters and prisoner of war volunteers and that only the rejects were sent to his brothers in the south. These were frequently "animated by 'motives not military' and were much more interested in forming political committees...than in fighting the Turks, whom they described as 'our Moslem brethren'." Col. Brémond reported that the committee in 'Ali's army expressed a near adoration for the Germans, and made no pretence of concealing its pro-Turkish feelings, its contempt for the English and hatred for the Beduin.<sup>69</sup> The Beduin in turn made threats against the Baghdadi officers whom they considered "traitors." Instead of a spirit of unity, the introduction of the Arab ex-officers from the Ottoman Army served only to multiply the divisions and to create new sources of conflict within the Sharif's forces.

The hostility between the Hijazis and the Syrians and Iraqis was reflected even in the Sharif's own attitude. Husayn was suspicious of the Arab officers who owed no direct allegiance to him and he had never expressed any enthusiasm for recruitment

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<sup>68</sup> A.B. 53, June 14, 1917, p. 263.

<sup>69</sup> Brémond, op. cit. p. 229; Aldington, op. cit., p. 233; A.B. 97, July 16, 1918, p. 249; A.B. 95, July 2, 1918, pp. 223-226, report by Major Davenport on hatred between the Beduin and Baghdadis with 'Abdallah and 'Ali; See also A.B. 80, Feb. 26, 1918, p. 59.

from the ranks of the Arab prisoners of war, this initiative having come entirely from the British and from 'Aziz al-Misri. He feared political intrigues against him and was jealous of any possible diminution of the direct control of his army which he exercised through his sons.<sup>70</sup> Under strong pressure from Britain, the Sharif had reluctantly appointed 'Aziz to the post of Minister of War, an "empty dignity," as Aldington points out, since Husayn withheld financial and administrative assistance, and actively hampered the Egyptian's goal of creating a disciplined force to act as a spearhead of united Arab military action on the northern front.<sup>71</sup> 'Aziz was also the only member of Husayn's ministry who did not have to prove his credentials as a nationalist, having headed a revolt of Arab officers within the Ottoman Army and having had direct contact with the secret Arab societies in Bayrut and Damascus which are generally accepted by contemporary historians as the first organizational outgrowth of Arab national sentiment. Husayn however barely disguised his distrust of 'Aziz and removed him from office early in 1917, fearing that the fame and political reputation of the latter

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<sup>70</sup>F.O. 686/47, pp. 22-23, Clayton to Wilson, Cairo, Aug. 28, 1917; F.O. 686/35, pp. 19-20, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Sept. 16, 1917; F.O. 371/2776, Wilson to Husayn, (telephone) via Ruhi, Oct. 11, 1916.

<sup>71</sup>Aldington, op. cit., p. 204; For relations between Husayn and 'Aziz, see F.O. 686/54, p. 24, R.N.O. to Wilson, Oct. 31, 1916; F.O. 371/2775, Ibrahim Dimitri, sent by Wingate, Aug. 24, 1916; F.O. 686/33, p. 39, Husayn to Wilson, Nov. 5, 1916; *ibid.*, Wilson to Husayn, p. 61, Nov. 2, 1916; *ibid.*, p. 60, Wilson to 'Abdallah, Nov. 1, 1916; *ibid.*, Wilson to Husayn, Nov. 7, 1916; F.O. 686/34, p. 144-145, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Jan. 17, 1917; *ibid.*, pp. 111-2, Wilson to Husayn, Mar. 17, 1917; F.O. 371/2776, Diary of Risaldar-Major Gul Nawaz Khan in Bray to Director of Military Intelligence, War Office, Cairo, Oct. 19, 1916; *ibid.*, Parker to Arab Bureau, in McMahon to Foreign Office, Oct. 30, 1916; A.B. 44, Mar. 12, 1917, p. 115.

threatened his own position as leader of the Arab movement.

Subsequent confrontations with leaders of Faysal's northern regular army were even more serious and threatened to disrupt the entire revolt. In a declaration aimed particularly at Ja'far Pasha and Nuri al-Sa'id, the Sharif in August 1918 abolished the ranks of all regular army officers. The action caused pandemonium in the northern army, Ja'far and all other officers immediately proffering their resignations. Faysal then cabled to Mecca submitting his own resignation, the soldiers promptly mutinied and military action ground to a halt on the eve of the projected joint Anglo-Arab assault in Palestine. While energetic British intervention convinced Husayn to withdraw his order, it did not diminish his suspicions of the "feelings and dealings" of "Jaafar and Nuri and their like," as he told the British Agent at Jiddah.<sup>72</sup> Lawrence's biographers have tended to explain the Sharif's actions partly in terms of "his prejudices against Mesopotamians" in general and by his desire "to spite the Syrian and Mesopotamian Arabs in Feisal's army."<sup>73</sup> To the extent that this was true the incident

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<sup>72</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 106, Husayn to Bassett, Sept. 3, 1918; For Husayn's correspondence with Faysal, Zayd, Bassett, Wilson and the High Commissioner about the crisis, see F.O.686/39, pp.57-119 inclusive, dated Aug. 30 to Sept. 14, 1918; other references to the incident and Husayn's relations with Ja'far are in F.O. 686/35, pp. 19-20 and p. 53; S.A. 149/5 and 145/8; A.B. 104, Sept. 24, 1918, p. 333; A.B. 106, Oct. 22, 1918, p. 343; I.O. L. P. & S/10/643; and in the following secondary accounts, among others, Lawrence, Seven Pillars, p. 579; Brémond, op. cit., p. 287; Aldington, op. cit., pp. 274-5; Graves Lawrence, pp. 327-8; Nutting, Lawrence, pp. 139-40; Lord Birdwood, Nuri as-Said, London, Cassell, 1959, pp. 70-71; The Letters of T.E. Lawrence, David Garnett (ed) New York, Doubleday, Doran, 1939, p. 248.

<sup>73</sup>Nutting, op. cit., p. 55; Graves, op. cit., p.345.

simply reflects on the highest level, the divisions between the ex-prisoners and the Hijazis in the field. But it is also certain the Husayn had grave misgivings about the political motives of the high-ranking officers, and he may even have feared the military organization of the force in itself as a potential threat to his power, as his attempt to dismantle the entire structure of the regular army indicates. Of all the participants in the revolt, 'Aziz, Ja'far and Nuri were among those who most actively subscribed to the nationalist ethos that was being propagated. And in that sense it is difficult not to view the Sharif's hostility toward the three major leaders of the regular army as further evidence of a resistance to the intrusion of external political forces into the traditional power structure within which he exercised his authority.

Having observed the cleavages and divisions between Syrians and Iraqis, between both groups and the tribesmen, and between the Sharif himself and the commanders of the regular army, we turn finally to the actual military performance of the regulars in the field. And here the British hopes for a reliable and well-disciplined force were most profoundly disappointed. British interests after all were little concerned with internal political differences in themselves, but were centered ultimately on the Arab military effort against the Turks. British dispatches bemoaned the fact that the regulars who had been the greatest hope, had turned out to be ineffective and unreliable, being composed of "bad material" at all levels.<sup>74</sup> The Hijaz townsfolk

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<sup>74</sup> A.B. 67, Oct. 30, 1917, p. 437; A.B. 71, Nov. 27, 1917, pp. 471-2; A.B. 80, Feb. 26, 1918, p. 59; and A.B. 65, Oct. 8, 1917, p. 398; report by Davenport in A.B. 95, July 2, 1918, pp. 223-6.

were "unwarlike" and of "very poor quality," the fallahin had "little discipline," and the soldiers of the former Ottoman army had "indifferent morale" and were "insubordinate." As for the officers, even in Ja'far's force, they were variously described by British correspondents as "worthless," "indifferent" and "incompetent," while cases of "deception", desertion and even sabotage were not uncommon. Ja'far and Nuri themselves were excluded from such pejorative evaluations, and their military skills and close personal relationship with Faysal made them central figures in the northern campaign. Certainly one gains the strong impression from various reports that the regulars in the north performed much better than those with 'Ali and 'Abdallah, but even those on the Syrian front were said to be useful for defensive purposes only. Ironically, although the regulars had been formed for the specific purpose of mounting sustained attacks against the Turks, the Beduin tribesman were still considered the only element for offensive action, even in the settled areas of southern Syria. It was the Huwaytat and Banu Sakhr Beduin, joined later by sections of the Ruwala who carried the revolt northwards towards Damascus.

At the conclusion of the armistice there were signs of severe discontent in the regular army, the officers demanding demobilization and the freedom to return to their homes. Syria and Mesopotamia, they claimed, were not under the Sharif's suzerainty and so the latter had no right to their services.<sup>75</sup>

By mid-1919 the regular army was almost nonexistent, and the Hijaz had reverted to a state of unrestrained tribal rule. The preconceptions on which the British had placed their hopes and expectations

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<sup>75</sup> A.B. 108, Jan. 11, 1919, pp. 13-14; A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 127.

for the force were European and not Arabian. Far from providing a stabilizing element, a disciplined attack force and a catalyst for Arab union, the regular army had instead compounded the divisions already existing in the Sharif's forces. Militarily, politically, and even socially, the ex-officers of the Ottoman army were alien elements who had intruded into Beduin culture.

Finally, a comparison with tribal participation in the revolt is inevitable. Whatever the motives of the tribesmen, and they were not Arab liberation, nationalism and unity, their interests nevertheless coincided with the aims of the Sharif and they fought for him with considerable success. For the first year of the revolt at least, the Beduin were generally described as being "in great spirits,"<sup>76</sup> being the immediate beneficiaries of the enormous influx of resources that resulted from British assistance to the Sharif. Lawrence, as we saw, quickly perceived that the military activity from which most profit could be derived from the tribesmen, was guerrilla warfare, and the experience of the revolt confirmed that small raiding parties could successfully worry the Turks and harrass their lines of communication. However unlike the ebb and flow of the tribal movement with its shining examples of individual daring and valor, its defections, desertions and disobedience to higher authority, and the spirit of clan and tribal independence that pervaded all its actions, the history of the regular army was almost unequivocally dismal, with so few redeeming features that its actual military contribution was almost negligible. Most of the plans for the standing army were never put

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<sup>76</sup>Graves, Lawrence, pp. 108 ff.

into effect, and even where it was most active in the north, its absolute numbers never exceeded ten per cent of the eight to ten thousand men with Faysal at Wajh or 'Aqabah. None of the major successes of the revolt--Wajh, 'Aqabah, the isolation of Medina, the incursions into southern Syria--can be attributed to the regular army. From start to finish, the revolt in the Hijaz was a tribal movement, and the failure of the experiments with the regular army served only to dramatize and accentuate the fact that the uprising had its roots deep in the tribal political system of the region. For the first few months there was no other active element fighting the Turks in Arabia, and even after the formation of the regular army, the success or failure of the rising rested squarely with the tribes. The Sharif had built his movement on the backs of the Beduin, and there it remained throughout the war. He had declared his independence with their support alone and it was ultimately their withdrawal of that support which led to his downfall.



## PART II

THE EXPANSION OF EXTERNAL INFLUENCE:

THE SHARIF IN THE REGIONAL POLITICAL SYSTEM OF ARABIA

Until this point we have been looking inside the political system of the Hijaz, at the relationship between leaders and followers, at the decisionmaking structures and the division of power between the tribes and the central authority, and finally at the motivations for action of the various groups within that system. However, all power structures, whether national, tribal, communal or familial, must look outward as well as inward. They must be prepared for challenges from without at the same time that they attempt to maintain their authority at home. And they are rarely content to consolidate their hold on those whom they control within their own borders without at least attempting to expand their influence beyond. We have examined the complexities of tribal government inside the Hijaz in some detail, and certainly this has been the area most neglected by historians of the Arab revolt. But the political system of the Hijaz did not exist in total isolation. It was itself a part of several larger systems whose own definitions were fluid and changed over time--the Arabian Peninsula, the Arab and Muslim worlds, and indeed almost the entire planet as it was drawn into global conflict during the First World War. By concentrating on the Sharif's relationship with Britain and his role in the struggle for Arab independence and unity, historians have examined these ever-widening orbits from the outside moving in. Husayn's negotiations with McMahon and the contradiction between these and the policies of France and Britain as expressed in the Sykes-Picot agreement, have been analyzed in minute detail from almost every conceivable angle by Kedourie, Busch and others. Writers like Antonius and Zeine

have been equally concerned to relate the Hijaz revolt to the rise of nationalism in the Arab world as a whole. But little attention has been paid to the significance of the Sharif's movement in the politics of the Arabian Peninsula, and even less to its impact at home.

In two senses this designation of priorities is somewhat misplaced. For one, it probes effect while neglecting cause. By emphasizing the importance of the revolt's results in Anglo-Arab relations and on the course of Arab nationalism, while virtually ignoring the internal forces which shaped and influenced the Sharif's actions, it assumes a leader and takes his followers for granted. The Sharif's own motivations cannot be subjected to accurate scrutiny if his relationship with the tribes which fought the revolt is disregarded. Secondly, by implication, it assigns inaccurate weights to the revolt's impact within these various spheres. The Arab revolt in the context of the world war and even as a proportion of Great Britain's attention, spending and manpower was minute, being regarded by more than one observer as an ill-advised side-show,<sup>1</sup> while its part in the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the junior partner in the alliance with Germany, was marginal. There is a stronger relationship to the history of Arab nationalism, especially if we consider Faysal and 'Abdallah's postwar activities, but we have seen that it is questionable at least, whether the power of this causal connection was as great as many writers have assumed. In the Peninsula on the other hand, the revolt had a profound effect on the balance of power between the amirs and dominated the politics of that region both during and after the war, while

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<sup>1</sup>See for example: Philip Graves, The Life of Sir Percy Cox, London, Hutchinson, 1941, pp. 198-199; and Phillip Willard Ireland, Iraq: A Study in Political Development, London, Jonathan Cape, 1937, p. 100.

its impact on the Hijaz itself was nothing less than convulsive, shaking the entire system to its very roots.

It is one of the functions of this study, therefore, to redress the balance and to examine the Sharif's relationship with these various systems or orbits in reverse order. Having discussed the internal power structure of the Hijaz in Part One, we now move on to Husayn's relationship with his immediate neighbors, widening the scope of our analysis to include the political system of the Arabian Peninsula as a whole. Some attention will be paid to the Sharif's connection with Britain where it helps to illuminate aspects of his own ambitions and where it illustrates the effect of external intervention on traditional political processes. The reactions of elements in the Arab and Muslim worlds to the revolt, and the involvement of other powers such as France, will be mentioned only in passing when these are necessary to explain regional phenomena. However, in themselves, they do not fall within the purview of this work.

Our primary aim in this part is to determine how the tribal political system of Arabia functioned on the regional level. How did the principles which governed the relationship between tribe and amir in the Hijaz apply to the interaction among the amirs in the Peninsula as a whole? By examining carefully the processes of coalition and conflict in the Arab revolt, we may also probe further the general characteristics of segmentary politics, as well as find clues to such specific questions as why one actor (ibn Sa'ud) won, and another (Husayn) lost, in their struggle for power. Before we explore the complex network of relations among the various political forces of the Peninsula, we must ask what the Sharif's goals, interests and political ambitions were at the regional level, and what implications they had for the existing balance of power.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## THE SHARIF'S POLITICAL AMBITIONS IN ARABIA

Since Husayn presented and defended the territorial demands of the Damascus Protocol, it is frequently assumed that his motivations in launching the revolt were identical with those of the Syrian nationalists who had formulated the document as the basis of a united and independent Arab state. Other writers have taken the Sharif's military alliance and cooperation with Great Britain as evidence of a consonance of interests between the two. Both interpretations, however, deprive the Sharif of his role as an independent actor in the Arab revolt, making him a mere conduit for policies spawned in London or Damascus. Further, they deny the existence of the political system which brought him to power and which continued to impose its own demands on him. If Husayn's interests sometimes coincided with those of Britain and of other Arab leaders and spokesmen, they also frequently clashed. And it is these conflicts which reveal his ambitions most lucidly, for in these cases they stand in stark contrast to those of his allies. To focus on crises which indicated a divergence of aims is not to minimize the cooperation which did in fact take place, but simply to identify the Sharif's objectives and his power base more clearly.

An event and its consequences gives us the opportunity to identify these objectives. On October 29, 1916, 'Abdallah, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, informed Colonel Wilson that a great assembly of the 'ulama and populace of Mecca had proclaimed Husayn "King of the Arab Nation."<sup>1</sup> In-

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<sup>1</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./10/645 and L.P.& S./10/601, 'Abdallah as Minister of Foreign Affairs to Wilson, 2nd Moharram, 1335 (=Oct. 29, 1916), Mecca. These volumes in the India Office series have reprinted much of the corre-

credibly British officials had received no advance warning of the event, and all correspondence from the period indicates that the announcement took them completely by surprise. Although the Sharif claimed no prior knowledge of the 'ulama's intention, it was soon apparent that the ceremony had been a carefully orchestrated and elaborately staged ritual designed to present the world with a *fait accompli*. It was a gamble, for Husayn hoped to establish a political fact in name which at this point had no correspondence with reality. If he had consulted the British he would certainly have been rebuffed, while the other Arabian amirs, jealous of their own authority, would never voluntarily have acquiesced in his assumption of supremacy over them. But he felt he could overcome the latter objection by exploiting his accord with Britain and his usefulness to the war effort. The Sharif planned to rely on his power base at home in order to extract the agreement of the European powers who would have been caught off balance. This achieved, he would then use the enhanced authority vested in him by means of the title to impose and extend his influence over the competing centers of power in the region. To this end, Husayn and 'Abdallah embarked on a concerted campaign to secure immediate foreign recognition, which was the intermediate step on which everything else depended. If he succeeded in this, as he clearly thought he would, the Sharif's prestige both at home and beyond his borders would be inestimably raised and a significant first stage would be set in demonstrating his paramountcy in the Peninsula and in the Arab world. Husayn's preoccupation with this goal throughout the war dominated his relations with both his rivals

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spondence on the Sharif's title on which this paragraph is based. Other references used here include I.O. L.P. & S./10/637; F.O. 686/9, p. 34; A.B. 33, Dec. 4, 1916, p. 508, translation of article in Al-Qibla No. 24; and Storrs, Memoirs, pp. 192 and 197.

and his allies, and therefore represents for us the medium by which we shall attempt to understand the political system within which he operated.

Significantly, even the ideological justification for the action was sought in the traditional roots of Sharifian authority. The title, said Husayn, would "prove to the Islamic world that the Hejaz Government is actually independent and that its ruler is a great Moslem King," thereby refuting enemy reports that he was dependent on Great Britain and had sold the Holy Cities to a Christian power.<sup>2</sup> As in our earlier discussion of tribal ideology, we must look carefully into the meaning of the word "independence" here, for it is the misuse of that term which has led to a misapprehension of the Sharif's motives as it has also of tribal objectives. Aside from the religious framework within which Husayn chose to explain his position, 'Abdallah further argued that the regal title signified a "return to the prior state of Sharifian independence." He claimed that the amirs of Mecca were not originally under the suzerainty of the Turks and had made the agreement to respect Ottoman authority as free agents rather than by coercion.

Let no one imagine that the Arabs have been in subjugation to the Turks since the foundation of the Ottoman Empire: that would be an error which history could not pardon. Revolt has been simmering in their hearts from the time they ceased to rule, and saw their successors wasting territories and provinces....<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>F.O. 371/2776, Sirdar to Secretary etc., Simla, Khartoum, Nov. 8, 1916, being Wilson's reports of conversations with 'Abdallah, Nov. 1, 1916, and with the Sharif by telephone, Nov. 2, 1916; I.O. L.P.& S./10/645, telephone message by 'Abdallah, Nov. 1, 1916; telephone by Sharif, Nov. 2, 1916; and letter, Sharif to Wilson, Nov. 4, 1916; also A.B. 36, Dec. 26, 1916, p. 555, Storrs interview with Husayn.

<sup>3</sup>A.B. 29, Nov. 8, 1916, p. 415 (emphasis added). 'Abdallah's argument is further explained in I.O. L.P.& S./10/645, 'Abdallah to Wilson, by telephone, Nov. 1, 1916; and in the Qibla, No. 71, Apr. 20, 1917, quoted in

What distinguished the Sharifian position from that held by Arab nationalists in Syria and Cairo was that the former looked back into the history of the existing traditional political system for its justification both of independence and rebellion, while the latter based its reasoning on notions of popular sovereignty and national self-determination inherited from Europe. There was nothing revolutionary in the Qibla description of the proclamation ceremony, in the regal petition presented to Husayn by the 'ulama and notables, or in any of the speeches made in Jidda and Mecca celebrating the event. As with his original declaration of independence, all of these official pronouncements justified Husayn's political position in terms of the religious and hereditary authority vested in the Sharifate.

Ideological justification, however, is insufficient evidence of political motivation and tells us little about the ramifications of the Sharif's action in the Arabian political system. The regal proclamation is significant not only because it contained the essence of the Sharif's ambitions, but also because it indicated the two potential sources of conflict with which he had to contend in order to realize his aims--the other amirs and Great Britain. We shall examine these in turn, the former in order to establish the political structure toward which the Sharif's ambitions were directed, and the latter in order to understand the strategy by which he hoped to accomplish those goals.

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I.O. L.P. & S./11/119. See also I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Al-Qibla, 3rd Moharram, 1335 (=Oct. 30, 1916); and report of reading of the petition at Jiddah, Oct. 30, 1916.



The Sharif's Ambitions and the Traditional Power Structure

Both British and Arab observers were aware that ibn Sa'ud, the Idrisi Sayyid, ibn Rashid and the Imam Yahya were deeply distrustful of the Sharif's motives. A Syrian correspondent noted that these amirs "have their own suspicions and misgivings regarding the movement of the Sherif and are afraid that the success of the Sherif and his power might interfere with their own influence and authority."<sup>4</sup> At least under Ottoman rule there had been a kind of balance of power among these various rulers, and each feared that the Sharif's declaration was a direct threat to the delicate equilibrium that prevailed at the time. From Basrah Sir Percy Cox reported that ibn Sa'ud had taken great exception to the Sharif's title while in Aden Colonel Jacob stated that neither the Idrisi Sayyid nor the Imam would ever recognize the Sharif as their temporal or religious overlord. In fact neither officer was even willing to raise the issue with the amirs when Sir Mark Sykes ventured the suggestion that they might possibly be persuaded to acknowledge the Sharif as the titular leader of the Arab movement.<sup>5</sup> As one observer noted: "not only ibn Saud but all other Arab chiefs hold themselves to be as good as the Sherif."<sup>6</sup> Fears that the proclamation would cause offence were not limited to Husayn's immediate neighbors, and an Indian Office note predicted an adverse

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<sup>4</sup>F.O. 371/2775, Ibrahim Dimitri, report, Aug. 24, 1916.

<sup>5</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/638, Cox to Foreign, Delhi, Basrah, Feb. 8, 1917; ibid., A.H. minute reporting conversation with Colonel Jacob, June 1, 1917; ibid., Cox to India Office, June 2, 1917; F.O. 371/3054, Shuckburgh to Foreign Office, July 17, 1917.

<sup>6</sup>F.O. 371/3074, L.O. minute, June 1, 1917.

effect even on the Sultan of Muskat and the Shaykh of Kuwayt.<sup>7</sup> In Mesopotamia, Gertrude Bell wrote, the Sharif's "name carries no weight [and]... his rising has aroused no enthusiasm," while even in Syria he would be acceptable only to parts of the populace. As for the Peninsula, she added,

The Bedouin chiefs who might have risen with comparative impunity in their inaccessible deserts and could greatly have hampered Turkish military operations on lines of communication, have never lifted a finger on behalf of the Arab cause. Not one of the great Central Arabian sheikhs outside the Hejaz...have given so much as nominal adherence to the Sherif.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the war none of the amirs ever addressed Husayn as King of the Arab Nation nor gave any indication, public or private, that they regarded such a designation as legitimate. Each saw himself as an absolute ruler, "exercising in the Arabian Peninsula a power at least equal to that of Sherif Hussein."<sup>9</sup>

In the face of this immediate and unequivocal rejection of his pretensions, the Sharif promised that he intended no infringement on the political rights of other rulers. Verbally he guaranteed that ibn Sa'ud, the Imam and the Idrisi Sayyid were "rulers in their own places and we would not interfere with them."<sup>10</sup> However, his insistence on his original title did nothing to reassure his neighbors and left serious doubts in the

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<sup>7</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./10/637, India Office note, Nov. 14, 1918.

<sup>8</sup>F.O. 882/3, pp. 49-57, AP/17/14, Bell, memorandum, June 25, 1917; and see The Letters of Gertrude Bell, 2 vols., edited by Lady Bell, London, Ernest Benn, 1927, chaps. 15 and 16. Letters written in 1917 from Basrah and Baghdad.

<sup>9</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./10/637, French Ambassador to London, to Foreign Office, Nov. 27, 1916 (translated from the French); and I.O. L.P.& S./10/645, Sirdar, Khartoum to Secretary etc., Delhi, Nov. 15, 1916.

<sup>10</sup>A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 473. I.O. L.P.& S./10/601, High Commissioner to Viceroy, Nov. 2, 1916; L.P.& S./10/637, Foreign Office to Sir G. Buchanan, Nov. 17, 1916; ibid., Sirdar to Foreign Office, Khartoum, Nov. 4, 1916; F.O. 371/2776, Sirdar to Secretary etc., Simla, Khartoum, Nov. 8, 1916; F.O. 686/9, Fuad to Faruqi, Mecca, Nov. 22, 1916.

the minds of British officials: "The title King of the Arab Nation hardly appears to accord with [the] Sherif's own declaration regarding independence of other Arab Chiefs within their own territories."<sup>11</sup> By the end of 1917, there was a subtle shift in the Sharif's argument which, while practically ineffectual, was nevertheless conceptually significant and raises an interesting question about the nature of a segmented political system. Since he had failed to secure recognition as King of the Arabs, Husayn gradually dropped his insistence on the title and incorporated his guarantee of local political authority into the concept of "suzerainty." Each amir, he stated, would have the "full power of hakim in his own sphere," but would recognize a "Merkaz," or central government, which would be responsible for foreign affairs and relations between the amirates.<sup>12</sup> Unlike earlier blanket assertions of leadership, the Sharif's scheme postulated a symbiotic relationship between a supreme ruler and a number of totally independent leaders within one political system. Several British officials who had rejected outright the regal title, were prepared to consider a watered-down version of this plan, and envisioned "a series of states loosely bound together in a confederation of which the King of the Hejaz would be the--at least nominal--head."<sup>13</sup> Leaning toward the symbolic rather than the political aspects of leadership, these proposals were

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<sup>11</sup>F.O. 371/2776, Sirdar to McMahon, Nov. 9, 1916; I.O. L.P.& S./10/637, J.W.H. Minute, Nov. 1, 1916; I.O. L.P.& S./10/645, Foreign Office to Husayn, copy sent by Governor General, Sudan to Viceroy, Delhi, Khartoum, Nov. 26, 1916; ibid., Wilson to McMahon, Jiddah, Nov. 5, 1916.

<sup>12</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 229, Wilson interview with Husayn at Jiddah, July 18, 1918.

<sup>13</sup>F.O. 882/3, AP/18/3, Clayton to Wilson, General Headquarters, May 6, 1918.

based on a voluntary recognition of Husayn as "primus inter pares" by his fellow Arab rulers.<sup>14</sup>

Did the suzerainty policy in fact represent a viable symbiosis which no longer threatened the independence of the other amirs as the regal title had, or was it merely a semantic compromise doomed to founder on the realities of Arabian politics? What had not essentially changed between the time of the Sharif's proclamation of kingship in 1916 and the discussion of suzerainty in 1918, were the forces at work in the traditional political system of Arabia and it is necessary to return to the principles which we observed in our discussion of the Hijaz tribes in order to evaluate the Sharif's ambitions. The territorial integrity and absolute authority claimed by the amirs of the Peninsula was in fact analagous to the authority assumed by tribal chiefs within the emirates. In both cases they resisted centralization and the external imposition of power. The antithesis of the unending struggle of the amirs for control of the tribes within their domains was their own refusal to succumb to controls from without. This parallelism is no coincidence for the tribes and the princely houses of the Arabian Peninsula were part of the same political system. Taking the emirate as the unit for convenience, we can see conflict among the tribes and among the amirs as the inside and the outside of that same system. Its inherent tendencies in both cases were toward factionalism, separatism and local authority and independence. The conditions of union at the regional level were therefore likely to be subject to similar restraints as governed the Sharif's tribal coalition. "Each chief remaining

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<sup>14</sup>I.O. T.P. & S./10/638, J.E. Shuckburgh, draft telegram to Foreign Office, June 12, 1917; A.B. 77, Jan. 27, 1918, p. 24; A.B. 111, May 24, 1919, p. 59.

in his own region and not transgressing on another's region..." stipulated the Idrisi Sayyid; "...if this is not strictly adhered to there can be no Arab union."<sup>15</sup> In comparing this impulse toward autonomy with the conditions of modern nationalism, Hans Kohn in fact described the Peninsula's lack of unity as a weakness "still characteristic of the country's Oriental, medieval phase of development."<sup>16</sup> When it was achieved, union in the Arabian Peninsula was either a temporary alliance entered into by equal partners, as the Sayyid had in mind, or else was imposed by force when an amir became sufficiently strong to subjugate his neighbors, as happened in the nineteenth century in the wars between the Sa'udis and the Rashidis in central Arabia.<sup>17</sup>

To expect therefore that the single appointment of a suzerain would freeze and stymie the inherent centrifugal tendencies of the Arabian system, was unrealistic. A symbiosis by definition implies a complementary and mutually beneficial relationship between two dissimilar parts. But the very dynamic of Arabian politics was a constant struggle for ascendancy between similar and competitive parts and between central and local power, pulling always in opposite directions. To assume that a suzerain and totally independent amirs could stand together in a united Arabia was to

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<sup>15</sup>A.B. 31, Nov. 18, 1916, p. 446, and A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 109. The Idrisi Sayyid, nervous of encroachment from all directions, repeated this formulation on many occasions.

<sup>16</sup>Hans Kohn, Nationalism and Imperialism in the Hither East, New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1932, p. 115.

<sup>17</sup>A.B. 38, Jan. 12, 1917, pp. 15-16, Gertrude Bell (memorandum); and see de Gaury, Rulers of Mecca, for earlier historical examples of temporary tribal unification in the Peninsula. Hurewitz, Middle East Politics, p. 244 compares the use of religious revivalism by the Wahhabis in Central Arabia and the Sanussis in North Africa to unify tribes and expand their domains.

assume that the entire system could stand still. The attempt to juxtapose rather than resolve the divergent interests of opposing forces therefore denied a basic principle of segmentary politics which we noted earlier--the assumption of a zero-sum theory of power. Conceptually at least, the Sharif's transcendent authority would exist alongside that of other actors without any diminution of their own authority, and also, it might be added, without any satisfactory definition of the new mode of interaction between them. In that sense the Sharif's earlier proclamation of kingship was more in accord with the realities of Arabian politics than the notion of "primus inter pares." What Husayn had in mind when he declared himself King of the Arab Nation was explicitly a new balance between the various centers of power in the Peninsula that would increase his own authority at the expense of his neighbors. Since we noted that actors in segmentary systems resist gross imbalances of power, and that such systems tend toward a temporary internal equilibrium, it was inevitable that the other amirs would strongly oppose his pretensions. It was for the same reason that the Sharif's internal expansion of control during the revolt could not be maintained and that power eventually swung back to the tribes. In terms of traditional values, the inherently unstable balance of opposing forces that existed under Ottoman authority better reflected the principles of the Arabian political system than Britain's massive infusion of resources to one actor within that system.

But if the policy of suzerainty did not correspond with reality because it assumed that conflict between irreconcilable forces could be avoided, the proposal to alter the existing balance in the Sharif's favor was equally unrealistic because it could not be enforced. Since equality

with his neighbors was not one of the Sharif's goals, the creation of an Arabian union could not by definition be contractual. The only other way in which the intrinsic pull toward factionalism and local autonomy could be countered was by the imposition of an overarching authority. Colonel Wilson recognized this when he proposed the adoption of the suzerain policy in order to prevent "a series of open hostilities between the various Arab chiefs" which would ensue at the end of the war. "Each will be watching his opportunity for a favourable moment to attack his neighbour...", he predicted.<sup>18</sup> If this was true then it was hardly likely that a supreme head would be accepted by mutual consent, and it followed that both the union and the suzerain would have to be imposed by force. This was a conclusion which Wilson was understandably hesitant to draw, but which the Sharif clearly recognized by his insistence that the suzerain be nominated and appointed by Great Britain.<sup>19</sup> The concept of Arab nationhood had conjured up for Husayn the possibility of achieving his traditional political aims by a modern *fait accompli* which ultimately depended for its success in the Peninsula on the intervention of an outside force. But it was precisely this role that Britain was unwilling to assume. If the suzerain was in fact to be installed by force, against the wishes of the other chiefs, this would imply the abandonment of the concept of full local independence and render the concept little different from the kingship which

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<sup>18</sup>F.O. 882/3, p. 81, AP/18/2, Wilson to Wingate, May 1, 1918.

<sup>19</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 228, Wilson interview with Husayn, Jiddah, July 18, 1918. See also A.B. 76, Jan. 13, 1918, pp. 9-14, Cornwallis conversation with 'Abdallah: it seems that 'Abdallah had reached this position several months prior to his father; also stated more explicitly in: Notes on the Middle East, No. 3, Apr. 1, 1920, Cairo, p. 85, Colonel Vickery interview with 'Abdallah and Husayn.

had been proposed earlier. And without the ability to enforce decisions, either title would be an empty one that would be resented as fathering dangerous pretensions. In the end, the kingship and the suzerainty represented separate strategies for the attainment of the same goal, and since both depended on external intervention, we must consider now the Sharif's relationship with Great Britain.

#### The Sharif's Ambitions in an Alliance of Dependency

Long before the Sharif's regal proclamation, most Foreign Office policy-makers had already concluded that Arabia was "politically divided and almost anarchic" and could not therefore be united under one ruler.<sup>20</sup> Indian officials went further and dismissed all discussion of an independent Arab state as "a fantastic dream," viewing it as "quite impossible ...to bring into unity rival and warring Arab Chieftains."<sup>21</sup> Of all Arab potentates, Husayn was judged most able to mobilize a significant number of Arabs against the Turks, largely because of the prestige attached to his guardianship of the holy cities. But his religious position could not, as Gertrude Bell said, be converted into political supremacy.<sup>22</sup> And Hogarth, even before the revolt, cautioned that "in the actual default of general organization among these peoples, it would be futile to treat with

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<sup>20</sup>F.O. 882/2, pp. 147-148, AP/15/8, Note by Major Gabriel, Nov. 21, 1915; S.A. 135/4, Wingate to Wigram, Oct. 16, 1915; and F.O. 882/2, AP/16/1, Col. Jacob, Aden, March 14, 1916.

<sup>21</sup>Nicolson to Hardinge, Nov. 11, 1915; Hardinge Papers, vol. 94, p. 344a, quoted in Elie Kedourie, In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and its Interpretations, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 93.

<sup>22</sup>F.O. 882/3, AP/17/14, pp. 49-57, Gertrude Bell, memorandum, June 25, 1917.



him alone and to assume that, through him, we could influence and bind all the Arabs."<sup>23</sup> Since Britain's aim in the early stages of the war was to defeat Ottoman plans for a general Muslim uprising by securing the benevolent neutrality of the Arabs, there seemed to be no inherent conflict with the negotiations being carried on with the Sharif, to promise other Arab rulers also, independence from the Turks. Britain already had agreements with several of the Gulf shaykhdoms including Kuwayt, and in 1915 signed treaties with the Idrisi Sayyid and with ibn Sa'ud.<sup>24</sup> At the same time the Foreign Office thought it advisable to point out to the Sharif in the course of the negotiations, that His Majesty's Government's commitments to other shaykhs were being upheld and that it had "no wish nor intention to interfere in the internal affairs of Arabia provided that these agreements are faithfully observed."<sup>25</sup>

There was little disagreement therefore, even between Foreign Office and Indian Office personnel who disagreed on most aspects of British policy toward the Arab revolt, that in substance at least, the Sharif's assumption of the title King of the Arab Nation was simply not in accord with political reality. In Cairo, Delhi and London, policy-makers were annoyed by what they regarded as a "premature announcement," and embarrassed by its patent conflict with guarantees of autonomy which they had given to other Arab leaders in the Peninsula. It was likely, they said, "to promote dis-

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<sup>23</sup>F.O. 882/2, pp. 203-204, AP/16/2, Memorandum of Commander Hogarth, Apr. 16, 1916, (pp. 199-206 in entirety).

<sup>24</sup>Hurewitz, *Diplomacy*, vol. 2, p. 4 (Kuwayt), pp. 12-13 (the Idrisi Sayyid), pp. 17-18 (ibn Sa'ud), pp. 22-23 (Qatar), for the texts of these agreements.

<sup>25</sup>S.A. 135/7, Clayton to Governor-General, Cairo, Dec. 14, 1916, being Foreign Office to High Commissioner, Dec. 10, 1915.

cord rather than unity."<sup>26</sup> Characterizing the assumption of royal authority as an act of "pure folly," one observer remarked that it "illustrates the impossibility of harmonizing the Sharif's ambitions with the prescriptive rights and natural claims of other Arab chiefs, some of whom we are indirectly under obligation to protect."<sup>27</sup> At the very least, officials felt, the Sharif had to prove himself before his pretensions could have any basis in fact, an opinion in which the French Government concurred. The High Commissioner therefore told Wilson to inform Husayn that he deprecated "an announcement of this nature which seems most inadvisable at a time when [the] Sherif is not in a position to substantiate fully such claims made on his behalf."<sup>28</sup> Significantly, even the Sharif's most ardent supporters in the secondary literature and those who have seen him as a champion of Arab nationalism, have chided him on this count, calling his action "hasty," "untimely," and "ill-advised," and accusing him of trespassing on the rights of other rulers.<sup>29</sup>

However, this unanimity of opinion on the substance of the Sharif's claims, vanished over the question of form. When a decision had to be reached as to how the powers were to address the King, confusion replaced

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<sup>26</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/637, Minute, signed J.W.H., Nov. 4, 1916; also Minutes of Nov. 1, 1916; and J.W.H. to Under-secretary of State, Foreign Office, Nov. 4, 1916; I.O. L.P. & S./10/601, High Commissioner to Viceroy, Oct. 31, 1916; and many other references. "Premature" was the adjective most commonly used to describe the regal declaration; I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Wilson to McMahon, Jiddah, Oct. 31, 1916.

<sup>27</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/637, J.W.H., Minute, Nov. 1, 1916.

<sup>28</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/637, McMahon to Foreign Office, Cairo, Oct. 31, 1916, being text of proposed telegram to Wilson; ibid., French Ambassador in London to Foreign Office, Nov. 27, 1916.

<sup>29</sup>See for example, Antonius, *op. cit.*, p. 213; also de Gaury, Rulers of Mecca, p. 275.

displeasure. For nearly two months telegrams passed almost daily between Jiddah, Cairo, Delhi, London and Paris, translating, redefining and juggling the various terms which might be employed in according a measure of official recognition to the Sharif's position. "Champion of the peoples of Arabia," "King of the Arabs in the Hejaz and its dependencies," "King of the two holy cities," were only some of the many titles proposed. Some suggestions were regarded as "inconveniently wide" and others as connoting a "religious flavor." As the British scrambled for a solution, they tried to stall the Sharif especially since he had "urgently requested" immediate foreign recognition of his title. In December, agreement was finally reached, and the designation "King of the Hejaz" was adopted by both Britain and France. A debate then ensued well into January as to the honorific that should accompany the term Malik (King), the Sharif's request for Jalalah (Majesty) being rejected in favor of the less committal form Siyadah (Highness) which referred to a ruler in general.<sup>30</sup>

Husayn did not, however, retract his proclamation, and the dispute resolved itself in a stalemate, the Sharif signing his letters variously as "King of the Arab Country" and "Ruler of the Arab Nation," while Britain continued to restrict recognition of the title to the Hijaz.<sup>31</sup> The British decision was an early and severe blow to the Sharif's political ambitions and confirmed formally what the other amirs had long considered to be the

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<sup>30</sup>Based on numerous items of correspondence between Cairo, Delhi, Khartoum, London, Jiddah, Basrah and Paris, in F.O. 371/2776; F.O. 371/3044; I.O. L.P.& S./10/637; I.O. L.P.& S./10/645; I.O. L.P.& S./10/601.

<sup>31</sup>For examples of the continued use of these titles in the months after the coronation, see, F.O. 686/9, pp. 23, 24; F.O. 686/34, p. 11; F.O. 371/3044, p. 199; A.B. 53, June 14, 1917, p. 264.

traditional limits of Sharifian authority.

Britain's reaction, however, was based not only on the immediate conflict which the Sharif's action implied with the independence of his neighbors. For the assumption of regal authority was also the first dramatic instance during the revolt in which Britain and Husayn moved beyond the bond which joined them to the interests which motivated and ultimately separated them. It had created a breach between the partners that was to widen eventually into a chasm of misunderstanding and mutual recrimination. The irony of the alliance between Britain and the Sharif was that their point of contact was a concept which neither was genuinely prepared to honor. The ideal of Arab national unity was the rhetorical bridge which spanned the gap between the diverse interests of the two partners and was the ideological basis for their cooperation and joint venture. For the British it was the wedge that would tear apart the Ottoman Empire from within and, by creating a new military front, contribute to the defeat of a wartime enemy. For the Sharif it was an unparalleled opportunity to expand his influence and establish his hegemony over a wider area than he had previously dreamed possible. For both it was the means to variant ends, whose very divergence revealed significant aspects of the Arabian political system.

Since their alliance still served both Britain and the Sharif, neither was yet prepared to risk a total break, and serious attempts were made to resolve the differences which the Sharif's regal proclamation had brought to the surface. The most ambitious of these plans was proposed by Sir Mark Sykes in May 1917 and had "as its ultimate object the promotion of Arab unity by the final confederation of the various autonomous areas." In order to achieve this, Sykes argued, "we should aim at getting the King

of the Hejaz regarded as titular leader and premier among the Arabs."<sup>32</sup> Clearly these views were in consonance with the desires of the Sharif himself, for they now established as goal what had formerly been means, using Husayn's primary purpose as the method by which national union would be achieved (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

POLICY/GOALS	as MEANS	as END
Defeat of Turks	Husayn/Nationalists	Britain
Arab National Union	Husayn/Britain	Nationalists/ Sykes Plan
Sharif's Suzerainty	Sykes Plan/ Some Nationalists	Husayn

That Sykes' views were not in accord with the political realities of the Arab world we have already seen, and most British officials concurred that "all unification or federalizing attempts are at the present premature and in practice absolutely impossible."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup>F.O. 882/3, pp. 13-16, AP/17/5; and I.O. L.P.& S./11/119, File 735, dated May 17, 1917. Although the proposals were officially titled the Sykes-Picot Recommendations, they were in fact authored by Sykes and presented to the French representative for approval, comment and modification; see also, F.O. 882/3, p. 10, Memorandum by Sir Mark Sykes, June 3, 1917. It should be noted that Sykes wrote his memorandum after a visit to the Red Sea ports of Jiddah, Yanbu', Wajh, Kamaran and Aden but that he had no contact at all with the interior and eastern Arabia and therefore had no first-hand experience of the opinions of Najd, Kuwait and other principalities.

<sup>33</sup>F.O. 882/3, AP/17/7, Capt. G. Lloyd, June 7, 1917; for similar opinions on the scheme, see I.O. L.P.& S./10/638, Secretary of State to Viceroy, June 23, 1917; F.O. 371/3054, Shuckburgh to Foreign Office, July 17, 1917; *ibid.*, Secretary of State to Cox, May 31, 1917; I.O. L.P.& S./10/638, Cox to India

If the plan was doomed in advance by the "extraordinary diversity of natives and local conditions," as Clayton believed,<sup>34</sup> then it was doubly condemned by the inherent contradictions that existed between the interests of the alliance partners. Both Kedourie and Busch have explored the various manifestations of British policy in great detail, but for our purposes it is necessary only to see how this policy clashed with the ambitions of the Sharif. For a start it was not at all clear that the united Arab state which Sykes had proposed, served British interests. Delhi believed that imperial interests in the Middle East were better served if the Arabs remained "in a state of political mosaic, a tissue of small jealous principalities, incapable of cohesion."<sup>35</sup> Kedourie and Busch have demonstrated convincingly that these views were not held by India alone, and that even the rhetoric delivered by many Foreign Office officials in the cause of Arab union, was never intended as more than "a pious aspiration" and "mere words."<sup>36</sup> Clayton, for example, told Wingate that "India seem obsessed by the fear of a powerful and united Arab state, which can never exist unless we are fools enough to create it."<sup>37</sup> Yet the failure of Sykes' attempt to reconcile British and Sharifian interests lay not so

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Office; I.O. L.P. & S./11/119, Chamberlain, Mar. 23, 1916, in India Office Minute of May 30, 1917.

<sup>34</sup>F.O. 882/3, AP/17/10, Clayton to Foreign Office, comment on Sykes' proposals, June 10, 1917; and dispatch to Balfour, June 11, 1917.

<sup>35</sup>F.O. 371/2771, Foreign Office memorandum, p. 155, undated, probably mid-1916; 371/2769, McMahon to Grey, Feb. 29, 1916; I.O. L.P. & S./11/119, India Office minute of May 30, 1917.

<sup>36</sup>Kedourie, op. cit., pp. 71, 120; Briton Cooper Busch, Britain, India and the Arabs, 1914-1921, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971, p. 91.

<sup>37</sup>S.A. 135/5, Clayton to Wingate, Nov. 12, 1915.

much in the criticism which his plan aroused, as in its own incongruities. First of all his proposals were a corollary to the Sykes-Picot agreement which had carved the Arab world into British and French spheres of influence. As an attempt to harmonize competing European interests, the boundaries which that agreement had set forth bore no relation to existing racial, political or economic divisions among the Arabs. It is not productive to speculate whether Sykes' enthusiasm for Arab national union was an overcompensation for the territorial dismemberment of the Arab world. But we need only look into the "small print" of the scheme itself to see his inability to resolve the inherent contradictions. Having proposed Husayn as leader and suzerain of the Arab world, he then suggested that the residence of the King of the Hijaz should be Mecca "and that he should not have any permanent or temporary residence outside the Hejaz." Further, he added the curious stipulation that once the Sharif's sons had been established as hereditary princes in the autonomous regions (under British and French influence) which had been set up (in the Sykes-Picot Agreement), "their issue should be debarred from succession to the Kingdom of the Hejaz."<sup>38</sup> These measures were clearly designed to institutionalize the territorial divisions which had been set up by the agreement with France and implied a distinction between these and the aspirations of Arab nationhood. Furthermore they appeared to run counter to Sykes' vision of a "final confederation of the various autonomous areas." The unification

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<sup>38</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./11/119, File 735, and F.O. 882/3, AP/17/5, Sykes-Picot recommendations, May 17, 1917; F.O. 882/3, AP/17/14, Bell, June 25, 1917, draws attention to the lack of correspondence between the Sykes-Picot boundaries and inter-Arab divisions; F.O. 882/3, AP/17/7, Lloyd, June 7, 1917; AP/17/10, Clayton to Foreign Office, Cairo, June 10, 1917; AP/17/11, Clayton to Balfour, June 11, 1917.

scheme of 1917 was a gallant and probably well-intentioned attempt at reconciliation, but the greater the effort to force incompatible interests into the same mold, the more profound the disillusionment which had inevitably to follow.

In the negotiations between Britain and the Sharif therefore, a joint premise of a united Arabia had been created which had as little relation to British interests as it had to the traditional political system of the Peninsula. Yet Husayn was depending on the former to overcome the resistances of the latter, when his own ambitions were equally incompatible with both. Britain needed the Arabs in order to create another front against her wartime enemies and one that would preserve its own strategic superiority on the crucial route to India, while the Sharif needed Britain in order to expand his influence within the Arabian political system, to establish supremacy over competing centers of power within that system, and to step into the power vacuum that would be created by the imminent disappearance of Ottoman authority from the Arab world. That Anglo-Arab cooperation did not necessarily imply a coincidence of objectives was recognized in an uncharacteristically hard-headed Foreign Office memorandum designed to remove the delusions of sentimentalists within the department:

Sherif Hussein's...activity seems beneficial to us, because it marches with our immediate aims, the break up of the Islmaic "bloc" and the defeat and disruption of the Ottoman Empire, and because the states he would set up to succeed the Turks would be as harmless to ourselves as Turkey was before she became a tool in German hands. The Arabs are even less stable than the Turks....If we can only arrange that this political change will be a violent one, we will have abolished the threat of Islam, by dividing it against itself, in its very heart.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>F.O. 371/2771, pp. 155-156, Foreign Office memorandum, undated, probably May or June, 1916.



The writer was also realistic enough to appreciate that "Sherif Hussein is not working in the British interests, except in so far as they further [his] particular dreams and hopes...."

The potential for conflict between such distinct purposes, especially on the issue of unity, increased toward the end of the war, but there was a paradox in the growing tension which permeated relations between Britain and the Sharif as both realized that a compromise between their diverse interests was not possible. On the one hand there was greater pressure to reach a joint position on the postwar political settlement of Arabia while the immediate *raison d'etre* of the alliance, viz. the defeat of the Turks, was still operative and before the subject was raised at the peace conference. On the other hand the impending defeat of the enemy diminished the very mutual dependency that had hitherto made such a united political front necessary. This was more Mecca's problem than London's, for while Britain was on the verge of achieving the objectives for which it had sought Arab support, Husayn would still need external support for his wide-ranging political claims after the war. It is hardly surprising then, to find the Sharif more and more insistent and desperate for the fulfilment of what he saw as his side of the bargain, before it was too late. Throughout 1918, it was reported from Jiddah that British recognition of his suzerainty was Husayn's "main concern" and was "uppermost in his mind."<sup>40</sup> Certainly he was discerning enough to realize that if he did not obtain some kind of commitment to his interests while Britain still had a military stake in his goodwill and support, he was not likely to at all.

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<sup>40</sup>A.B. 77, Jan. 27, 1918, p. 22; and F.O. 686/10/1, p. 6, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, July 30, 1918.

Persuasion therefore began to give way to threats, and as early as June 1917 the Sharif was declaring his intention "to retire absolutely" if his demands were not met.<sup>41</sup> "King Hussein is becoming increasingly nervous and unreasonable," wrote Colonel Wilson a year later, "making transaction of business very difficult. He tries to force my hand by threats of resignation...."<sup>42</sup> But although Wilson and his superiors tended to dismiss Husayn's continuous talk about withdrawal as a "bluff ...never seriously meant,"<sup>43</sup> it nevertheless represented an awareness that the stage was being set for Britain's abandonment of him when the military objectives of the alliance were achieved. In the hope of attaining his goals, the Sharif had maneuvered himself into a situation of total dependency. And since he was no closer in 1918 to realizing his ambitions than when he had launched his revolt two years previously, he genuinely felt, as Wilson reported, that "to continue striving for the Arab cause under such conditions would be futile."<sup>44</sup>

Britain could only hope to persuade the Sharif that it was in both

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<sup>41</sup>F.O. 686/35, p. 82, Husayn to High Commissioner, Mecca, June 16, 1917; and F.O. 686/36, p. 12, Husayn to British Agent, Oct. 18, 1917.

<sup>42</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 334, Wilson to Arab Bureau for High Commissioner, June 29, 1918. For similar remarks on the Sharif's nervous state, see F.O. 686/10/1, p. 6, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, July 30, 1918; F.O. 686/39, p. 323, Wilson to Director, Arab Bureau, Jiddah, June 30, 1918.

<sup>43</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 323, Wilson to Director, Arab Bureau, Jiddah, June 30, 1918; *ibid.*, p. 34, Wilson to Arab Bureau for High Commissioner, Jiddah, June 29, 1918; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 6, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, July 30, 1918.

<sup>44</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 227, Wilson interview with Husayn, Jiddah, July 18, 1918; see also, F.O. 882/3, p. 96, AP/18/7, Cairo to Foreign Office, Sept. 23, 1918; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 6, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, July 30, 1918.

their interests not to fracture their alliance "at this juncture,"<sup>45</sup> but the lop-sided nature of their relationship became increasingly apparent as some of the Sharif's previous supporters in the British administration began to turn against him:

It is fully realized that the resignation of King Hussein would be unfortunate in many respects [wrote Brigadier Clayton in September 1918] but, in the existing circumstances, the disadvantages of his resignation are outweighed by the greater disadvantages of a continuance of the present situation....If therefore he maintains his present obstinant attitude...he be informed definitely that the continued financial and material support of His Majesty's Government is dependent upon his loyal acceptance of their advice in matters of policy....If he again resigns...we should accept it.<sup>46</sup>

The statement was not only a frank expression of British self-interest and an admission of the virtual stranglehold that Britain exercised over Husayn and could bring to bear in a moment of crisis, but also in effect set the scene for the Sharif's eventual downfall. By making his survival dependent on continuing British advantage and on the terms which His Majesty's Government chose to impose for maintaining its support of him, Clayton also implicitly envisioned the day when these conditions would no longer apply and where the Sharif's usefulness to Britain would be outweighed by the disadvantages of having its own Arabian policy hamstrung and constricted. When the burden of support became excessive, Britain would abandon him and give a quiet signal to his neighbors, who were waiting impatiently in the wings with their own designs, that it would allow free rein to the inherent po-

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<sup>45</sup>F.O. 686/40, p. 41, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Dec. 27, 1918; for further discussion of the Sharif's resignation threats, see F.O. 686/10/1, p. 4, High Commissioner to Husayn, Aug. 1, 1918; F.O. 882/3, p. 96, AP/18/7, Cairo to Foreign Office, Sept. 23, 1918; F.O. 686/39, p. 334, Wilson to High Commissioner, June 29, 1918; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 8, Husayn to British Agent, Mecca, 21.10.36 (=July 29, 1918); F.O. 882/3, AP/18/11, Wilson to Storrs, Dec. 13, 1918.

<sup>46</sup>F.O. 882/3, pp. 90-91, AP/18/4, Clayton, secret memorandum, Sept. 2, 1918.

litical forces of the Peninsula to adjust their relationships according to the new balance of power in the region.

After the war the inevitable occurred. For Britain, the balancing of divergent interests had been an increasingly precarious but nevertheless political act, the aim of which was to hold out until its objectives were served by a military victory. At that point, ironically, it was Britain rather than the Sharif who was able to withdraw and "retire," for the very stature and survival of the latter within the existing political system was now at stake. His professed aim was to establish Faysal, 'Abdallah and Zayd on the thrones of Syria, Mesopotamia and Palestine "under the direct control of His Majesty the King of Kings," a new title that the Sharif assumed in April 1920.<sup>47</sup> But what had been an unrealistic objective during the war, now became absurd. For ibn Sa'ud was making inroads on the territory of the "so-called King," as he scornfully called the Sharif, by winning the allegiance of powerful tribes on the border of the Hijaz and Najd.<sup>48</sup> And in London, Antonius reports, Husayn "was regarded as an object of ridicule and a nuisance...a laughing stock. He was no longer taken seriously by the Civil Servants."<sup>49</sup> In Syria Faysal led Arab troops into battle against the French, while in Mesopotamia in 1920 there were clashes between Arabs under Sharifian command and the British. More seriously, as we have seen, Husayn was faced

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<sup>47</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 3, Apr. 1, 1920, Cairo, p. 79; F.O. 686/12/2, p. 145, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, Apr. 8, 1920; F.O. 686/12/1, p. 62, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, Nov. 29, 1920; F.O. 686/12/2, p. 104, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, May 19, 1920.

<sup>48</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 3, Cairo, 1921, p. 121. Report by Major H.R.P. Dickson, Political Agent, Bahrayn. See also next chapter.

<sup>49</sup>Antonius, op. cit., pp. 331 ff; de Gaury, op. cit., pp. 275-276.

with a total breakdown of authority in the heart of the Hijaz. "The high pedestal which he had made for himself in the belief that his revolt would bring all the world round his feet," was cracking and beginning to collapse under him.<sup>50</sup> In subsequent chapters we shall explore the consequences of the loss of an actor's functional independence in a segmented tribal system by examining Husayn's dependence on Britain in the context of his specific interaction with his neighbors and rivals. Here it is sufficient to recognize that the Sharif's extravagant personal ambitions were out of touch with the reality of the political forces with which he had to contend, and that he was broken finally by the clash between his own traditional system and the illusory promises of a new and encroaching political philosophy that had not yet taken hold in the Arabian Peninsula. The strategy had in fact defeated the goal for which it was employed, for his alliance of dependency had deprived the Sharif of his own autonomy.

#### A Note on the Caliphate

The succession to the Caliphate of Islam has been a complex and controversial question throughout Muslim history.<sup>51</sup> But as an issue in the Arab revolt, its effect on Husayn's relations with

<sup>50</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, p. 40, Nasir al-Din to British Agent, Sept. 18, 1920.

<sup>51</sup>The following discussion is based primarily on the views of T.W. Arnold, The Caliphate, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1924; C. Snouck Hurgronje, The Revolt in Arabia, New York and London, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1917; Hurgronje, Politique Musulmane de la Hollande, Paris, Leroux, 1911; review of C.A. Nallino, "Appunti sulla Natura del 'Califfato' in Genere e sul presunto 'Califfato Ottomano,'" reviewed in The Times Literary Supplement, Nov. 29, 1917; Capt. Gore in a memorandum on the Caliphate, dated Dec. 1916 in F.O. 882/3, pp. 136-137, HM/16/2; D.G. Hogarth in an article on the Caliphate in A.B. 49, Apr. 30, 1917, pp. 191-193; ibn Khaldun, op. cit., on the Caliphate, pp. 154-189.

his neighbors and on the political processes of the Arabian system in general, was minimal. Yet Kedourie has concluded from an extensive examination of the British sources that "it is clear that in Husayn's mind the kingship of the Arabs was only a preparation for the caliphate in which he hoped to succeed the Ottomans."<sup>52</sup> Colonel Wilson believed that the Sharif "cares far more...about eventually becoming Caliph than for any temporal title."<sup>53</sup> And the vehemence of Indian opposition to the revolt was based largely on fears in regard to the Caliphate. In the light of the importance attached to the issue both by British officials at the time and by historians now, we must therefore interrupt our analysis momentarily to consider the misconceptions that have clouded an understanding of the Sharif's motives.

According to an article in the Qibla, "the Caliphate is the office of delegate of the Prophet in the guardianship of Moslem matters, spiritual and temporal."<sup>54</sup> Two aspects of this definition in combination make the institution unlike any that has existed in European history and hence the source of much confusion. The first lies in the inseparability of religious and temporal power.<sup>55</sup> However, this does not render the title of Caliph equivalent to that of "Pope and Emperor in one," as one writer has claimed,<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Kedourie, In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth, p. 148.

<sup>53</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Wilson to McMahon, Jiddah, letters of Oct. 31, Nov. 5 and Nov. 11, 1916.

<sup>54</sup>The Qibla, No. 71, Apr. 20, 1917, translated in I.O. L.P. & S./11/119.

<sup>55</sup>Philip K. Hitti, The Arabs, A Short History, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1949, pp. 60-62; Bernard Lewis, The Arabs in History, London, Hutchinson, 1966, p. 20. Both writers emphasize the temporal as well as the spiritual nature of the Caliphate. See also Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, p. 189.

<sup>56</sup>Edward A. Freeman, The Turks in Europe, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1877, p. 64.

for the second aspect of the definition is more subtle and rests in the word "guardianship." Strange as it may appear, Muslim jurists, while ascribing to the Caliph unlimited executive power, have never ascribed to him the smallest dogmatic or legislative authority, as the sacred law exists in its perfection and is merely defined and interpreted by the consensus (ijma') of the jurists. Since he is the supreme administrator of the law which includes the waging of war against unbelievers, it is manifest that a Caliph without executive power is a contradiction in terms. The Caliph is "no Pope, no spiritual head," writes T.W. Arnold, "rather he is the secular ruler of the ideal community...the real sovereign."<sup>57</sup>

Ironically, historical abuse of the title was due precisely to Christian unwillingness to equate it with the Papacy. The long line of medieval Caliphs, who were widely if not universally recognized as legitimate by orthodox Muslims, came to an end in 1258 when the last Abassid Caliph was overthrown by the Mongols. However, even before this time, as the Abassid dynasty had gradually lost the practical control of affairs, the Caliphate had tended to become more and more an empty title. Only at the end of the eighteenth century and during the nineteenth, did the office regain its political significance as Ottoman Sultans attempted to restore their declining power by using the title's hidden weapon--the Christian analogy with the Pope. Beginning with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774, the Ottomans claimed a certain religious authority, with the ability to legislate in matters of faith and ritual, over Muslim subjects in territories in which they exercised no political jurisdiction.<sup>58</sup> 'Abd al-Hamil II

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<sup>57</sup>Arnold, op. cit., pp. 191-193.

<sup>58</sup>For the provisions of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, July 1774, see Hurewitz, Diplomacy, vol. 1, pp. 54-61.

made it a deliberate article of policy to induce Muslims throughout the world to recognize him as Caliph, a strategy in which European statesmen acquiesced by virtue of their notion of the office as a spiritual one. Well aware that such a distinction between spiritual and temporal authority was quite alien to the principles of Islam, the Young Turks then turned the weapon which had been forged by 'Abd al-Hamid into an instrument of war, attempting thereby to restore its political function. In retrospect it is incredible that the Europeans, and especially the British, so readily accepted what was essentially an historically false claim, and found themselves on the eve of the First World War in a situation where the Turks had acquired much influence in their possessions and where they suspected millions of their Muslim subjects of possessing a dual loyalty. By their own misconceptions they had unwittingly fostered an allegiance which now had subversive potentialities. India Office fears that the Empire would be torn asunder by Muslim uprisings lay at the root of their deep suspicion and extreme caution in dealing with the Sharif's revolt. But while India had become aware of the political implications of the title through bitter experience, the Foreign Office in effect succumbed to the equation of the Caliphate with the Papacy and thereby bought the Ottoman definition of the office. In correspondence, its officials inevitably referred to the "religious head of Islam," and Storrs saw a Sharifian Caliphate ideally as "a hereditary spiritual Pope with no temporal power."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./11/119, India Office Minute, May 30, 1917, quoting Secretary of State to Viceroy, Jan. 13, 1915; also I.O. L.P. & S./10/637, McMahon to Foreign Office, Cairo, Oct. 31, 1916 (emphasis in quotation is added); Storrs, quoted in Kedourie, op. cit., p. 33, letter of Feb. 22, 1915; for an excellent analysis of the British experience in India in regard to the Caliphate, see Hurgonje, Politique Musulmane, p. 67.



Even aside from the functional distortion of the title's usage through history, the validity of the concept of the Caliphate was never universally accepted after the first century of Islam. According to the Shia'h doctrine which predominates in Iran and Iraq and represents significant minorities in Syria, Lebanon and south Asia, the last legitimate Caliphs were the offspring of 'Ali, Hasan and Husayn, who were both killed by the Umayyads. The Zaydis in Yemen recognize only 'Ali while the Wahhabis of central Arabia saw the institution as having been discontinued after the first four Caliphs.<sup>60</sup> In Morocco, Algeria and central Asia the practice was not followed, although the Sultan of Morocco was regarded as Caliph by his own followers. Clearly, racial and hereditary claims to the title therefore were various, and it is noteworthy that Husayn himself did not rely on the rights of blood in denying Ottoman claims to the office. In fact he affirmed the rights of the "great Sultans of the House of Osman" to the Caliphate, blaming the forfeiture of title and legitimacy on the subversion of Islamic law and the loss of power by the young Turks: "If the tyrants had but acted rightly, not a voice would have been raised against them, nor a heart swerved from them."<sup>61</sup> In summary, the origins of the Caliphate were political as well as religious and the retention of the office was based on the power to enforce Islamic law. The concept was

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<sup>60</sup>The Wahhabi view is given by Cox in F.O. 882/8, based on his interview with ibn Sa'ud on Dec. 26, 1915, and with the shaykh of Kuwayt on Dec. 31, 1915. However, Kedourie, *op. cit.*, p. 51, footnote 2, referring to article by W. Madelung on "Imama," in The Encyclopedia of Islam, new edition, disputes this view of Wahhabi belief.

<sup>61</sup>A.B. 25, Oct. 7, 1916, pp. 342-344, Supplement to the Proclamation of Independence, Sept. 9, 1916; also see I.O. L.P. & S./11/119, The Qibla, No. 71, Apr. 20, 1917.

not an essential part of Islam, and the historical claim of the Ottomans to the title was a poor one, based on a misconception and nurtured by Christian doctrine. Finally, its revival prior to the World War was the creation of interested parties whose aims were political and not spiritual.

There is no doubt that Sharif Husayn was well aware of these limitations and of the extreme sensitivity of the Caliphate issue for the British. Unlike his declaration of kingship, the Caliphate extended well beyond Arab borders into the very possessions of the allies upon whom he depended, and whose support for him would have been seriously jeopardized had he assumed the title. In the eyes of the Muslim world he was wary of the charge of usurpation and he was not eager to provide further ammunition to those who already accused him of dividing and undermining Islamic power. Furthermore unless he hoped to create the fact by the title, as 'Abd al-Hamid had partly succeeded in doing, Husayn had to acknowledge that his ability to carry out the executive functions of the office simply did not correspond with the reality of his power. According to orthodox Islam, his assumption of the title would have been viewed as ill-timed and improper and was more likely to diminish his stature in Muslim eyes than enhance it. The very fact of his regal proclamation, his overt attempts to have it accepted and the persistence with which he pursued the claims inherent in that title, leave no doubt that the Sharif was actively seeking to expand his political influence and control in Arabia and to secure recognition of his suzerainty in the Arab world. On all counts this evidence is lacking in relation to the Caliphate. Husayn did not in fact declare himself to that title at the time of the revolt, he specifically disavowed any intention of

doing so and he never pursued the question during the war.<sup>62</sup>

From certain of his prewar statements and from his stipulation of an Arab Caliphate in the early negotiations with McMahon, it is possible to deduce that the Sharif initially had ambitions in that direction.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, it is true that he did not entirely close his options, for the British position and his own were that the issue should be decided later at a time when Muslims could reach a consensus on the subject, and it is quite possible therefore that he harbored aspirations along those lines that could be pursued after the war.<sup>64</sup> Whether his unwillingness to declare himself Caliph was merely a temporary dictate of prudence, or whether it in fact represented a real disinterest in that title is open

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<sup>62</sup>For examples of the Sharif's specific disavowals of intention in regard to the Caliphate, see I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, The Qibla, 3rd Moharram, 1335 (=Oct. 30, 1916); ibid., Wilson to 'Abdallah (telephone), Nov. 1, 1916; I.O. L.P. & S./10/601, High Commissioner to Viceroy, Nov. 2, 1916, being telegram from Brémond; I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Husayn to Wilson, Nov. 4, 1916, and Wilson to Husayn (telephone), Nov. 2, 1916; I.O. L.P. & S./10/637, A.H. Minute, Dec. 11, 1916; F.O. 686/9, p. 28, Fuad to Faruqi, Mecca, Nov. 11, 1916.

<sup>63</sup>For indications of the Sharif's prewar intentions see especially F.O. 371/2767, Husayn to Sayyid 'Ali al-Mirghani, Mecca, Dec. 28, 1915, and see covering note and interpretation, McMahon to Grey, Feb. 7, 1916. The Sayyid was a Sudanese religious leader who had previously urged Husayn to take over the Caliphate. This letter, the original Arabic of which has been lost, is the basis of Kedourie's evidence that Husayn aspired to the Caliphate. Yet the letter is ambiguous at best, and refers only to "the qualified chief of Emirs," which was interpreted by British officials as "Caliph." See Kedourie, *op. cit.*, p. 122. See also F.O. 371/2767, 'Abdallah verbal messages to Shaykh 'Urayfan, sent McMahon to Grey, Feb. 29, 1916; F.O. 371/2771, p. 155, Foreign Office memorandum, undated, probably May or June, 1916.

<sup>64</sup>Reports by Ayyub Khan, Nasir al-Din and Ihsanullah, all British Muslim representatives in Mecca, separately confirm the Sharif's increasing, or renewed, interest in the Caliphate after the war: F.O. 686/12/2, pp. 40, 77, 131 and 146, reports from Apr. to Sept. 1920; also F.O. 686/12/1, p. 64, Nov. 1920; see also Antonius, The Arab Awakening, p. 337.

to debate. But for our purposes it is not an important question, for actions, as we have consistently noted, speak louder than words. If we accept the premise that people tend to act according to their perceived interests, whatever they might say and however they might afterwards choose to justify their deeds, then the Sharif's attitude toward the question of the Caliphate was far more indeterminate and equivocal than his views on the suzerainty. After his coronation he was quite willing to drop the issue entirely, and we may conclude that, whatever his personal desires, the assumption of the Caliphate of Islam was not one of the Sharif's immediate aims and objectives for the period of his revolt.

Husayn's position here bears comparison to the uncompromising stand of the British Government which had eventually yielded to India's vehement insistence on an "attitude of extreme reserve on the subject of the Caliphate."<sup>65</sup> Significantly, it was the British who evinced signs of intense anxiety and who displayed exaggerated fears in regard to the Caliphate, while all the evidence points to a singular awareness on the Sharif's part of the manifest inappropriateness of an assumption of the title according to traditional norms. This is in marked contrast to the sharp disagreements between the two on the secular definition of the territorial and national limits of kingship, where it was the Sharif who had unrealistic and inflated assumptions on the implications of the title. At a symbolic level, the two titles therefore represented the clash of two worlds. The title King of the Arab Nation was totally inappropriate to the political

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<sup>65</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./11/119, India Office minute on Caliphate, May 30, 1917, quotes from several items of correspondence, 1914-1917, and shows how the British Government eventually came to adopt the Indian position.

system within which the Sharif exercised his authority. Within his own domain he had no direct control over the tribesmen except through their chiefs, and in the "Arab nation" beyond his borders his political supremacy was recognized by none. The kingship in fact symbolized the intrusion of the modern world of the nation-state and the Sharif's attempt to turn the concept to his own political advantage at home, while the Caliphate represented the traditional order to which he responded much more cautiously and realistically. The Caliphate was as unfamiliar a concept to the British as a secular national monarchy was to the political system of the Sharif, and both titles produced expectations and fears that were out of proportion to political realities.

That the Caliphate had little relation to the values and ideology of the Arabian political system was confirmed early in the revolt from an unexpected source. In January 1917, Sir Percy Cox received a telegram jointly signed by ibn Sa'ud and the Shaykhs of Muhammarah and Kuwayt in eastern Arabia, which contained the phrase, "we three are of same opinion as His Highness the Sherif who is entitled to Caliphate Islam..."<sup>66</sup> At first sight it appears remarkable that those chiefs who had protested most vigorously against the Sharif's political pretensions in Arabia and who refused to accord him the slightest recognition as King of the Arabs, were prepared to accede so readily to a far more expansive title, and to offer an unsolicited acknowledgement of his right to that office. Closer examination, however, reveals that the Caliphate constituted no real threat

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<sup>66</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/638, Cox to Foreign, Delhi, Jan. 10, 1917; and I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Cox sends copies of above to Delhi, London, and Cairo. The emphasis was added by Cox himself in forwarding the text of the telegram.

to these chiefs while the quest for suzerainty in the Peninsula, implied by Husayn's assumption of the kingship, was a direct challenge to their supremacy and autonomy in their own domains. Cox had reported a year earlier that ibn Sa'ud and the Shaykh of Kuwayt "knew little and cared less about the Caliphate" while the Wahhabis in any case no longer recognized the validity of that office. The Arabs of eastern Arabia, wrote one correspondent, "are not great theologians."<sup>67</sup> Similar attitudes were expressed by the Idrisi Sayyid of 'Asir and by the predominantly Shia'h population of Mesopotamia, where Sykes reported that "the question of the Caliphate seems to arouse little interest...and the less said about it the better."<sup>68</sup> Indeed it appeared that the Sharif would be able to assume the Caliphate without much opposition from within the Arabian system. However, he was also an astute enough politician to realize that power gained by this means would be as meaningless as the insignificance of the title in that sphere.

On this one point at least, Husayn and his neighbors appeared to agree--that the real struggle between them was for political supremacy and territorial independence. Religion might be a useful strategy for the attainment of political goals, as we shall see in the next chapter, but it

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<sup>67</sup>F.O. 882/8, Cox on interviews with ibn Sa'ud and the Shaykh of Kuwayt, Dec. 1915; F.O. 882/3, pp. 136-137, HM/16/2, Capt. Gore (Memorandum), December, 1916; I.O. L.P. & S./11/119, India Office Minute, May 30, 1917, quoting Cox statement of Jan. 10, 1916; I.O. L.P. & S./10/637, A.H. Minute, Dec. 11, 1916. See also F.O. 371/2769, McMahon to Grey, Sirdar's views on Cox's notes of an interview with ibn Sa'ud on Feb. 29, 1916.

<sup>68</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/598, Walton to Secretary etc., Simla, July 4, 1916 (on the Idrisi Sayyid); I.O. L.P. & S./11/119, Sykes' statement of Oct. 23, 1915, in India Office Minute of May 30, 1917. And see F.O. 882/3, AP/18/1, meeting at the British Residency of the Arab Bureau in Cairo on Apr. 1, 1918.

did not stand as an objective in itself. In the Arabian political system, as in orthodox Islamic theory and history, leadership was based ultimately on temporal power. How the struggle for that power was waged, by whom, and according to what rules and principles is our concern for the remainder of this work.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## THE HIJAZ REVOLT AND THE POLITICS OF CENTRAL ARABIA

Having noted the Sharif's political objectives and ambitions as they were revealed by his assumption of regal dignity, it remains to be seen how these were expressed in his actual relationship with other centers of power in the Arabian political system. In his attempt to expand his political influence beyond his borders and to use the revolt as a lever to replace the Ottoman presence in the Arab world with his own authority, where did his priorities lie? Precisely which of the competing political forces and areas of potential conflict with which he had to deal commanded his attention and his energies? Ibn Sa'ud and the eastern border of the Hijaz were by far the most important foci of the Sharif's exertions, overshadowing all other political issues in the Peninsula and containing the seeds of his final downfall. Next in importance came the Sharif's southern border and his relations with Muhammad ibn 'Ali, the Idrisi Sayyid of Sabya ('Asir) and Yahya Hamid-al-Din, the Imam of Yemen, and only after that was he concerned with Mesopotamia, Syria and other parts of the Arab world. If the following pages deal with the Peninsula rather than Syria, it is because that was the epicenter of the traditional tribal system of Arabia of which Husayn ultimately considered himself a part. Hegemony over the Arab world was the Sharif's overall aim, but suzerainty over his immediate neighbors was his top priority, for that was the traditional historical arena for power struggles involving the Hijaz and the amirate of Mecca and it was where the most immediate and major challenges to his own power and independence originated. In terms of our earlier diagrammatic representation, Syria and Mesopotamia



were in that sense one sphere further removed from the Sharif's political concerns than the Peninsula. Historically they had not been directly involved in Hijaz affairs and from Husayn's perspective were still peripheral in his scale of priorities.

However, the Sharif's ambitions were only one side of the process, for the Arabian political system imposed its own rules and limitations on the objectives of its actors. Central Arabia demanded Husayn's attention as much as he chose it. By moving from a definition of the Sharif's general aims to the level of real policy-making and the implementation of those aims, we shall therefore be able to see in what way the segmented political system of the Peninsula was the determinant and the context for his actions. We shall attempt to map out the interplay of political forces within that system and thereby to ascertain its principles, its strategies and its processes. We shall begin with the issues dividing the main protagonists and then examine these within the web of regional politics and in interaction with the external forces which intruded into the Peninsula during the war.

#### Husayn versus ibn Sa'ud: Religious Propaganda and Tribal Agitation

Historical events bore out the Sharif's intense anxiety over his relations with ibn Sa'ud. Even the Turks, whom both amirs were supposed to be fighting, were ultimately perceived by Husayn as less of a threat to his power and survival than his eastern neighbor. More than a hundred years earlier, a combination of Sa'udi political leadership and Wahhabi religious revivalism led to the invasion of the Hijaz and the capture of

Mecca.<sup>1</sup> It was the first time since the birth of Muhammad that the Hijaz had been invaded and occupied by men from outside the territory, and the wresting of the Holy Cities from Sharifian control by the "wild men from Najd" was still a vivid historical memory in the minds of Husayn and his sons.<sup>2</sup> Indeed the elements of a Wahhabi revival were again present in central Arabia and Faysal recalled that five years before the war ibn Sa'ud had sent sayyids and preachers among the tribes on the border of the two amirates to spread religious propaganda and threaten the town of Taif.<sup>3</sup> In retaliation Husayn had launched expeditions into Najd in 1909 and 1910 which resulted in a compromise and a peace settlement in which it was prescribed which wadis and tribes would be within the orbit of Najd and which would belong to the Hijaz.<sup>4</sup> Two years previously, Faysal claimed, ibn Sa'ud had again sent agents to the 'Ataybah and other tribes,

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<sup>1</sup>Mecca was captured in 1803. See de Gaury, Rulers of Mecca, pp. 185-188; H. St. John-Philby, Saudi Arabia, New York, Praeger, 1955, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>de Gaury, *op. cit.*, p. 186; and A.B. 33, Dec. 4, 1916, p. 512.

<sup>3</sup>A.B. 41, Feb. 6, 1917, p. 69; Faysal in a discussion with Lawrence.

<sup>4</sup>A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, pp. 112-113. As far as can be determined, the terms of the 1910 Treaty were as follows: Husayn's dominion over the 'Ataybah was recognized, and the towns of Qasim were to pay an annual tribute to Mecca, though this was never exacted. Sections of the Harb, 'Ataybah, Subai' and Mutayr tribes in Najd were to be free of taxes by either ibn Sa'ud or ibn Rashid, while the Sharif accepted ibn Sa'ud's rights to deal with the 'Ataybah sections in his own territory. Wadi Dawasir went to ibn Sa'ud, while the Sharif controlled Wadis Khurmah, Bishah and Ranyah. Ibn Sa'ud was recognized as overlord of the Qahtan tribe. The 'Ataybah, it should be noted, were of Hijaz stock but had gradually moved east so that they were geographically within Najd but retained Sharifian ties because of their customs and origins. Neither Husayn nor ibn Sa'ud ever produced a copy of the 1910 treaty for the British and this account is a composite of verbal references to its provisions by the amirs in conversations with British officials.

and 'Abdallah had this time responded with a large expedition which had penetrated far into Najd and confirmed the allegiance of the border tribes.

The fears that were the legacy of a long history of enmity between the two amirates were certainly mutual as ibn Sa'ud made abundantly clear at the beginning of the war when the Sharif asked him for alliance and assistance. In his reply he wrote that whereas he himself had never had designs upon the Hijaz, Husayn on the other hand had habitually endeavored to interfere amongst the tribes and territories of Najd.<sup>5</sup> In 1846, Husayn's great-grandfather, Muhammad ibn 'Awn had invaded Najd for the Turks and imposed a tribute on the Sa'udi amir which had been paid until 1885. And Husayn for the first time in generations had attempted to "reassert the ancient rights" of Mecca over the entire Harb and 'Ataybah tribes, a policy which ibn Sa'ud obviously resented.<sup>6</sup> Quite candidly ibn Sa'ud told Sir Percy Cox:

As you are aware there has been war between me and the Sherif for years and his design has always been to get a footing in Najd and the neighbourhood, both among Bedouins and the townspeople.... The Turks were assisting him in his proceedings and providing him with the necessary means. It is essential therefore that Your Highness should draw the attention of the Government to the fact that the boundaries between Najd and the Hejaz are well-defined and that the tribes of Najd cannot come under the sway of anyone. We cannot put up with or tolerate such an idea as I have previously explained to you. For is not Najd the land of our forefathers? Moreover Mecca has never from the earliest times, up to now, had an independent chief; but it has been an Amirate under the Turkish Government.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>F.O. 371/2769, Summary of letter from ibn Sa'ud, dated Aug. 15, 1916, sent Arab Bureau, Basrah, (Cox) to Arab Bureau, Cairo, Sept. 8, 1916. Letter translated in full in F.O. 371/2776, ibn Sa'ud to Chief Political Officer, Aug. 15, 1916, in printed series No. 153.

<sup>6</sup>de Gaury, op. cit., chap. 15, and see genealogy on p. 243. Also, A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 113.

<sup>7</sup>F.O. 371/2776, ibn Sa'ud to Cox, July 20, 1916, pp. 96-100 of printed series No. 152. Quotation on p. 99.

The amir explained that the reason he had taken pains to emphasize his feud with the Sharif was the "considerable apprehension" he had felt at seeing British official communiques referring to "the Arabs, as if they were a compendious whole"; and noting Husayn's appropriation of this term for his own purposes, he pointed out to the British that "the Sharif in his dealings with you is not free from political guile and knows well how to turn phrases."<sup>8</sup> Of the border incidents which Faysal had described, ibn Sa'ud had quite a different view, blaming 'Abdallah for taking advantage of his own preoccupation with suppressing an internal tribal rebellion, by making unprovoked incursions into Qasim and the border regions. In fact, late in 1915, at the time he was having trouble with the 'Ajman tribe, ibn Sa'ud had already accused the Sharif of sending his son up "to fish in troubled waters." There was truth in these allegations for, not content with the guarantees of the 1910 treaty, 'Abdallah had launched another expedition into Qasim in 1912 "to reconfirm," as he said, the allegiance of the 'Ataybah.<sup>9</sup>

What is perhaps most remarkable about these recriminations is the extent to which the border disputes influenced the actions and military disposition of the Sharif's forces in the revolt itself. In the next chapter we shall discuss in detail the incident at Khurmah in 1918 in which the conflict flared into the open, but it is noteworthy here that the Sharif's preoccupation with his eastern border was a factor in every phase of the

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<sup>8</sup>idem., and F.O. 371/2769, Cox to Arab Bureau, Cairo; Basrah, Sept. 9, 1916.

<sup>9</sup>F.O. 371/2769, Cox to Foreign, Delhi, from Kuwayt after meeting with ibn Sa'ud, Nov. 21, 1916; ibid., Cox to A.H. Grant, Secretary etc., Basrah, Jan. 10, 1916, notes on an interview with ibn Sa'ud on Dec. 26, 1915. See also A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 113, summary of discussion: Faysal and Lawrence.

uprising. Through much of 1917 British observers had criticized 'Abdallah for his indolence and inactivity in the vicinity of Medina, emphasizing Faysal's northern campaign in their reports as the only significant advance of the Arab movement. Here there is a real bias in the British sources for which we must be on our guard, for in terms of British military objectives, the push towards Damascus in any case had precedence over what was happening on the southern front. Even Lawrence, who had a clearer perception than most of tribal political realities, liked to think of Faysal as more attuned to the cause of Arab nationalism than his brothers.<sup>10</sup> But it was Faysal who sprang to his brother's defense against British criticism of 'Abdallah's lack of action against the Turks and his failure to raid and cut the Hijaz Railroad. 'Abdallah's job, he said, was the strengthen his hold over the 'Ataybah and thereby to prevent a Wahhabi advance into the Hijaz, which would not be possible without the assistance of that powerful tribe. In addition he was garrisoning border villages and maintaining order in western Najd, working there to win over parts of the Mutayr, Hutaym and Shammar tribes.<sup>11</sup> Faysal credited his brother with "taking the war" into ibn Sa'ud's camp and doing secret work among the townsmen of Qasim with the aim of uniting the settled populations to "strangle the new faith in the desert." If he failed, Faysal warned, all other efforts would have been wasted and Britain would not profit by the Arab revolt. "Abdullah is fighting all our battles," he told Lawrence, "and if he has no leisure to campaign

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<sup>10</sup>T.E. Lawrence, Seven Pillars, Chap. 14.

<sup>11</sup>The Hutaym had been under Sharifian control but were now loyal to ibn Sa'ud, while the Shammar generally owed allegiance to ibn Rashid.

against the railway meanwhile, he should not be judged too harshly."<sup>12</sup>  
 In addition, both 'Ali and Zayd were also deployed on the Najdi border for most of the war.

From the Sharifian perspective, it was as though there was another secret front in the "Arab" movement, and one which was generally concealed from the British because it was aimed both at a fellow Arab leader and at a British treaty ally. The Sharif never openly admitted the nature of 'Abdallah's activities in his correspondence or conversations with Col. Wilson. It was undoubtedly Faysal's unique personal intimacy with Lawrence, revealed on several occasions, that prompted this frank discussion. However, several other hints and pieces of evidence in the British sources confirm this account of 'Abdallah's preoccupation throughout most of 1917. Ibn Sa'ud himself was not keen to raise the issue with Britain for he also had agents working in the border regions attempting to counter Sharifian influence and win over tribal elements by means of religious conversion to Wahhabism. Sir Percy Cox reported to a meeting of the Arab Bureau at the Residency in Cairo that

ibn Saud is no doubt working influence among the Ateibah in the endeavour to retain the allegiance of as many of that tribe as possible, and in order to counter the Sherif's activities in similar directions among his own tribes.<sup>13</sup>

From this discussion it is clear that religious rivalry was a key element in the conflict between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud and that it was inextricably linked to their temporal ambitions. The extent to which both

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<sup>12</sup>A.B. 74, Dec. 24, 1917, pp. 511-513, Faysal interview with Lawrence. The Qasim towns particularly mentioned by Faysal were 'Anayzah, Buraydah and Rass.

<sup>13</sup>F.O. 882/3, AP/18/1, Cox, Cairo, (Arab Bureau memorandum), Apr. 1, 1918.

leaders were engaged in a political process that was centuries old can be gauged by reference to ibn Khaldun's descriptions of continuity and change half a millenium earlier. The historian did not give religion the value of an independent motive for revolt or dynastic change, but saw it rather as a highly useful cement for the strengthening of the 'asabiyya (or group feeling) which was necessary for the seizure of royal authority. "Religious propaganda" gave a leader additional power, he wrote, by uniting his followers and causing differences and jealousies to disappear. Among the Beduin it had a particularly important role because it acted as a restraining influence on their naturally anarchic tendencies and enabled groups united by religious fervor to overcome numerically stronger groups whose inherent 'asabiyya was greater.<sup>14</sup> What Husayn feared then was that the unifying power of the Wahhabi doctrine presented a direct political threat to his own survival. The revivalist movement was, in Clayton's view, "the real source of the King's nervousness," though it was impossible to foresee at the time whether it would become a serious menace. Times of trial in Islam, he noted, had in the past fostered such puritanical movements.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, observers in central and eastern Arabia noted that ibn Sa'ud was unashamedly using the Ikhwan (Muslim brotherhood) as a means of consolidating his political control, furthering his territorial ambitions and even of reestablishing the Arab Empire under his own aegis. Defending ibn Sa'ud's use of the Ikhwan "as a useful weapon of defence" against Husayn's ambitions, Cox added optimistically, "...there is no

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<sup>14</sup>Ibn Khaldun, op. cit., Chapters 2 and 3, especially pp. 120-127.

<sup>15</sup>F.O. 882/3, AP/17/18, Clayton to Wilson, Cairo, Dec. 17, 1917.

likelihood of it getting beyond his control or assuming the aggressive form which has characterized Wahhabi movements in the past." Of course, Cox was very wrong.<sup>16</sup> The Wahhabi missionaries preached that all orthodox Sunnis and Shi'ahs were infidels and they branded the Sharif himself a kafir, or unbeliever.<sup>17</sup> And from the pulpits of Mecca, prayers beseeched God to "destroy the Kafara (unbelievers of God), Rafida (heretics), Mubtadia (those who initiate new doctrines), and al-Mushrikin (the polytheists)," references clearly directed at the Wahhabis.<sup>18</sup>

The rising polemical level of this religious debate during the war was therefore indicative of the growing salience of the political stakes that divided the two leaders and heightened the prospect of a military confrontation between them. By 1918 the conflict has escalated significantly in words and in actions. The area in which Husayn and ibn Sa'ud tested their relative strengths, and the ultimate battleground for both the clash of doctrines and the force of arms, was the border area between the two territories and especially the 'Ataybah tribe. Unbeknown to the British, more and more of the resources, both in arms and money, which had been provided to fight the Turk, found their way to this region. Lawrence had commented frequently on 'Abdallah's partiality to the 'Ataybah, and numerous British reports in 1918 noted that the amir

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<sup>16</sup>See for example A.B. 88, May 7, 1918, p. 149, report by Col. Hamilton; also A.B. 114, Ramlah, Aug. 30, 1919, p. 137; and F.O. 882/3, AP/18/1, Cox at meeting of Arab Bureau, Residency, Cairo.

<sup>17</sup>F.O. 371/3054, Lawrence, memorandum, Jiddah, July 29, 1917, report of conversation with the Sharif.

<sup>18</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 261, Husayn to ibn Sa'ud, 26.7.36 (=May 7, 1918).



was perpetually short of funds despite his receipt of large subsidies and his lack of any military activity against the Turks. But short of accusations that he was "squandering money" on "ill-advised payments to the tribes," it is remarkable that the British sources show no evidence that their correspondents drew the connection between this "lavish expenditure" and the growing struggle with ibn Sa'ud.<sup>19</sup> Even in private the realization that British resources were being used to fuel an inter-Arab conflict, was not expressed, perhaps because their immediate goal of defeating the Turks blinded them to the clash of other forces within the traditional structure of the Arabian political system and maybe because such an admission would have undermined the very ideology they were propagating in order to justify their intervention on behalf of a united Arab nation. Only when the latent rivalry exploded into military combat later in 1918, were the British forces to take notice and then only in an attempt to divert attention from this "side-show" back to what they insisted was the real struggle, to expel the Turks from the Peninsula.<sup>20</sup> Indeed it was Britain's failure to acknowledge the depth of the Sharif's concern with his eastern border that intensified the distrust that had already developed on account of Britain's de facto rejection of Husayn's general political ambitions within the Arabian system, and hastened the

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<sup>19</sup>S.A. 148/7, Wingate to Clayton, Mar. 6, 1918; ibid., Foreign Office to Wingate, Mar. 5, 1918; F.O. 686/38, p. 236, Bassett to Director, Arab Bureau, Jiddah, Mar. 20, 1918; F.O. 686/48, p. 3, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Feb. 24, 1918; also F.O. 686/49, pp. 6-29 has numerous telegrams exchanged between Davenport, Bassett, the Arab Bureau and the High Commissioner on the subject of 'Abdallah's subsidy and expenditures, dates March 11 - April 24, 1918.

<sup>20</sup>F.O. 882/3, p. 101, AP/18/12, Wingate to Wilson, Cairo, Dec. 15, 1918.

collapse of the alliance between them.

Even before the revolt ibn Sa'ud recognized the irreconcilability of his differences with the Sharif, when he wrote that these were "not worth disentangling, because they are based upon complications which cannot be unravelled."<sup>21</sup> And Husayn's own correspondence with the amir early in 1918 revealed the implications and potential gravity of the struggle for control of the 'Ataybah tribe, at a time when British observers were still largely oblivious to the situation:

You have armed this gang [the Ikhwan] and let them go against Ateibah. I can tell you most plainly and openly that you and the shaykhs are responsible for the blood which has been and will be shed and we cannot excuse this. Ateibah and others are under the protection of God and in my charge wherever they are and whatever they may be--Ikhwan or subjects. This will never be changed in course of time--days or years.<sup>22</sup>

Ibn Sa'ud then accused the Sharifians of interfering with tribes under his jurisdiction and of inflaming public opinion by speaking "against the people of Najd from the pulpits of Mecca." In a bitter reply Husayn denied the charges with several sarcastic asides about ibn Sa'ud's ignorance of religious law compared to his own deep knowledge on the subject, and with oblique remarks concerning his rival's internal troubles with rebellious tribes and his earlier battlefield reverses against ibn Rashid. He reproached ibn Sa'ud for his issue of arms in the border regions, and warned, in a thinly veiled threat:

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<sup>21</sup>F.O. 371/2769, ibn Sa'ud letter to Sayyid Mohammad Rashid, editor of *al-Manar*, Cairo, dated 20 Shawal, 1332; and intercepted by British Postal Censor; also, *Notes on the Middle East*, No. 4, 1920, report on the Ikhwan by Major H.R.P. Dickson, Political Agent, Bahrayn, pp. 103-112.

<sup>22</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 261, Husayn reply to letter from ibn Sa'ud, 26.7.36 (=May 7, 1918).

You know, O Abu Turki, that we have so many rifles that we cannot distribute them. But God preserve us both from resorting to arms and causing civil war and the shedding of blood.<sup>23</sup>

It is apparent from these remarks that while British interests succeeded perhaps in containing the conflict for some time and kept it simmering below the surface, at the same time the British involvement raised the stakes and the level of confrontation by the sudden availability of weapons, supplies and money. Furthermore, the general unrest created by the revolt and the uncertainty of the future alignment of power relationships among the amirs made the border areas an especially fertile ground for religious propaganda and political agitation. It seems now, that far from creating a new unity as Sykes, Lawrence and others had hoped, the Arab movement was a trigger for latent rivalries to flare to the surface, and for the inherent centrifugal tendencies of Arabian politics to be set in motion.

#### Najd and the Suzerainty

What was happening on the border was clearly a reflection of a more far-reaching design. In the previous chapter we noted the broad and general purposes for which the Sharif hoped to use the revolt. Now we shall ask how these aspirations were applied to Najd in particular. Having seen the extent to which his enmity with ibn Sa'ud preoccupied Husayn and created what amounted to a latent "second front" which demanded the attention of three of his four sons, we will be interested now in determining what future end these border activities served. Ibn Sa'ud was the most immediate threat and the most powerful countervailing force

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<sup>23</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 262, Husayn to ibn Sa'ud, 26.4.36 (=Feb. 18, 1918).

with which the Sharif had to deal in the context of the Arabian political system. How then did he expect to realize his cherished goal of suzerainty with regard to Najd? Since the amirate of Riyadh is not the main focus of this study, we will be concerned with ibn Sa'ud's objectives and policies primarily as a response to the Sharif's actions and as an input into the Hijaz political structure.

Our task in defining the Sharif's aims in central Arabia is remarkably simple, for he left no doubt at all as to exactly what his plan for Najd was. Unlike issues such as the Caliphate over which Husayn was extremely reticent and which require much speculation as to his real ambitions, he spelled out succinctly in a thirteen-point program precisely how he envisioned his future relations with ibn Sa'ud. The still unpublished statement, put forward at the end of 1918, referred specifically to Najd, but was seen as an administrative model for all parts of the Arab world over which the Sharif claimed hegemony, and is the only detailed account setting forth Husayn's scheme for Arab union under his suzerainty. It set the boundaries between the amirates, assigned responsibility for the movement of tribes and individuals over the borders, regulated pasturing rights and camel dues, and prescribed the preeminence of Islamic and tribal law in rendering judgments. However, the crucial power relationship was contained in two sentences. Article five stated,

The Amir of Najd has got no right to negotiate with any other power regarding anything whatever because such right is one of the prerogatives of the Merkaz [Central Government].

And article twelve read,

The Merkaz guarantees the protection of his [Amir of Najd] status and the security of even the least of his rights against all transgression.

Both the preamble and the postscript emphasized that "the most essential step" toward the enactment of this program was the abolition of the Ikhwan colonies which had been established in the last two years and which were "nothing but military posts," and the "dispersal of the inhabitants" of those settlements. The postscript also defined the borders of 'Asir and Yemen, and allowed the towns of Qasim to annex themselves either to ibn Sa'ud or ibn Rashid, or to be independent.<sup>24</sup>

In an eleventh-hour attempt to persuade Britain to accept these proposals, the Sharif repeated earlier assurances that he had no aggressive designs on ibn Sa'ud, that he would guarantee his complete autonomy provided that he acknowledged the suzerain, and that he would respect all existing conditions of the treaty between Britain and the amir. Except for the detail with which they were put forward, however, neither the Sharif's statement on Najd nor his guarantees were markedly different from Sykes' earlier suggestions that ibn Sa'ud be persuaded in some way to "convey to King Husein that he regards him as the titular leader of the Arab cause, without prejudice to his own personal or local claims."<sup>25</sup> For, despite all Husayn's assurances that he was immune "from the stain of self-aggrandizement and self-interest,"<sup>26</sup> two points emerge from his administrative scheme which reveal his intentions very clearly. In

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<sup>24</sup>F.O. 686/40, pp. 86-87, Husayn to Wilson, Nov. 21, 1918.

<sup>25</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./10/638, J.E.G. Minute, June 14, 1917, on Sykes' proposal made after the latter's interview with the Sharif at Jiddah; also F.O. 371/3054, Cox to India Office, May 24, 1917; and ibid., Secretary of State to Cox, May 31, 1917.

<sup>26</sup>F.O. 686/40, p. 6, Wilson to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, Nov. 24, 1918; and earlier: F.O. 686/39, p. 113, Husayn to High Commissioner, 12.11.36 (=Aug. 19, 1918).

spelling out for the first time the precise nature of the relationship he envisaged, the Sharif indicated that he planned a very real limitation on the political authority of the "independent" Arab chiefs under his suzerainty.

"Local" autonomy meant nothing in the context of traditional Arabian politics if not the right to procure weapons and wage war. Yet in article five alone, which denied ibn Sa'ud the right to negotiate with other powers, the Sharif reduced the status of Najd to that of a vassal state and in effect demanded acceptance of his own permanent leadership. Since that stipulation precluded any foreign alliance which could ensure the security of Najd, and could further be used to prevent access to arms from abroad, it followed, in article twelve, that the only possible guarantor of ibn Sa'ud's rights would have to be the Sharif himself. The significance of this restriction is even greater when we realize that Najd depended for its supplies entirely on British ports, and that the Sharif could therefore exercise an economic stranglehold as well since it would be his agreement with Great Britain that would be necessary for the flow of goods to the interior.<sup>27</sup> If there is a constant sum of power as we have assumed throughout our discussion of segmented political systems, then the Sharif's aim here was to establish permanent military superiority over Najd and to expand his own influence at ibn Sa'ud's expense. The second main point which emerges from the Sharif's program is his extreme fear of a Wahhabi religious revival with which his statement both begins and ends. His insistence on the abolition of the Ikhwan colonies further confirms Husayn's determination to offset the threat of military mobilization which

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<sup>27</sup>F.O. 882/3, p. 77, AP.18/1, Cox, Memorandum of the Arab Bureau re. meeting at the Residency, Cairo, Apr. 1, 1918.

these communities posed to his own security and thereby to use his administrative proposals to tip the military and political balance of power in his own favor.

Through the various stages of the Sharif's attempts to realize his ambitions, from the declaration of kingship to Sykes' unification scheme to the suzerainty proposal to the specific plan for Najd, ibn Sa'ud's rejection of these pretensions was total and uncompromising. With the single exception of the acknowledgement of Husayn's right to the Caliphate, which we noted was a meaningless gesture as the Wahhabis did not recognize that institution, the amir did not waver from his assertion of absolute, as opposed to "local" authority and complete equality with the Sharif. In his letters he never acknowledged Husayn's claims or titles and when the Sharif obtained British support for the holding of an Arab Council meeting at Mecca, ibn Sa'ud did not send a representative, and the plan failed.<sup>28</sup> Even coming to Mecca to sit at a meeting under the Sharif's auspices would have amounted to some kind of recognition of Husayn's superiority. The most that could be suggested, in Cox's view, was that ibn Sa'ud have a liaison officer with the Sharif, but even that modest proposal was left in abeyance and never pursued, as relations between the two steadily declined.<sup>29</sup> Cox himself concluded definitively, "...ibn Saud would never acknowledge the King as his temporal overlord."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>A.B. 41, Feb. 6, 1917, p. 60: Ibn Sa'ud's letters always addressed Husayn as Sharif, not King; and F.O. 686/34, p. 49, Fuad to Wilson, Apr. 13, 1917, on the proposed Arab Council meeting.

<sup>29</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./10/638, Cox to India Office, June 2, 1917.

<sup>30</sup>F.O. 882/3, p. 77, AP/18/1, Cox at Arab Bureau meeting, Residency, Cairo, Memorandum, Apr. 1, 1918.

Since there was no point of contact at all between the Sharif's stated design for Najd, and ibn Sa'ud's response, the plan could certainly never be implemented by compromise. Was there then, either the intention or the possibility of imposing it by force? There were two ways in which this might have been done against ibn Sa'ud's wishes--by the Sharif's own armed might, or by British insistence, or possibly by a combination of the two. Of the former ibn Sa'ud had no great fear, and felt that the 'Ataybah would always be a buffer between them. The danger receded further after the war despite the Sharif's hope that with his sons enthroned in Damascus and Baghdad, he would be able to threaten Najd from the north and west. "It is absolute madness," wrote a Muslim observer for the British, "to dream that ibn Saud one day will be subdued by the united Mesopotamian and Hejazian forces."<sup>31</sup> In any case, ibn Sa'ud felt confident of his military ability to resist any serious encroachments by the Sharif, and warned that if the latter attempted to exert control over him, he would take steps to protect his own interests.<sup>32</sup> For his own part, ibn Sa'ud recognized that because of his obligations to the British, he could not attack the Hijaz "at all events so long as the war continued."<sup>33</sup>

As to the second contingency, however, that he might be forced into submission to the Sharif if Britain condoned and supported Husayn's plans, this caused ibn Sa'ud very real anxiety. "My fear," he told Cox,

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<sup>31</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, p. 104, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, May 19, 1920.

<sup>32</sup>A.B. 25, Oct. 7, 1916, p. 338, ibn Sa'ud to Cox, July 25, 1916; F.O. 371/2769, Arab Bureau, Basrah (Cox) to Arab Bureau, Cairo, Sept. 8, 1916; F.O. 371/2776, ibn Sa'ud to Cox, Aug. 15, 1916.

<sup>33</sup>F.O. 882/3, p. 77, AP/18/1, Cox at Arab Bureau meeting, Cairo, Apr. 1, 1918.



"is that the Sherif may obtain from the British Government an undertaking for his independent control over the Hejaz and the Arabs."<sup>34</sup> Moreover ibn Sa'ud was afraid that the massive British resources at the Sharif's disposal could be turned against Najd and would facilitate agitation at his own expense in the border areas. Already in the first months of the war many tribesmen from the towns of Qasim had joined the Sharif's forces for high pay, and the investment of large sums of money had succeeded in consolidating Husayn's position among the Harb and 'Ataybah on the border. British reports from central Arabia frequently described ibn Sa'ud as being "exceedingly jealous and suspicious" of the Sharif's title and of the subsidies and arms he was receiving for his movement.<sup>35</sup> Although his activities against the Turks had been limited, ibn Sa'ud sought to obtain more weapons and a larger subsidy from the British to match his rival, by persuading them that the Sharif's revolt was only successful while he, ibn Sa'ud, was holding the hostile Shammar tribe of Hail in check. Recognizing, however, that he had far less leverage and bargaining power with the British than Husayn, the amir attempted to neutralize possible Sharifian designs by obtaining affirmations of earlier British guarantees to him. He agreed to work together with the Sharif if the latter gave him "an undertaking and a solemn promise for the immunity of my territories and my subjects, and for abstention from trespassing in our limits or from interference with our subjects." But in order not to compromise

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<sup>34</sup>F.O. 371/2776, ibn Sa'ud to Cox, July 20, 1916.

<sup>35</sup>See for example A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, pp. 189-190, report by Colonel Hamilton; and Cox in F.O. 882/3, p. 77, AP/18/1, Arab Bureau memorandum on meeting at Residency, Cairo, Apr. 1, 1918.

his own position he emphasized that he had no personal wish to cooperate with the Sharif whom he regarded as a bitter enemy, but that he would entertain the proposal because Britain desired it.<sup>36</sup> It was Britain to whom he had to appeal therefore in order to protect himself from the possible application of the suzerainty policy to his own domain. Throughout the war he was not afraid that the Sharif would independently be able to impose his administrative scheme on Najd, but his fears did persist until the Peace Conference that Husayn might succeed in his territorial ambitions because of British aid and support.

However, it would be a mistaken assumption to imagine from what has been said that ibn Sa'ud was entirely on the defensive and had no political aspirations of his own. Over the previous years he had been working to consolidate his position in central Arabia at the expense of ibn Rashid and expanding his influence among the Shammar and the 'Anazah confederation of tribes. One British observer saw his "masterly inactivity" during the war as a way of preserving his strength, while the Sharif spent his, until he had an opportunity for realizing his own aim--an independent Arabia under the aegis of Najd and the secular and religious leadership of the Sa'udis. As for his immediate goals, he was prepared to push for equality of recognition with the Sharif, an adequate subsidy, affirmation of his treaty with Britain guaranteeing the succession of Najd within his own family, and control over the tribes, trade and caravan traffic of central Arabia.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>F.O. 371/2776, ibn Sa'ud to Cox, Aug. 15, 1916, printed series No. 101; F.O. 371/2769, Arab Bureau, Basrah (Cox), to Arab Bureau, Cairo, Sept. 8, 1916; A.B. 25, Oct. 7, 1916, p. 339.

<sup>37</sup>A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, pp. 189, 191-192; A.B. 88, May 7, 1918, p. 150.

Given these objectives and his intense rivalry with Husayn, it should not then be surprising to find ibn Sa'ud pursuing a policy with the British that had no place in the proclaimed "Arab" movement against the Turks, but was perfectly logical in the context of the Arabian political system at the time. What the amir tried to do in essence was to persuade Britain to give the Sharif just enough support to keep him engaged in a protracted struggle. In a rather convoluted argument he claimed to prove that the Sharif really intended to obtain his independence from the Turks guaranteed by Germany, and that the Turks were likely to grant this to him in order to relieve their own position in the Hijaz.

My advice is that you should help the Sherif but only to a partial extent, so that the Turks may still cherish hopes of crushing him and he also may remain in fear of the Turks. Thus the Turks will be greatly embarrassed in the Hejaz and this will be an assistance to your business in Iraq and elsewhere. In short, as far as I can see, the protraction of the hostilities between the Sherif and the Turks is a most expedient course for you.<sup>38</sup>

What ibn Sa'ud did not add was that such a British policy would expend the Sharif's strength and exhaust his Beduin forces, while limiting his resources sufficiently that he would constitute no real threat to Najd. Such a course would serve ibn Sa'ud's aims in two ways, both actively and passively. It would allow him quietly to strengthen his own forces in preparation for an assault on the Sharif when the latter had been weakened by his "protracted struggle" with the Turks, and it would eliminate the threat on the border while detracting seriously from Husayn's wider claims to suzerainty.

Ibn Sa'ud's determined resistance to the imposition of any external

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<sup>38</sup>F.O. 371/2776, ibn Sa'ud to Cox, July 20, 1916; A.B. 25, Oct. 7, 1916, p. 338.

control therefore draws attention again to a cardinal principle of the segmentary political system which we have noted before and which we shall encounter in various forms throughout this part of the study. A unifier of tribes within his own domain, like the Amir of Najd, would be hostile to unifying attempts at the regional level if these threatened his independence. The prospect of union in the Arab world as a whole therefore carried no appeal for a leader who had been accurately credited with having drawn a "loose mesh of tribal organization into a centralized administration."<sup>39</sup> Both leaders and followers therefore wore different hats in different relationships. Ibn Sa'ud in fact pursued the same policy of absolute autonomy in relation to his neighbors as the tribal shaykhs did toward him and which he attempted to overcome. Fusion at one level became fission at another, with each unit determined above all to preserve its functional independence.

It should be quite clear from this discussion that ibn Sa'ud's primary concerns, objectives, perceptions and actions were as deeply rooted in the traditional political system of Arabia as were the Sharif's. There were those in the "Indian school" who, more accurately than their counterparts in Cairo, perceived that the prospects for union under Husayn were dim, but nevertheless thought ibn Sa'ud capable of achieving what the Sharif could not. The amir was, in Lawrence's words, the "gladiator of the India Office," and Major Bray, for example, saw ibn Sa'ud as the "national champion of the Arab peoples."<sup>40</sup> Such an assessment was, of

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<sup>39</sup>A.B. 38, Jan. 12, 1917, pp. 15-16, Gertrude Bell, memorandum.

<sup>40</sup>Lawrence, Evolution of a Revolt, p. 66; Bray, op. cit., p. 46. Similar views are expressed by A.T. Wilson, Loyalties, Mesopotamia, 1914-1917: A Personal and Historical Record, London, Oxford University Press, 1930, p. 160.

course, as misleading as those of the Sharif's partisans who referred to Husayn as the leader of the Arab national cause and the first genuine spokesman of the Arab nation.<sup>41</sup> Even Sir Percy Cox, who was generally realistic about ibn Sa'ud's aims, nevertheless believed that the amir's strength "was far more solidly based and more genuinely representative of Arab sentiment and aspiration than that of Husain of Mecca."<sup>42</sup> That ibn Sa'ud was no nationalist is clear from his advice to Britain that Syria should be ruled "with a firm hand," that the Arabs should never be given Bayrut and that His Majesty's Government should beware of giving independence to Iraq. "...And on no account," he told the British, should they "listen to the nationalist screams of the Egyptians."<sup>43</sup>

Rather, what our evidence has shown plainly, is that both men were locked in an age-old struggle that had far more in common with the bitter clashes of their ancestors a hundred years earlier than with the professed aims of the Arab movement. Ultimately, both of these Arab chieftains were concerned not with the creation of a unified Arab national entity, but with the balance of political power in the Peninsula, which was the traditional arena within which they pursued their interests. In their perceptions, the combatants were Arabs and the divisions were among Arabs, and none would dream of ceding power to another or to any larger

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<sup>41</sup>See for example Yale, *op. cit.*, p. 202; Nutting, Lawrence, pp. 294, 297-298; H.I. Katibah, The New Spirit in Arab Lands, New York, 1940, pp. 60-61.

<sup>42</sup>Philip Graves, The Life of Sir Percy Cox, London, Hutchinson, 1941, p. 206.

<sup>43</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 4, 1920, p. 121.

more encompassing whole. There, the very term "Arabs," used as "a compendious whole," gave offense. 'Abdallah's preoccupation with the eastern frontier of the Hijaz and ibn Sa'ud's attempt to persuade the British to reduce their aid and thus prolong the Sharif's conflict with the Turks, were actions which diverted attention and energy from the war effort but which were geared to the attainment of time-honored objectives that clearly had precedence in the minds of their architects. The war itself and the massive British involvement in Arabia were simply outside forces which overlaid existing issues that had deep historical roots in the area. These forces provided a new and wider context within which those issues had to be resolved, most often sharpening the conflicts by raising the stakes. When put to the test, as we shall see particularly in the next chapter, the commitment of the two amirs to the war against Ottoman dominion was always secondary to the pursuit of their traditional interests in the Peninsula. It is, however, an examination of the actual interaction of contending forces which best reveals the nature of the Arabian political system, the goals of its actors and the strategies which they employed to achieve them. And it is in this direction which we must now expand our observations.

#### Ibn Rashid and Other Political Actors of Central Arabia

Politics are complex and no issue however distinctly delineated, can stand in isolation from the infinite number of intermeshing relationships that comprise what is conveniently called a political system. It would be mistaken therefore to view the rivalry between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud as if it stood outside the wider patterns of central Arabian politics. A

struggle of such dimensions could not help but spill over into other areas and become entangled with other issues. Surrounding groups were drawn into the conflict and into the military activity and foreign alliances of the two amirs. Now we shall examine the various objectives and policies which our principal actors were pursuing in terms of their other neighbors, our aim being to define additional significant forces and determinants of action in the politics of central Arabia at the time of the Sharif's revolt. With a clearer perception of the dynamics of inter-Arab interaction in the area, we shall then be able to draw the primary conflict between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud back into the framework of the war against Ottoman authority and the alliance with Britain.

The cast of characters is now expanded to include Sa'ud ibn Rashid, the Amir of Jabal Shammar and perhaps the single most blatant example in the Peninsula of the lack of Arab unanimity in opposing the Turks. It will be seen that while the ostensible rivalry was between ibn Rashid siding with the Turks on the one hand, and Husayn and ibn Sa'ud in alliance with Britain on the other, the actual imperatives of Arabian politics were otherwise. For the Sharif, Hail in fact posed no great threat while ibn Sa'ud saw ibn Rashid as his immediate enemy and Husayn as his ultimate one. Into this increasingly complex network of interrelationships will be introduced also the Shammar and 'Ajman tribes of central Arabia, Sa'ud ibn Salih al-Subhan of Hail and the Shaykh of Kuwayt, Salim ibn Mubarak ibn Sabah. Having begun with the Sharif's broad aims and moving now from

the general to the specific, we shall tie together more and more of the threads of inter-Arab politics so that the actual workings of the Arabian system become clearer and the priorities of the participants plainer. In order to evaluate these priorities it is necessary to show the various spheres in which Husayn and his neighbors were involved. Then, by comparing their policies and actions in each sphere we can deduce what their main objectives and interests were and how they hoped to achieve them. As the Sharif is the center of this study, we cannot delve in detail into the motivations of each actor in the system; but by observing their behavior during the war we can place the Sharif's actions into a wider and more comprehensive perspective. As we draw the web of central Arabia politics more tightly around the Sharif's objectives we shall see the roots of his revolt extending more deeply into the traditional political system of the Peninsula.

At the end of the eighteenth century the Wahhabis struck north and conquered Hail, gradually bringing almost all of eastern and central Arabia under their sway.<sup>44</sup> The amirs of the Rashid family, while retaining nominal control over their territory, were subject to appointment by the Wahhabis. For the next fifty years they were reduced to the status of feudatories, acknowledging Sa'udi suzerainty over Jabal Shammar. Toward the middle of the century, however, Jalal al-Rashid gradually extended his influence, claiming to do so in the interest of the Ottoman Empire to which he professed allegiance, while continuing to pay an annual tribute to

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<sup>44</sup>This brief historical account comes mainly from Philby, Sa'udi Arabia; also I.O. L.P. & S./11/116, A.H. Minute on Jabal Shammar, Jan. 6, 1917; and Gertrude Bell, A Ruler of the Desert, reprinted in I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, sent from Basrah by Chief Political Officer, Dec. 3, 1916.



Riyadh. His son, Muhammad, established himself securely as Amir of Jabal Shammar and in 1877 began attacking Najd. By 1891 he had overthrown the Wahhabis, captured Riyadh and driven the Sa'udis into exile. In 1902, 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Faysal Al Sa'ud, with assistance from Shaykh Mubarak of Kuwayt who was himself at enmity with the Rashid, staged a daring night-time raid on Riyadh, surprised the garrison and re-captured the city. For more than a decade the two dynasties were in a state of almost continuous warfare as the Rashidis were gradually driven back to their own territory. With the outbreak of the world war it is hardly surprising that Hail and Riyadh found themselves on opposite sides of the conflict, and since the Rashidis had depended on Ottoman support in their fight against the Sa'udis it was not likely that they would renounce their allegiance to Istanbul while they were still being threatened from the south. Britain nevertheless maintained an attitude of neutrality in central Arabian affairs even allowing ibn Rashid access to its Mesopotamian markets as late as 1916 when the amir rather imprudently announced that he was under Ottoman orders and would join the Turks in attacking the British when the occasion arose.<sup>45</sup> Having obtained British guarantees for the defense and security of Najd a year earlier, ibn Sa'ud was now able to pursue offensive action against Hail with overt British support.

What were the ramifications of this protracted and bitter struggle for ascendancy in central Arabia both for the Sharif's movement and for relations between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud? While ibn Rashid's dependence on and alliance with the Turks thrust him into inevitable opposition to the Sharif,

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<sup>45</sup>F.O. 371/2775, The General Officer Commanding, Force 'D', Basrah, to Secretary, etc., Simla, two letters dated July 9 and July 25, 1916.

he nevertheless continued to direct his energies toward the reestablishment of his grandfather's hegemony over Najd. From ibn Sa'ud's perspective, he could not hope to pursue his objectives in the Hijaz while his northern border was threatened and his position in central Arabia not yet secure. At the same time the ease with which Husayn was able to reach an amicable settlement with ibn Rashid after the war was due to the lack of a comparable history of territorial rivalry, war and conquest between the two. On the other hand suzerainty over Hail would give the Sharif significant leverage in his conflict with ibn Sa'ud and here at least he was likely to receive British backing since Britain had no obligation to any ally of the Turks. Practically, Hail was the only feasible direction in which expansion in the Peninsula was possible during the war. This three-cornered situation may therefore be summarized as follows: The struggle between ibn Rashid and ibn Sa'ud was primary and immediate for both of them; the alliance of the former with the Ottoman Empire was a direct outcome of that enmity; ibn Rashid's opposition to the Sharif was a by-product of the alliance with the Porte; and the conflict between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud was seen by both as the ultimate and pivotal contest for domination of Arabia. Let us look briefly at the evidence. If our hypothesis that the roots of the Arab revolt must be extracted from the imperatives of traditional tribal politics is correct, then we would expect to find the rivalry between the Sharif and ibn Rashid to be less virulent than and secondary to those inherent antagonisms that were spawned by the Arabian political system itself.

"I have nothing to do with the revolt of the Sherif," said ibn Rashid early in 1917, "because my position precludes me from anything except

helping the Turks to whom allegiance is due."<sup>46</sup> But despite the ostensible centrality of his conflict with Husayn, ibn Rashid chose to stand aloof from it, engaging in minor raids and harrassments rather than active hostility and combat. One report even stated that he did not intend to hamper the Sharif at all, but would only pretend to help the Turks, preferring talk to action on their behalf.<sup>47</sup> There was apparently considerable personal enmity between the amir and the Ottoman commandant of Medina, Fakhri Pasha, and it seems that cooperative relations between Hail and the Ottoman Empire were sustained through the efforts of Rashid ibn Layla, the amir's agent in Istanbul, rather than by ibn Rashid himself.<sup>48</sup> The absence of an historical rationale helps to explain the dearth of evidence indicating an open hostility, suspicion or hatred for the Sharif on the amir's part. Unlike the remarks of ibn Sa'ud which we have examined, ibn Rashid never appears to have justified his actions in terms of a prior state of distrust and enmity, and this accounts for the comparative mildness of both his rhetoric and his activities against Husayn. As a child the amir had in fact been sent to Mecca in order to avoid the bloody struggle for succession to the throne of Hail that was taking place in the first decade of the century. After living for some years under the protection of the Hijaz

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<sup>46</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p. 204, Ruhi to Wilson (report: pp. 203-208), Mar. 2, 1917.

<sup>47</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 86, Newcombe to Wilson, report Apr. 25 to May 2, 1917 - this report by 'Muhammad of Mada'in', reputed to be an agent of ibn Rashid; F.O. 686/10/1, Ruhi to Wilson, p. 205, Mar. 2, 1917.

<sup>48</sup>F.O. 686/38, p. 229, 'Abdallah to Husayn, 3.6.36 (=Mar. 16, 1918), correspondence captured by 'Abdallah; F.O. 371/3049, Personalities of Iraq, printed booklet, p. 67 on Rashid ibn Layla; also F.O. 686/10/1, p. 203, Ruhi, report.

authorities he was finally recalled to Jabal Shammar in 1908.<sup>49</sup> If anything then, his relationship with Mecca had been a friendly one and his display of opposition to the Sharif was more for the benefit of his allies than in the service of his own interests.

Even for the Turks, the symbolic value of ibn Rashid's adhesion was probably more important than his actual military value in putting down the Sharif's revolt. They invested considerable money and supplies to ensure his loyalty to the Sublime Porte and in order to keep the Arabs divided. The Ottoman leaders feared that if ibn Rashid joined the Sharif, the rest of the tribes as far as Damascus would follow his lead.<sup>50</sup> The Turks maintained guns and soldiers at Hail and posted their own sentries around ibn Rashid's camps outside the city, making it clear that they were prepared to use coercion to prevent the amir's defection.<sup>51</sup> Indeed it is unlikely that the Turks would have been willing to risk a major defeat on ibn Rashid's part if this would have meant his effective elimination from the scene. Their modest expectations on the battlefield were therefore conveniently matched by the amir's own preference for inactivity, and their primary military benefit from the alliance was the vital source of camel supply which ibn Rashid could provide at considerable profit to himself. As for Husayn's attitude towards ibn Rashid's participation in

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<sup>49</sup>F.O. 371/3049, Personalities of Iraq, printed booklet, p. 67.

<sup>50</sup>F.O. 371/2775, Arab Bureau, Basrah to Secretary, etc., Simla, Sept. 13, 1916, information from intercepted letter to 'Ajaymi Sa'dun, no signature; also F.O. 371/3058, Sir R. Paget, Copenhagen to Foreign Office reports information from Russian Military Attache on ibn Rashid's subsidy from Istanbul.

<sup>51</sup>S.A. 147/1, telegram from Cairo to Foreign Office, Dec. 28, 1917; F.O. 371/2776, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Oct. 3, 1916.

the war, we do not read of any territorial designs on Hail which he might have had, nor of any significant diversion of arms or men on that front which was even remotely comparable to 'Abdallah's preoccupation with the Najd frontier. This was confirmed by the postwar negotiations, in which the Sharif made no attempt to take over Hail but saw ibn Rashid rather as a countervailing force to the threat posed by ibn Sa'ud. As ibn Rashid's rhetoric was mainly for the benefit of the Turks, so Husayn's denunciations of the amir were designed to please his British allies who he knew were extremely sensitive to any honest expressions of his sentiments about ibn Sa'ud. Britain was in fact far more active in denouncing and maligning ibn Rashid than Husayn.<sup>52</sup>

If the declared wartime alliances then had little relationship to the battlefield priorities of the Sharif of Mecca and the Amir of Jabal Shammar, let us see whether the inter-Arab military confrontations that did take place were more reflective of the actual interests being pursued in the context of the Arabian political system. To whichever side appealed for his cooperation during the war years, ibn Sa'ud made perfectly clear that while he was still engaged in the expansion and consolidation of his own power in central Arabia, he could offer little support for military operations elsewhere. In December 1914, when Enver Pasha had invited him to help the Turks defend Basrah against a British assault, ibn Sa'ud stated that he was occupied in his campaign against ibn Rashid, and that until the latter was reduced to the position of a vassal, he would not abandon these operations.<sup>53</sup> And to British and Sharifian requests for assistance, he re-

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<sup>52</sup>For example, F.O. 686/35, p. 55, Husayn to High Commissioner, July 1, 1917.

<sup>53</sup>S.A. 134/8, Clayton to Hakimam, Dec. 26, 1914, information from Indian Government.

plied that effective cooperation with the Hijaz was not practicable while he himself still faced a threat on his northern frontier, but that he would be quite willing to take action against ibn Rashid if he received assistance from Britain.<sup>54</sup> Indeed ibn Sa'ud carefully formulated his military plans against Hail with a view to obtaining British support for his activities. In the event of ibn Rashid proceeding towards Iraq in force, he would move up parallel with him toward Zubayr and join with tribes friendly to Britain in pushing him back towards Hail. Should ibn Rashid remain in his capital, he would deploy 4,000 men in Qasim to harrass or attack him as opportunity offered. In order to accomplish this, Cox reported, ibn Sa'ud was asking for 3,000 rifles and some machine guns with ammunition.<sup>55</sup> What ibn Sa'ud clearly hoped to do, was to use his alliance with Britain to strengthen his military position at the expense of ibn Rashid without committing himself to any direct or active role in support of the Sharif's revolt.

An examination of the actual military engagements taking place in central Arabia during the war confirms the primacy of the struggle between Riyadh and Hail. In late 1916 and early 1917 ibn Rashid was reported to be attacking elements of the Harb and Hutaym tribes northwest of Qasim in an area which was definitely considered a part of Najd.<sup>56</sup> Retaliating from the south and east, ibn Sa'ud and his son Turki pushed ibn Rashid

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<sup>54</sup>F.O. 371/2769, Cox, Basrah, to Foreign, Simla, Oct. 6, 1916; and Cox to Foreign, Government of India, from Bushire, Nov. 13, 1916.

<sup>55</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Cox to Secretary, etc., Delhi, Nov. 26, 1916.

<sup>56</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p. 176, Arab Bureau to Wilson, Apr. 2, 1917; ibid., p. 169, Arab Bureau to Wilson, Basrah report, Apr. 7, 1917; ibid., p. 207, Ruhi to Wilson, Mar. 2, 1917; F.O. 686/33, p. 146, Wilson to Husayn, Sept. 10, 1916.

back to Hail, though they stopped short of storming the town itself. For the next few months the two amirs watched and circled each other, making small-scale raids but never feeling themselves strong enough to push through a decisive offensive.<sup>57</sup> In September, Turki attacked and defeated elements of the Shammar and Banu Salim Harb, an action which caused much confusion as it was not certain to whom these tribesmen were affiliated. Ibn Sa'ud reported that the defeated shaykhs were with ibn Rashid, but Mecca labelled this an excuse for aggression, saying that they were in fact attached to the Sharif.<sup>58</sup> As the Wahhabi revival gained strength, Ikhwan forces were thrown into the battle and sent on harrying expeditions in the neighborhood of Hail, but the end of 1918 still saw no clear victory on either side.<sup>59</sup> Significantly, ibn Sa'ud turned down an offer by 'Abdallah, which certainly had ulterior motives, to stage a joint attack on Hail. It seems likely that he feared such cooperation would prejudice his own exclusive claims to dominion over Jabal Shammar and was content to hold ibn Rashid at bay until a suitable moment arrived to launch a final assault on his enemy's capital.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>F.O. 371/2775, Arab Bureau, Basrah to Secretary etc., Simla, Aug. 10, 1916, gives an earlier account of ibn Sa'ud's inability to deny ibn Rashid entry into Hail despite his armed presence near the town; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 109, Arab Bureau to Wilson, Basrah report, Apr. 7, 1917, makes a similar report; also F.O. 371/2775, General Officer Commanding, Force 'D', to Secretary etc., Simla, July 25, 1916.

<sup>58</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p. 147, Arab Bureau to Wilson, from Cox, Sept. 22, 1917; *ibid.*, p. 146, Acting Under-secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Muhammad 'Ali to Wilson, sent Wilson to Arab Bureau, Sept. 25, 1917; *ibid.*, p. 137, Husayn to Wilson, Oct. 4, 1917; *ibid.*, p. 136, Wilson to Arab Bureau, Oct. 7, 1917.

<sup>59</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p. 33, Hedghog, telegram to Cochrane, July 10, 1918.

<sup>60</sup>A.B. 76, Jan. 13, 1918, pp. 9-14. This argument was used by 'Abdallah as proof of ibn Sa'ud's insincerity toward the Arab cause; F.O. 371/2769, Cox to Foreign, Simla, Oct. 6, 1916.

None of the raids, skirmishes and intertribal fights that characterized the central Arabian desert during the war years had very much to do with the cause of "Arab liberation" (or even with the Turks for that matter). Ibn Sa'ud could not have made this clearer than in a letter to Cox in which he described his support for a dissident Shammar shakyyh whose tribe, he said, "used to be under our aegis of old, [as was] even ibn Rashid himself. Inshallah the old state of things will be restored."<sup>61</sup> To those who would see ibn Sa'ud's goals as representative of a new order in Arabia, it should be pointed out that the amir was referring here to a situation which had existed seventy years previously. The irrelevance of the official wartime ideology to his objectives in the historical struggle against ibn Rashid was shown by his conquest of Hail at a time when the "Turkish oppressors" had already been expelled, and the "Arab revolt" had been successful. Indeed, as Britain realized, it would have been more consistent with the goal of independence and unity to win ibn Rashid over to the "Arab cause." Subtle attempts were made to induce ibn Sa'ud to become reconciled with his enemy, "care being taken not to arouse suspicion in ibn Saud's mind that we recommend rapprochement because we attach any great importance to avoidance of the hostility of ibn Rashid."<sup>62</sup> So contradictory would such an accord have been with Riyadh's objectives, that when it was rumored in mid-1917 that ibn Rashid had asked for peace, both British and Arab observers agreed that it was highly unlikely that ibn Sa'ud would accept, "as it was obviously not in

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<sup>61</sup>F.O. 371/2776, ibn Sa'ud to Cox, July 20, 1916.

<sup>62</sup>F.O. 371/2775, General Officer Commanding, Force 'D' to Secretary, Simla, July 25, 1916.



his interest to do so."<sup>63</sup> Both amirs recognized that their conflict was beyond mediation and would be resolved by force, irrespective of the intrusion of outside influences into their sphere of combat.

Before returning to the Sharif's perspective on this struggle for central Arabia, several more characters should be introduced into the drama, simply to illustrate the intricate bonds that had tied Mecca, Riyadh and Hail into the complex relationship that existed during the war. Molded by generations of conflict and interaction these links were at various levels--from tribes that straddled the border regions between the three amirates to the machinations of rival aspirants for the throne who used the enmity of a hostile neighbor to further their ambitions within their own ruling house. To spell all these out in detail would be a dissertation in itself. Our aim here and throughout this chapter is to identify forces operating from within the Arabian political system itself in order to show that system functioning as a complex and viable entity with its own dynamic, propelling and producing Arab goals and actions at the time of the war.

If any single incident accounts for ibn Sa'ud's caution in dealing with Hail, and his unwillingness to leave his northern frontier unguarded throughout the war, it was the serious defeat he had suffered at the hands of ibn Rashid early in 1915.<sup>64</sup> In that battle, the 'Ajman tribe which was

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<sup>63</sup>F.O. 371/3059, opinion of Sulayman al-Dakhil, Baghdad, June 7, 1917, with British commentary referring to earlier statements to this effect made to them by ibn Sa'ud. The rebuff of any possible advances was mutual, as Wilson's report of a meeting with a representative of ibn Rashid at the end of 1918 showed: F.O. 686/40, p. 54, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Dec. 15, 1918.

<sup>64</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Cox to Secretary etc., Delhi; Basrah, Nov. 26, 1916.

under his aegis, had suddenly turned against him during the fight, attacking him in the rear and looting his supplies. It was that collision which had led ibn Sa'ud to back away from another immediate confrontation with his rival and to decide first to consolidate his power closer to home. To afford himself the necessary breathing space to rebuild his strength, he signed a treaty with ibn Rashid in June, 1915, an agreement which he claimed had been broken by Hail at the instigation of the Turks.<sup>65</sup> However, he could not forgive the 'Ajman for their teachery and swore to punish and subjugate them totally before risking his next move in the north. To make matters worse, 'Abdallah, it will be remembered, had taken advantage of ibn Sa'ud's difficulties with the 'Ajman to make an armed incursion into Qasim, further embittering relations between Mecca and Riyadh.<sup>66</sup> In fact, after ibn Sa'ud's brother was killed in battle against the 'Ajman in July, 1915, it became a matter of blood, and ibn Sa'ud determined to "exterminate" them.<sup>67</sup> It will be seen that for ibn Sa'ud as for Husayn, such shifting priorities were a matter of political as well as military necessity with threats in the sphere closest to the center of power assuming precedence over more distant challenges. While the conflict between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud deepened as a result of the 'Ajman episode, it would have to wait until the internal rebellion was crushed.

But the implications of the dispute extended out from Najd in al-

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<sup>65</sup>F.O. 371/2769, Cox to Foreign Secretary, Government of India, Basrah, Jan. 13, 1916, enclosing letters from ibn Sa'ud.

<sup>66</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Cox to Secretary etc., Simla, Nov. 21, 1916.

<sup>67</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/601, Chief Political Officer, Basrah to Arab Bureau, Cairo, Oct. 14, 1916.

most every direction. In the face of ibn Sa'ud's vow to extract blood revenge, the 'Ajman scrambled for another protector. British observers feared that ibn Sa'ud's "implacable hostility" would drive that tribe into the arms of ibn Rashid and the Turks.<sup>68</sup> One section of the 'Ajman sought British protection at Basrah and another joined 'Ajaymi Sa'dun who was fighting for the Turks.<sup>69</sup> However, the majority of the tribesmen crossed the border into Kuwayt and took refuge with the ruler of that principality, Salim ibn Mubarak ibn Sabah. In the bitter dispute for custody of the 'Ajman that ensued, the previous cooperation between Najd and Kuwayt that had enabled ibn Sa'ud to expel the Rashidis from Riyadh in 1902, was shattered.<sup>70</sup> When British mediation threatened to satisfy ibn Sa'ud's unrelenting insistence that the tribe be returned to his jurisdiction, several 'Ajman shaykhs approached the Sharif of Mecca, offering their allegiance and asking his protection. To have accepted their appeal would have constituted a direct challenge to ibn Sa'ud and angered the British who were at that time pressing Husayn to reconcile his differences with Riyadh. Placed in an embarrassing position, the Sharif gave the 'Ajman delegates a sympathetic hearing, referred them to the British representative at Kuwayt, and urged the British not to impose unacceptable conditions on ibn Sabah.<sup>71</sup> The case of the 'Ajman is particularly revealing

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<sup>68</sup>A.B. 57, July 24, 1917, p. 447; and A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, p. 188; I.O. L.P. & S./10/601, Chief Political Officer, Basrah to Officer in Charge, Cairo section, 'Eastern Bureau', Oct. 14, 1916.

<sup>69</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Arab Bureau, Basrah to Secretary etc., Simla, Aug. 10, 1916.

<sup>70</sup>A.B. 88, May 7, 1918, p. 148.

<sup>71</sup>S.A. 149/5, Arab Bureau, Cairo to Arab Bureau, Baghdad, Aug. 14, 1918; F.O. 686/10/2, p. 374, Husayn to Bassett, pp. 344-345, Mecca, 1.11.36 (=Aug.

for its graphic illustration of the interweaving threads of the Arabian political system. In his attempt to suppress one rebellious tribe within his own domain, ibn Sa'ud had brought to the fore the entire web of his relations with three of his neighbors. Significantly, the matter could only be temporarily resolved by reference to an outside arbiter, Great Britain. The example also makes clear the impossibility of discussing the revolt of the Sharif in isolation from the crucial issues of Arabian politics which impinged on his every action and decision.

If centrifugation was the cardinal principle of Arabian politics, as we have seen, then no case more clearly demonstrates this than the ability of one faction within a single family to mesh the pursuit of its own ambitions with the whole network of political ambition and conflict in the Peninsula. At the beginning of 1917, Sa'ud ibn Salih al-Subhan, brother-in-law and ex-vizier of ibn Rashid, joined the Arab movement and declared his hostility toward the Turks.<sup>72</sup> If we were to look no further than the initial rhetoric that accompanied this defection, we might assume with later chroniclers of the revolt, that ibn Subhan's action was motivated by a desire to free his brethren from Ottoman dominion. We shall see, however, that the most personal ambitions could constitute a motivation for a much wider involvement which complicated both the policies and the objectives of other participants in the Arab revolt and in the British alliance.

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8, 1918); *ibid.*, p. 374, Husayn to Bassett, Mecca, 2.11.36 (=Aug. 9, 1918); *ibid.*, p. 373, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Aug. 13, 1918; *ibid.*, p. 366, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Aug. 8, 1918; also *A.B.* 100, Aug. 20, 1918, p. 279, reports that the 'Ajman offered to help Husayn attack ibn Sa'ud but that the Sharif "resisted temptation."

<sup>72</sup>*F.O.* 686/34, p. 133, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Feb. 2, 1917; *A.B.* 57, July 24, 1917, p. 314, report by Gertrude Bell.

The struggle for succession to the throne of Hail had been a particularly bloody and brutal one. Before Muhammad ibn Rashid unified central Arabia under his control, there had been a series of murders and usurpations that had splintered the ruling house at Hail.<sup>73</sup> After Muhammad's death in 1891, the strife resumed. One contender, Dhari ibn Fahad al-Rashid admitted having slain with his own hand three children who stood between him and the succession, before fleeing Hail in 1908 and taking refuge at Riyadh. There he was treated with great consideration and became ibn Sa'ud's right-hand man, declaring that he was only waiting to return to Hail and seize the throne. But Dhari had suffered from tubercular disease and this had fostered similar pretensions in his younger brother, Faysal, who had also come to Riyadh and was in ibn Sa'ud's confidence.<sup>74</sup> Meanwhile, Sa'ud ibn Subhan as vizier in Hail, had quarrelled with the amir, Sa'ud ibn Rashid. The cause was primarily his jealousy of and antagonism to Rashid ibn Layla, who wielded great influence over the young amir.<sup>75</sup> Secretly he planned to kill ibn Rashid and set himself up as amir in his place. Since ibn Layla was closely associated with the Turks, it was logical that ibn Subhan should appeal to Britain for support in his plan. The British refused, replying that assassination was foreign to their methods and noting privately that the pretender was already a double-murderer: "Indeed in villainy it would be difficult to find the equals of

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<sup>73</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./11/116, A.H. Minute on Jabal Shammar, Jan. 6, 1917.

<sup>74</sup>F.O. 371/3049, Personalities of Iraq, printed booklet, p. 67.

<sup>75</sup>F.O. 371/3059, report of Sulayman al-Dakhil of Buraydah, who had spent much time in both Riyadh and Hail, Baghdad, June 7, 1917.

of these two families--the Rashids and the Subhans."<sup>76</sup> Finding his position at Hail increasingly untenable, ibn Subhan fled the town with his supporters to pursue his ambitions from the outside. As Dhari and Faysal ibn Fahad al-Rashid were at Riyadh and now represented rival contenders for the throne, it was reasonable that ibn Subhan should ally himself with Husayn rather than ibn Sa'ud. And in this way the Sharif gained a powerful adherent to his "cause." As one dispatch correctly warned, the alliance between Husayn and ibn Subhan could better be understood in terms of the "sanguinary history of the Rashid-Subhan conflict" than as a product of the shaykh's subscription to the ideology of the revolt.<sup>77</sup>

Indeed this process corroborates Barth's observations of segmentary opposition among the Pathans, that close collaterals will seek alliances with more distant groups which are the rivals of the allies of one's own rival.<sup>78</sup> Thus, from ibn Subhan's perspective, Husayn was in conflict with the Turks who were the allies of his own brother-in-law, with whom he was himself in primary opposition. Since both Dhari and Faysal ibn Fahad al-Rashid were now also potential opponents, and had sought refuge with ibn Sa'ud who was in conflict with both his own rival and his new ally, the support of the Sharif was therefore doubly advantageous. By a distant alliance, ibn Subhan was now able to pursue simultaneously both his primary feud (with ibn Rashid) and a secondary derivative feud with the close rivals of his own rival (Dhari and Faysal). A similar analysis might be

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<sup>76</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./10/645, Cox to Secretary etc., Delhi, Jan. 3, 1917; ibid., Cox to Secretary etc., Dec. 12, 1916; I.O. L.P.& S./11/116, File 58, A.H. Minute, Dec. 12, 1916.

<sup>77</sup>A.B. 38, Jan. 12, 1917, p. 20.

<sup>78</sup>Barth, "Segmentary Opposition," pp. 5, 11 and 12.

made from the viewpoint of any of the other actors in this process. It was the complex network of such overlapping feuds and alliances and the almost infinite combinations of opposition among segments which resulted, which ultimately maintained the traditional political system of Arabia.

In this increasingly complicated mosaic of central Arabian politics, the largest bone of contention and the prize coveted by all the participants in the power struggle, was the Shammar tribe. We have already seen that the Harb, 'Ataybah, 'Ajman and other tribes were all involved in the conflicts between Husayn, ibn Sa'ud and ibn Rashid. But the various sections of the Shammar which owed primary allegiance to Hail were particularly susceptible to being drawn into the dispute because of the general unrest in that area and the number of challenges to ibn Rashid's authority which were accentuated by his loyalty to the Ottoman Empire. It was the aim of all the contenders to win over sections of that large and powerful tribe and thus to weaken ibn Rashid and exercise leverage to strengthen their own claims to his domain. Reports throughout the war place the Shammar at the center of more inter-Arab fights than any other tribe, and show it becoming increasingly splintered and fragmented as the conflict deepened. It was ibn Subhan's declared aim to detach the entire tribe to himself, and from the time he left Hail he was engaged in raiding both the Shammar who were still loyal to ibn Rashid and the 'Ajman who had recently joined the amir.<sup>79</sup> But blood and kinship were still important fac-

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<sup>79</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/601, p. 176, Arab Bureau to Wilson, Apr. 2, 1917. This dispatch also reports that the 'Ajman had recently joined ibn Rashid as had the Sinjarah and Tuman sections of the Shammar in February; also, F.O. 686/10/1, p. 169, Arab Bureau to Wilson, Basrah report; I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Cox to Secretary, Delhi, Jan. 3, 1917.

tors in the traditional political system, and there was some doubt as to whether a Subhan, not being "of the Sheikhly house," could bring in the whole of the Shammar. To some extent, it was thought, his success would depend on the measure of cooperation accorded him by ibn Sa'ud. The Amir of Jabal Shammar "exists doubtless chiefly on the strength of a name," said one report, "but it cannot be denied that the name of ibn Rashid is still potent." Dhari ibn Tawalah, chief of the Aslam Shammar, had for this reason found considerable difficulty in raising his tribesmen against the amir.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, by the middle of 1917, the Shammar were reported to have split into two groups with most of the Aslam section having joined ibn Subhan and most of the 'Abdah still with ibn Rashid, though afraid to take the field for the amir because they feared retaliatory action by ibn Sa'ud.<sup>81</sup> The latter also used his two Rashidi contenders for the throne to spread his influence among the Aslam, whom he claimed had historically been under his control, and among the Sinjarah and Tuman Shammar who were negotiating with Dhari ibn Fahad.<sup>82</sup> At the same time Husayn was said to be "exerting all his influence" to winning over ibn Rashid's tribes, an effort that met with some success when eighteen 'Abdah Shammar shaykhs arrived at Abdallah's camp declaring their intention to join the Sharif.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>F.O. 371/3049, Personalities of Iraq, p. 67; and F.O. 686/6/2, p. 113, opinion of 'Abbas al-Falaji to Chief Political Officer, Basrah, sent by A.T. Wilson to Arab Bureau, Cairo, Mar. 18, 1917; also I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, High Commissioner, Cairo to Secretary etc., Delhi, Jan. 9, 1917.

<sup>81</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 157-158, Arab Bureau to Wilson, being telegraph from Cox, July 12, 1917, based on information from ibn Sa'ud.

<sup>82</sup>F.O. 371/2776, ibn Sa'ud to Cox, July 20, 1916; I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Cox to Secretary etc., Dec. 12, 1916.

<sup>83</sup>F.O. 371/2776, Wilson to McMahon, Jiddah, Oct. 6, 1916; F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 166-167, Joyce to Wilson, two letters of May 7 and 10, 1917, reporting and then confirming 'Abdallah's information.



However, until the end of the war, the Sharif was generally content to warn the Shammar not to raid tribes under his aegis, arranging with sympathetic shaykhs in Mesopotamia to attack them if they moved south against him.<sup>84</sup>

The degree to which this intense competition for supremacy in central Arabia was divorced from the war against the Ottoman Empire is shown by the simple fact that the claims of the various contenders clashed though they were apparently fighting on the same side. As we have already seen with ibn Sa'ud, none would abandon these claims for the sake of unity or divert any of their energies to fighting the Turks unless this also furthered their aspirations within the Arabian political system. The problem was that Britain's only standard for support and alliance was precisely the willingness to wage war against the Ottoman Empire, and London could not avoid embarrassment when the ambitions of its own protégés collided. Let us examine one clear example of this. On the one hand ibn Rashid and Hail were the Turks' most powerful stand-by and stronghold in central Arabia and it was clearly in the British interest to support anyone who could help eliminate them. On the other hand, supporting ibn Subhan's claim to the amirate of Jabal Shammar also conflicted with ibn Sa'ud's hope and desire to regain supremacy over the area, while the latter eventuality would certainly be interpreted by the Sharif as a direct threat to himself. The British realized the tightrope they were walking. "By openly supporting [ibn Subhan]...we commit ourselves to maintaining Hail against Riyadh," said Cairo, a policy which Cox strongly opposed on the grounds

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<sup>84</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 101-102, Husayn to Wilson, June 17, 1918, message from Hamud al-Muntafiq to that effect; and *ibid.*, p. 205, Ruhi to Wilson, Mar. 2, 1917.

that Jabal Shammar had only been independent of Najd for seventy years and that ibn Sa'ud's claim to the territory was a good one.<sup>85</sup> From further afield, British opinions were more cynical, and prepared to back whatever policy best served British military strategy. In London, the Secretary of State for India wrote, "ibn Saud's claims to Jabal Shammar are apparently not strong enough to prevent us giving al-Subhan moral support if there is reasonable probability that Shammar can be detached from ibn Rashid and used by us to military advantage." Showing less understanding of the complexities of Arabian politics than those closer to the scene, he suggested that ibn Subhan "attack and defeat ibn Rashid, thus releasing ibn Saud to move against Medina," a very fine strategy if one could only assume that the aim of all parties was to expel the Turks.<sup>86</sup> And an India Office minute noted: "There can be little doubt that Saud ibn Salih has his eye on the amirate, but so long as he does not tell us so, we need not hesitate to use him."<sup>87</sup> While Britain had no interest at all in becoming involved in the politics of central Arabia, it could not avoid being drawn

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<sup>85</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, High Commissioner to Secretary etc., Delhi and to Cox, Jan. 9, 1917; ibid., Cox to Secretary etc., Delhi, Jan. 3, 1917; I.O. L.P. & S./10/638, Cox to Foreign, Basrah, Jan. 24, 1917. It should be noted that the figure of 70 years is merely one that can be used. It is true, as we have seen, that for several decades Jabal Shammar was under Sa'udi control. But a different historical perspective might also be used, for prior to the Wahhabi invasion at the end of the eighteenth century, the region had been independent. Cox's view of the history of central Arabia was clearly ibn Sa'ud's.

<sup>86</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Secretary of State for India, London, to Viceroy, Delhi, undated.

<sup>87</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./11/116, A.H. Minute, Jan. 25, 1917.

into the web, whatever decision it made. Indeed, uncommitted and wavering shaykhs, concerned with considerations of strength as well as material reward, frequently seemed to evaluate British leanings before making their own decisions.<sup>88</sup>

While ibn Rashid was actively siding with the Turks, Britain could avoid making a direct choice between the various aspirants to the throne of Hail, simply by encouraging all of them to pursue their struggle against the common enemy. But as the defeat of the Turks became more likely, the competition for the spoils of war intensified and the British were under greater pressure to come forward with a clear policy on the future of Jabal Shammar. In a way the situation was analagous to that of the Sharif's title, in that the conflict between ambitions pursued in the Arabian political system on the one hand and the pursuit of the war on the other, could be avoided while both were served by fighting the Turks. In both cases it was only when one of these aims, the expulsion of the Turks, had been accomplished, that Britain had to face the inter-Arab rivalry directly. The dilemma over Jabal Shammar was manifest at a meeting of the Arab Bureau in Cairo in 1918.<sup>89</sup> Cox felt that England should not obstruct ibn Sa'ud's aspiration to dominion over Hail, though he thought it unlikely that the amir would actively pursue this aim until after the war. Another view however was that "...the balance of power in Arabia would be better preserved if ibn Rashid continued to rule independently there" and that the Shammar

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<sup>88</sup>For example, see I.O. L.P.& S./10/645, Cox to Secretary etc., Delhi, Jan. 7, 1917, reporting opinions of Assistant Political Office at Zubayr.

<sup>89</sup>F.O. 882/3, AP/18/1, Arab Bureau memorandum on meeting, Residency, Apr. 1, 1918.

would certainly oppose any attempt by ibn Sa'ud to take the town. The High Commissioner concurred that "we should keep our hands free to negotiate with ibn Rashid if he shows any desire to meet us."<sup>90</sup> Col. Wilson predicted that 'Abdallah would move against Hail as soon as the Turks were finally driven out of the Hijaz, a move that Cox was certain ibn Sa'ud would resent and which would do nothing to resolve his continuing feud with ibn Rashid. At this point there was a consensus that while Sa'ud ibn Subhan should be kept on side, he should not be encouraged to attack Hail. An informed Arab source had expressed the conviction that the majority of the Shammar would not accept a leader outside the Rashid family and that they looked to the nephews of the present amir as possible successors in the event of an Ottoman defeat.<sup>91</sup>

To make the situation even more complicated, several of the tribes affiliated with Husayn had their own ambitions in the disputed territory. The 'Ayda and Fuqarah tribes of the 'Anazah confederation were probably motivated to join the Sharif's coalition in order to avenge earlier defeats at the hands of ibn Rashid, whom both tribes considered a blood enemy, and in July 1917 they captured the towns of Taymah and Huwayyat from the Shammar. The postwar accord between Husayn and ibn Rashid probably contributed to the defection of the two tribes from the Sharif's alliance.<sup>92</sup> Meanwhile Nuri Sha'lan hoped to conquer Hail from the north

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<sup>90</sup>S.A. 148/9, Cairo telegram to Foreign Office, May 25, 1918.

<sup>91</sup>F.O. 371/3059, Sulayman al-Dakhil, Baghdad, June 7, 1917. The nephews were 'Abdallah and Muhammad, aged 12 and 11, sons of Talal, who had been murdered in 1906.

<sup>92</sup>A.B. 58, Aug. 5, 1917, p. 300; A.B. 72, Dec. 5, 1917, p. 485; and A.B. 91, June 4, 1918, p. 174.

and became amir of a combined Ruwala-Shammar confederation, an aim again bound to conflict with ibn Sa'ud's own penetration of Shammar territory from the south and east. As Faysal appeared to be instigating Nuri to proceed with these plans, British observers feared that such an action would further prejudice relations between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud.<sup>93</sup> Here therefore we have examples of the interaction of two levels of political activity, the world war intruding into the Arabian political system and frequently exacerbating existing conflicts by allowing them a broader framework within which to work themselves out. Thus the alignment of ibn Rashid with the Turks allowed several chiefs to pursue their ambitions in Hail with the blessing and support of Britain. While alliance with the Sharif's cause afforded the clearest opportunity for such action, it was also not the only one, especially if competition with the Sharif himself was seen as the ultimate struggle for power, as was the case with ibn Sa'ud. In that event, independent association with Britain could achieve the same purpose.

While several groups affiliated with Husayn had direct aspirations at the expense of ibn Rashid or sought to settle old quarrels with him, we have also noted that the Sharif himself did not place such a high priority on his struggle there. After all, the Hijaz had historically experienced far greater threats from Najd than from Jabal Shammar. It was therefore preferable for the Sharif to ensure that there was an effective countervailing force to ibn Sa'ud at Hail, than to extend his own limited power there and probably incur the wrath of the Shammar as well. Of all the

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<sup>93</sup>F.O. 882/3, AP/17/3, Meeting at Residency, Cairo, May 12, 1917, views of Col. Leachman; A.B. 39, Jan. 19, 1917, p. 29; F.O. 882/3, AP/18/1, Meeting at Residency, Cairo, memorandum, Apr. 1, 1918.

contenders for the throne, from Husayn's perspective, only ibn Sa'ud was therefore definitely excluded, while both Nuri and ibn Subhan received encouragement in their designs. However, one factor interfered in the plans of all these groups. At the end of 1918, ibn Rashid had still not been decisively defeated and was still a powerful force in his area. The amir, however, was perceptive enough to see that his allies, the Turks, were on the defensive, that he would soon be left isolated and that he had better explore alternative alignments within the framework of Arabian politics while he still had some bargaining power on his side.

It is not surprising therefore to read in August of that year that 'Abdallah was making overtures to ibn Rashid and that the latter had sent a delegate and letters to 'Abdallah sounding out the conditions that would be attached to a possible agreement. It is also significant that 'Abdallah was the initial contact since, of all the Sharif's sons, he was most closely associated with the confrontation with ibn Sa'ud.<sup>94</sup> In October there was discussion of a possible secret alliance between Mecca and the Shammar aimed at ibn Sa'ud, and ibn Rashid sent a mission to the Sharif himself. The emissary informed Husayn, probably falsely, that ibn Sa'ud had sent letters to ibn Rashid and the Turks suggesting an alliance against the Hijaz.<sup>95</sup> During this and subsequent meetings, ibn Rashid made several accusations against ibn Sa'ud, suggesting that the latter was going to attack 'Abdallah. Noting that he had a deadly blood feud with

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<sup>94</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 154, Husayn to Bassett, 6.11.36 (=Aug. 13, 1918); F.O. 686/10/1, p. 369, 'Abdallah to Husayn, Aug. 2, 1918; *ibid.*, p. 368, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Aug. 14, 1918; *ibid.*, p. 365, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Aug. 12, 1918; A.B. 99, Aug. 6, 1918, p. 271.

<sup>95</sup>A.B. 105, Oct. 8, 1918, p. 338.

ibn Sa'ud because his father had been killed by the Sa'udis, ibn Rashid asked for the Sharif's help against Najd.<sup>96</sup> In return for his submission to Husayn, ibn Rashid requested access to the Mesopotamian markets, a monthly subsidy, and the return of those villages that had been occupied by the Sharif's tribes.<sup>97</sup> The offer was tempting for Husayn from two points of view. It would be the first acknowledgement of his authority by a leader beyond his borders, thereby strengthening his claim to suzerainty over all Arabia, and it would be a powerful lever in his conflict with Najd, discouraging any aggressive designs on ibn Sa'ud's part. At this point however, the evidence suggests some deception on Husayn's part in his dealings with the British. That relationship certainly precluded him from openly announcing an alliance against ibn Sa'ud and the Sharif strenuously denied that this was his intention. But on November 27, 1918, ibn Rashid officially accepted the Sharif's suzerainty at a time when the border between the Hijaz and Najd had become increasingly tense.<sup>98</sup> In the following month the Sharif assured ibn Rashid that he would help him purchase his supplies from Yanbu' in case he experienced difficulties with the British in Iraq.<sup>99</sup> After the war, decorations and honors were bestowed on

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<sup>96</sup>F.O. 686/40, pp. 104-105, Wilson report of interview with Husayn on Nov. 17, 1918.

<sup>97</sup>Taymah, Huwayyat, Hayyat and Khaybar. See A.B. 108, Jan. 11, 1918; and F.O. 686/40, *idem.* But Husayn probably had little ability to persuade the tribes in that area to give up those towns even if he had wanted to. See A.B. 111, May 24, 1919, pp. 62-63, and A.B. 114, Aug. 30, 1919, p. 138.

<sup>98</sup>A.B. 107, Dec. 6, 1918, p. 370.

<sup>99</sup>S.A. 150/9, Cairo telegram to Foreign Office, Dec. 28, 1918.

ibn Rashid by the Sharif, and as the threat from ibn Sa'ud increased, guns and ammunition were sent from Medina to Hail.<sup>100</sup>

It is almost as though another war was taking place in Arabia that had no relation to the one described in almost all contemporary accounts of the Arab revolt. In this section we have dealt almost exclusively with conflicts in which Arabs fought Arabs, in which historical feuds were pursued and neighbors battled each other for the control of doubtful adherents. We have read not of Arabs fighting Turks, but of Rashidis against Sa'udis, of ibn Subhan raiding the Shammar and the Shammar raiding the Harb, of the 'Ajman versus ibn Sa'ud and ibn Sa'ud versus ibn Sabah, and of the 'Ayda and Fuqarah capturing towns belonging to ibn Rashid. If the Sharif was fighting for the "Arab cause," a term used as glibly and frequently in British policy statements during the war as in more recent analyses, exactly whom did this "cause" represent? Inter-Arab power struggles, border disputes and competing claims for regal succession could all represent reasons for joining the Arab movement. And if Husayn claimed suzerainty over a united Arabia, how was this to be brought about by an indigenous process of internal segmentation? The fragmentation of the Shammar, the divisions within the ruling house of Hail, and the fissiparous effect of the 'Ajman rebellion against ibn Sa'ud all produced new alliances. But unity and the acknowledgement of a supreme authority would have denied the very purpose for which these alliances were formed and undermined a system which was maintained by the oppo-

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<sup>100</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, p. 54, Nasir al-Din to British Agent, Mecca, July 29, 1920; F.O. 686/12/1, p. 64, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, Nov. 29, 1920.



sition between its parts. The function of the world war into which the Peninsula was involuntarily drawn, was to upset the balance of power and provide a wider context for the pursuit of traditional historical objectives. What the Arab revolt provided was an opportunity to realize, through the influx of massive new resources and the legitimization of armed conflict, goals which might otherwise have taken generations to accomplish. At the same time, it created threats to the security of leaders and tribes, which demanded the choosing of sides for the sake of self-protection. The atmosphere of a segmented system at a time of stress was conveyed by one report which described the central desert as "very disturbed and...very lively..., nothing gets through unplundered," adding in traditional parlance, that it was an unusually vigorous ghazzu season.<sup>101</sup> From within the labyrinth of interconnected channels which comprised the politics of central Arabia, let us now return to our primary rivalry between the amirs of Mecca and Riyadh, and examine the response of this conflict to the British war against the Ottoman Empire.

#### Husayn, ibn Sa'ud and the British Alliance

Any external force intervening in but pursuing interests outside the regional political system will necessarily distort a dispute whose roots and interests lie firmly inside that system. The Ottoman-British war, while not changing the basic objectives of the local centers of power, did affect the strategies by which these goals could be pursued. Having examined the intricacies and complications of central Arabian politics at

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<sup>101</sup>A.B. 44, March 12, 1917, pp. 117-122, report by R. Marrs, Assistant Political Officer, Zubayr.

the micro-level, we shall therefore return briefly to the principal conflict between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud and see how it was mediated and filtered through the alliance of both parties with Great Britain. How did the two amirs use their external ties to further their regional aims at each other's expense, and what effect did British arbitration between them have on the struggle for supremacy in central Arabia? By examining this question from the perspective of each actor in turn, we may observe several important principles of segmentary politics in action, and also find some important clues as to the effect of the war on the final outcome of the regional conflict.

For Britain, the first priority after 1914 was the successful prosecution of the world war and the defeat of Germany and the Ottoman Empire. To that end she would mobilize whatever support she could, and the opening of another front against the Turks to draw enemy troops away from the Dardanelles and Mesopotamia would certainly be beneficial to the war effort. It is not surprising then to find Britain negotiating with ibn Sa'ud at the same time as she was attempting to conclude an agreement with the Sharif of Mecca. On December 26, 1915, a treaty between the British Government and the Amir of Najd was signed guaranteeing the latter his territorial integrity and rights of succession in exchange for a pledge that ibn Sa'ud would deal with no foreign power other than Britain.<sup>102</sup> At a minimum this would neutralize the amir while it held open the possibility for causing the Turks more severe problems in the furthest reaches of their Empire. But in the negotiations themselves, ibn Sa'ud showed him-

<sup>102</sup>Hurewitz, Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East, vol. 2, pp. 17-18 for text of treaty; also Graves, The Life of Sir Percy Cox, pp. 197-198.

self as astute a diplomat and as hard a bargainer as Husayn. In the final revisions to the treaty, the amir carefully omitted the words "other chiefs and tribes" from the groups under British protection against whom he agreed to refrain from aggression.<sup>103</sup> Thus, even at this early stage, well before the Sharif had raised the standard of revolt, a careful observer might have predicted the seeds of future conflict in Arabia, in which Britain would be caught on the horns of an almost irresolvable dilemma. Whatever their private doubts and misgivings, however, it was in the interests of British negotiators as well as both amirs to seal their agreements at the earliest opportunity, and all parties were initially prepared to overlook possible future complications for the sake of present advantages. By early 1916 therefore, Britain had formal and written understandings with the two major rivals for power in central Arabia while they themselves had no comparable accord to define and settle their own relationship. In this situation it was almost inevitable that the amirs of Mecca and Riyadh would set the terms of their coexistence in the Peninsula through Britain and that Britain would be drawn into any attempt to resolve the differences between them.

For ibn Sa'ud, however, British support of the Arab movement was a double-edged weapon. If the Turks disappeared, he feared that Husayn would be the most powerful force in the Peninsula while he would remain a "mere Bedouin chieftain." At the very least an allied victory would buttress the Sharif's claims to the disputed border tribes. "If, on the other hand, the Central Powers conquer, as he thinks they will," wrote a

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<sup>103</sup>F.O. 371/2769, Cox to Foreign, Government of India, Bushire, Nov. 13, 1916; ibid., Cox to Foreign Secretary, Government of India, Jan. 3, 1916.

British observer, "he will have the satisfaction of seeing King Hussein go down, while as regards his own position, he relies on his political acumen to drive some sort of bargain with the Turks."<sup>104</sup> Despite his treaty with Britain therefore, the amir's relationship with both external powers was necessarily an ambiguous one. From the perspective of central Arabian politics, his ambition to act against ibn Rashid and eventually conquer Hail certainly favored an association with Britain. But his enmity with Husayn pulled in the opposite direction and according to the old adage that the enemy of an enemy is a friend, it was in the amir's interests to keep his bridges open in both directions. The Sharif had quoted ibn Sa'ud as having said, "The Turks will not be defeated and we must consider them."<sup>105</sup> And although there is no other confirmation of this remark, it may accurately have represented the amir's opinion.

In May 1914, ibn Sa'ud had signed a comprehensive treaty with the Ottoman Empire at Kuwayt, and although superseded by his agreement with Britain in December 1915, an observer remarked that the amir

did not intend to burn all his boats...He has a truly Teutonic contempt for the written word and never meant to keep the [Ottoman] treaty... [but] I don't think he will have the slightest hesitation in throwing us over if the interests of his house demanded it.<sup>106</sup>

Even before the Sharif's revolt became a factor in the equation, it was therefore, the "interests of his house" which was the crucial determinant of the amir's attitude toward alliance with any outside power. In 1914 a treaty with Istanbul served those purposes and in 1915 an agreement with

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<sup>104</sup>A.B. 76, Jan. 13, 1918, pp. 9-14; A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, p. 191.

<sup>105</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p. 159, Bassett to Arab Bureau, June 1, 1917.

<sup>106</sup>F.O. 371/2769, J. Keyes to M. Sykes, Bahrayn, Jan. 10, 1916.

England fulfilled them better. "His outstanding characteristic," wrote the observer, "is patriotism, or rather pride in the Feisal dynasty," making it quite clear that it was the traditional value of the blood tie and authority vested in the kinship group rather than a concept of state or nation which guided the definition of his interests. This is also apparent in his treaty with Britain in which ibn Sa'ud's primary and avowed object was to receive a guarantee that dynastic succession would remain in the Sa'udi house.<sup>107</sup> What the "interests of his house" appeared to dictate during the war was a policy of internal consolidation and external inaction, keeping both sides in play and being careful to offend neither. Sir Percy Cox noted that the amir would not "if he can avoid it enter actively into lists against the Turks.... He will probably do no more than continue to worry ibn Rashid in a desultory way at a respectful distance from Hail."<sup>108</sup> Active participation in the Arab movement and a consequent severing of his Ottoman ties would have curtailed his postwar options too drastically. Indeed there is substantial evidence that ibn Sa'ud maintained contact with the Turks throughout the war and even received large payments for the safe conduct of Ottoman military convoys through his territory.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>Hurewitz, Diplomacy, pp. 17-18; see also A.B. 25, Oct. 7, 1916, pp. 340-341, for Husayn's concern with the same issue.

<sup>108</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./10/645, Cox to Secretary etc., Simla, Basrah, Nov. 13, 1916; F.O. 371/2769, Cox to Foreign, Basrah, Sept. 27, 1916; F.O. 371/2769, Political Agent, Kuwayt to Cox, Basrah, Sept. 11, 1916; A.B. 32, Nov. 26, 1916, p. 473, ibn Sa'ud to Husayn, Oct. 30, 1916.

<sup>109</sup>For evidence of ibn Sa'ud's Ottoman ties and of supplies reaching the Turks from Najd, see: I.O. L.P.& S./11/118, Cox to Arab Bureau, Basrah, Feb. 9, 1917; I.O. L.P.& S./10/645, Cox to Secretary etc., Simla, Basrah, November 13, 1916; F.O. 371/2769, Cox to Foreign, Basrah, Sept. 27, 1916; F.O. 371/2776, Ruhi message from Husayn to Wilson, sent Wilson to McMahon, Jiddah, Oct. 6, 1916; F.O. 371/2768, p. 82, unsigned, undated "verbal message," from Husayn to Wilson, probably August, 1916; F.O. 686/34, p. 29, Faruqi to High Commissioner, Cairo, Apr. 22, 1917; F.O. 686/6/2, p. 109, Newcombe to

Certainly caravans destined for Medina, Hail and Damascus regularly passed through Najd at considerable profit to the amir who collected customs dues on the goods.

Meanwhile, ibn Sa'ud was determined to use the guarantees in his treaty with Britain to protect his political independence and to stave off Sharifian designs in what he considered his own territory. Aside from the dangers of an Ottoman defeat, he also feared that the Sharif would be able to use the massive resources being poured into the Hijaz to expand his power. While he knew that he could not expect a comparable subsidy while he was inactive against the Turks, he sought to use his fight with ibn Rashid, who was after all being supplied by the enemy, to extract some material benefit from his alliance. Indeed there is evidence that he deliberately inflated ibn Rashid's strength in the hope of receiving more arms from Britain.<sup>110</sup> On Cox's recommendation, ibn Sa'ud was granted at the end of 1916 a monthly subsidy of £5,000, and 3,000 rifles and four machine guns. Though British authorities urged on the amir "the importance of vigorous action immediately," there is little doubt that both the arms and the money were used to strengthen and consolidate his position in his own area.<sup>111</sup> One observer remarked that no

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Wilson, 15 miles west of San'a, Apr. 25, 1917; F.O. 686/6/1, p. 85, Joyce to Wilson, Rabigh, Feb. 5, 1917; A.B. 63, Sept. 18, 1917, p. 385; A.B. 109, Feb. 6, 1919, p. 18; A.B. 110, Apr. 30, 1919, pp. 44-45; A.B. 86, Apr. 21, 1918, p. 128; A.B. 91, June 4, 1918, p. 178; A.B. 93, June 18, 1918, p. 210; A.B. 101, Aug. 20, 1918; A.B. 30, Jan. 19, 1917, p. 35; A.B. 29, Nov. 8, 1916, p. 417; A.B. 89, May 14, 1918, p. 163; A.B. 90, May 24, 1918, p. 168; A.B. 60, Aug. 20, 1917, p. 347, Husayn to Wilson, reported by Lawrence; F.O. 686/35, p. 43, Husayn to High Commissioner, July 19, 1917; F.O. 371/3059, Husayn to Wilson, 16th Gamada al-Awal (=Mar. 10, 1917).

<sup>110</sup>A.B. 75, Jan. 3, 1918, p. 523.

<sup>111</sup>On the subsidy to ibn Sa'ud, see I.O. L.P. & S./10/45, and F.O. 371/2769, Cox to Foreign, Basrah, Nov. 26, 1916; F.O. 371/3044, Treasury to

greater cooperation could be expected from ibn Sa'ud even if his subsidy were increased. The extra money, he conjectured, would not go into fighting the Turks but rather into buying back the disputed sections of the Harb and 'Ataybah tribes which the Sharif, with his large resources, had managed to marshall for the revolt.<sup>112</sup>

This ability to manipulate both sides to his own advantage, which was a mark of ibn Sa'ud's consummate political skill, ceased to be an option for Husayn when he declared his revolt. Indeed, of all the major Arab chiefs involved in the First World War, only the Sharif of Mecca unequivocally severed his links with the Ottoman Empire. For Husayn there was no turning back; he had gambled the most. Jamal Pasha had stated plainly that he would hang the Sharif when Mecca was recaptured, and Husayn knew that he was totally dependent on Britain for protection.<sup>113</sup> On the other hand, he also had the most to gain. If the allies won the war, then Husayn's prestige and influence would likely be enormously increased, and this expectation encouraged him to formulate his rather extravagant demands for suzerainty over all Arabia. He had, however, broken a cardinal rule of any segmentary political system. By declaring himself for one side, whether it was destined to be the victorious one or not, and by becoming dependent on it, he had foreclosed his options and found him-

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Foreign Office, Jan. 1, 1917; F.O. 371/2769, Viceroy to Cox, Dec. 7, 1916. For discussion of the supply and replacement of rifles and ammunition for ibn Sa'ud, see dispatches of S.A. 149/5, Foreign, Simla telegram, Aug. 29, 1918; S.A. 149/8, Baghdad to Secretary of State, Sept. 16, 1918; S.A. 150/3, Baghdad telegram of Oct. 16, 1918; F.O. 686/34, p. 134, Pearson to Husayn, Jiddah, Feb. 14, 1917.

<sup>112</sup>A.B. 92, June 11, 1918, pp. 191-192.

<sup>113</sup>A.B. 35, pp. 538-539, reports in Syrian newspaper Al-Sharq, in Nov. 1916.

self in a serious impasse. On the one hand it was only through his military alliance with Britain that he could hope to expand his influence at ibn Sa'ud's expense. On the other hand Britain's treaty with his arch-rival and its interest in a united Arab front precluded the pursuit of his aims in central Arabia by traditional means. We have already seen for example how the Sharif "resisted [the] temptation" of making an alliance with the 'Ajman against ibn Sa'ud, a policy which in normal times would have been perfectly acceptable and eminently practical.<sup>114</sup>

How then can a dependent and local force turn its relationship with an outside power against its own regional rival? It can do so most effectively by persuading that power that the local enemy is in fact acting against the international interests of the great power. Pointing to ibn Sa'ud's failure to act against the Turks and ibn Rashid, the Sharif therefore accused his rival of having a "secret agreement" with the enemy. He cited the amir's refusal to cooperate in 'Abdallah's proposal to stage a joint attack on Hail and drew Britain's attention to the supplies and camels which reached the Turks from Najd.<sup>115</sup> British policy-makers were aware that Husayn's aim was "to discredit ibn Saud in our eyes," but the circumspet pieces of evidence against the amir which were regularly supplied by Mecca, did not succeed in turning British policy against Riyadh.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>A.B. 100, Aug. 20, 1918, p. 279.

<sup>115</sup>A.B. 91, June 4, 1918, p. 179; A.B. 76, Jan. 13, 1918, pp. 9-14; A.B. 86, Apr. 21, 1918, p. 128; F.O. 686/36, p. 113, Husayn to Wilson, Oct. 20, 1917; F.O. 686/39, p. 202, and F.O. 686/10/1, p. 8, Husayn to Bassett, 21.10.36 (=Aug. 29, 1918).

<sup>116</sup>F.O. 686/36, pp. 20-22, Husayn to Wilson, Oct. 8, 1917, and Wilson to Director, Arab Bureau, Oct. 12, 1917.



As tensions between the rival chiefs increased, and the impending end of the war heightened the pressure for a resolution of the conflict before his usefulness to the British was drastically diminished, the Sharif's allegations became more blatant and frequent and the tone of his denunciations more strident and bitter. When, after repeated British requests, he reluctantly agreed to transfer Zayd from the eastern front where he had been with 'Abdallah, to help Faysal in the north, Husayn said, "...in spite of the effect of ibn Saud's agreement with the enemy, we have sent Zeid who was confronting [his] intrigue and evil intentions."<sup>117</sup> Claiming that he had thereby weakened his position for the sake of British objectives, he stated that ibn Sa'ud was planning to act against him and that the arms issued by Britain to the amir had been distributed among the Wahhabis who were being deliberately stirred up against Mecca. Hinting at the possibility of civil war, he indirectly appealed to Britain to punish ibn Sa'ud.<sup>118</sup> Letters from Mecca to Riyadh were variously described by British sources as "discourteous and arrogant," "off-hand and patronising," "reproachful," "acrid," "overbearing," and "sarcastic." And on at least two occasions the Sharif returned letters from ibn Sa'ud unopened.<sup>119</sup> In his correspondence and interviews with the British the Sharif became overtly contemptuous of the amir who, he in-

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<sup>117</sup>F.O. 686/36, p. 113, Husayn to Wilson, Oct. 20, 1917.

<sup>118</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p. 159, Bassett to Arab Bureau, June 1, 1917; F.O. 686/35, p. 43, Husayn to High Commissioner, July 19, 1917; S.A. 150/9, Resident, Aden, Dec. 3, 1918; F.O. 686/39, p. 366, Husayn to Wilson, 29th Sha'aban, '36 (=June 8, 1918).

<sup>119</sup>A.B. 95, July 2, 1918, pp. 231-232; A.B. 33, Dec. 4, 1916, p. 512; F.O. 371/2769, and I.O. L.P.& S/10/645, Cox to Foreign, Nov. 21, 1916; and S.A. 146/10, Cairo telegram to Foreign Office, Nov. 27, 1917.

sisted "must first come and kiss my feet" before he would concede anything to him. The bitterness of course was mutual. In ibn Sa'ud's opinion, Husayn was a "trivial and unstable character" who "could never be depended upon" and whose insults "could only be obliterated by blood."<sup>120</sup>

The affective force of a comment can be as revealing of the author's intent as the subject matter, and there is nothing in his denunciations of even the Turks that bears comparison to the bitter resentment that permeated Husayn's remarks about ibn Sa'ud, no matter how diplomatically they were phrased for the sake of British sensibilities. What they indicate, in addition to his preoccupation with the eastern frontier, is a growing frustration that his dependence on Great Britain was a hindrance to his traditional political ambitions. Where his military alliance with Britain should have helped him to advance his position at his neighbor's expense, he found instead that Britain accorded apparent equality of treatment to both sides. He blamed Britain for closing its eyes to any provocation of ibn Sa'ud while continually exhorting him to a policy of restraint and passivity.<sup>121</sup> He felt that he was carrying the burden of the Arab movement while ibn Sa'ud, far from fighting the Turks, was obstructing his own military efforts. The least he could expect was for Britain to solve the border disputes in his own favor. Yet the end of the war saw him as far as

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<sup>120</sup>F.O. 371/2776, ibn Sa'ud to Cox, July 20, 1916; F.O. 371/2769, Cox interview with ibn Sa'ud, Nov. 26, 1915; and I.O. L.P.& S./10/645, Cox to Secretary etc., Simla, Basrah, Nov. 21, 1916.

<sup>121</sup>F.O. 686/40, p. 58, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Dec. 14, 1918; *ibid.*, p. 30, Husayn to Faysal, 13.4.37 (=Jan. 15, 1919); F.O. 686/10/2, p. 289, Husayn to Wilson, Dec. 3, 1918; F.O. 686/36, p. 24, Husayn to High Commissioner, Sept. 29, 1917.

ever from the achievement of his primary goal of dominion over Arabia while he was unable even to extract an overt expression of British support in his conflict with his arch-rival. What the Sharif had lost, in sum, was his functional independence within the traditional political system of the region, for the attainment of his goals came increasingly to depend on an external force whose interests were not necessarily his own.

There are, however, two sides to every relationship, and Britain's role in the struggle for power in central Arabia was a more active one than the mere provision of a tool which the two amirs could use to further their own aims and to limit the influence of their opponents. Third-party mediation was an accepted and time-honored method of conflict resolution in the Arabian political system, and Britain's assumption of this role at the regional level was the functional equivalent of that of the Sharif and especially Faysal among the feuding tribes of the Hijaz. Both Husayn and ibn Sa'ud however were deeply suspicious of British ties to the other, and it took Britain most of 1916 to iron out contradictions between the separate agreements it had made and to obtain the necessary assurances from each side that would afford the basis of a reconciliation. Considerable pressure was applied to convince the amirs that their main object should be "to expel the Turks from Arabia...and it is therefore in the interests of us all that there should be cooperation between all." Cox told ibn Sa'ud,

Compared with that great object, all other objects and interests become for the present insignificant and need to be deferred until the main object is achieved (such for instance as the matter of the Ajman....)<sup>122</sup>

Britain's insistence that it would tolerate no open hostility between the

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<sup>122</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/601, Cox to ibn Sa'ud, Basrah, Oct. 18, 1916.

two left absolutely no doubt as to its desired policy and both Arab leaders were politically wise enough to realize that had to play the game in order to secure the advantages of their alliance. To some extent British efforts to moderate tensions were successful. For Britain's benefit they initially exchanged cordial letters, maintained superficially friendly relations, cooperated in the resolution of some minor disagreements, and promised that they had no aggressive designs on each other.<sup>123</sup> Cairo and Baghdad meanwhile reassured their prospective clients that there was "nothing incompatible" between the guarantees given to each. On the contrary, they were told separately, their agreements with Britain served to protect their rights and reserve their interests. By the beginning of 1917, Britain felt that "a rapprochement...has at last been brought about."<sup>124</sup>

Not far below the fragile surface of amity and understanding, however, lurked a deep and underlying fear and hostility which all of Britain's diplomatic skills could not allay. Ibn Sa'ud's fears of Sharifian

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<sup>123</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 179, Ruhi to Wilson, Oct. 25, 1916; F.O. 371/3048, Cox to Foreign etc., Basrah, Jan. 24, 1917; F.O. 686/6/2, p. 113, information of 'Abbas al-Falaji to Chief Political Officer, Basrah, sent by A.T. Wilson to Arab Bureau, Cairo, Mar. 18, 1917; S.A. 146/7, Arab Bureau to Cox, Baghdad, Oct. 8, 1917; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 119, ibn Sa'ud to Husayn, Mar. 10, 1918, reported by Muslim Agent M.N. to Wilson, March 12, 1918; A.B. 38, Jan. 12, 1917, p. 15; and F.O. 371/2769, Cox to Foreign, Kuwait, Nov. 21, 1916.

<sup>124</sup>F.O. 686/34, p. 18, High Commissioner to Husayn, April, 1917; F.O. 371/2776, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Oct. 3, 1916; F.O. 371/2769, Foreign Office to McMahon, Sept. 23, 1916; ibid., Cox, Arab Bureau, Basrah to Arab Bureau, Cairo, Sept. 8, 1916; F.O. 371/2776, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Oct. 3, 1916; F.O. 371/2769, Secretary of State to Viceroy, Foreign Department, Sept. 19, 1916; F.O. 371/3047 and 371/2769, Secretary of State to Viceroy, re message to Cox from ibn Sa'ud, Nov. 15, 1916; I.O. L.P. & S./10/638, Minute of A.H., Jan. 20, 1917. For full text of ibn Sa'ud's treaty with Britain, see Hurewitz, Diplomacy, vol. 2, pp. 17-18.

interference with his tribes and Husayn's apprehensions of a Wahhabi revival were ultimately not amenable to mediation because both were merely symptoms of the continued and determined pursuit of a wider struggle which neither side was prepared to submit to disinterested arbitration. Mediation assumed a status of functional equality between the litigants, but one of Husayn's primary purposes in launching his revolt had been precisely to secure British approval of his superior standing among his neighbors. From the start there was an inherent contradiction in the negotiation of separate alliances by different branches of the British government between irreconcilable enemies. Certainly when policy-makers in Cairo, Delhi and London all agreed on the importance of a particular policy, the amirs had little choice but to accede to the demands made upon them. But such unanimity was rarely the case and the two amirs more often exploited British divisions to their own advantage.

The British-inspired "rapprochement" could therefore be little more than a rhetorical achievement. What Britain got for its efforts was the oratory it needed for political as well as military purposes to demonstrate a united Arab front against the Ottoman Empire. In a sense this was a major feat since it embodied the agreement of both sides to prevent their conflict from flaring into the open just long enough to create another battle front in the war and to defeat the enemy. What Britain lost, however, was a degree of honesty in its own relations with the amirs, for knowing what Britain wanted to hear, they publicly nurtured the image of cordial mutuality on which it insisted, while covertly pursuing their own aims at each other's expense. And in that sense it was a singular failure for British diplomacy, for having prided itself at the end

of 1916 with the forging of a rapprochement between the amirs, Britain found itself just two years later incapable of preventing the temporarily muffled antagonism from exploding into armed clashes. Britain had continuously assured Husayn that ibn Sa'ud was "loyal...friendly and sympathetic," and that any "trouble between friends" was the work of "intriguers" and enemy agents whose purpose was "to promote dissension between all the great Arab chiefs in order to prevent that unity of Arab purpose which they so greatly fear."<sup>125</sup> But that "unity" was a British creation, and the "trouble" and "dissension" in fact represented a bitter rivalry between its "friends." In the end the use of words to cover over real tensions inevitably produced accusations of misrepresentation and betrayal when Britain's former ally in Mecca was on the verge of total defeat a few years later. That Britain was never able to attack the real causes of the conflict is apparent from such British reports as the dispatch of Hogarth and Philby to "smooth over" the border trouble that was brewing at the beginning of 1918 and to put together a "working arrangement" to reestablish "Arab unity."<sup>126</sup>

The response of the struggle between Husayn and Sa'ud to external intervention therefore illustrates on the regional level certain cardinal principles of alliance formation in a segmented political system which we have already observed in relation to the Hijaz tribes. As a strategy for

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<sup>125</sup>F.O. 686/35, p. 52, High Commissioner to Husayn, June 29, 1917; F.O. 371/2769, Arab Bureau, Cox, Basrah to Arab Bureau, Cairo, Sept. 8, 1916; ibid., Cox to Foreign, Nov. 21, 1916; ibid., Foreign Office to Sirdar, with instructions for Wilson to communicate to Husayn, Nov. 25, 1916; ibid., Sirdar to Foreign Office, sends letter from Husayn to ibn Sa'ud, Dec. 2, 1916.

<sup>126</sup>A.B. 77, Jan. 27, 1918, p. 21; S.A. 148/5, Cairo telegram to Foreign Office, Mar. 12, 1918.

the achievement of temporary union, British mediation, like that of the Sharif, could lay aside but not permanently bury the hatchets of local conflict. The coalition of amirs like the coalition of tribes came apart before the last shots had been fired against the common enemy, the indigenous rivalries reemerging as the ultimate guarantor of a system based on the opposition between its several parts. Since the supply of material goods and weapons was in both cases the major source of leverage which they exercised over their clients, neither Britain nor the Sharif could cut off that supply, as the latter found when the Harb rebelled against him in 1918. Paradoxically, although an instrument of mediation, the arms supply served to escalate the local conflicts. British rifles were eventually used to decide the struggle for power in central Arabia as they were to settle intertribal feuds. The essential difference between British and Sharifian arbitration, however, was that when their mediation efforts collapsed and their alliances fell apart, Britain could leave while Husayn had to remain and face the consequences.

Most importantly, however, we have seen that the local response to external intervention was by no means one of passive compliance, both tribes and amirs actively manipulating their alliances in their own interests. As the tribes with the Sharif often retained an ambivalent attitude toward their professed enemy, so ibn Sa'ud recognized that his interests were best served by a more equivocal position toward the Turks than the British might have liked. Waterbury has noted that since members of a segmented system choose their enemies and allies "according to their own advantage in a particular situation," they have, at the time of conflict, three choices. They can choose one side and break contact with the other; they

can choose one and tell the other that they did so under duress; or they can withdraw from the conflict but maintain contacts with both sides.<sup>127</sup> By choosing the first alternative, Husayn received massive resources and an immediate gain in his position, but suffered the ultimate loss of his independence. By a combination of the second and third options, ibn Sa'ud deprived himself of the immediate benefit which large quantities of material goods and weapons could bring, and he feared a resultant loss of influence. By retaining his maneuverability and his freedom of action, however, and by resorting to religion as a traditional strategy for mobilization, ibn Sa'ud's ultimate gain was the maintenance of his independence. The final consequence of the intrusion of the world war into the Arabian political system was to raise the stakes and upset the local balance of power, thereby exacerbating rather than ameliorating the traditional struggle for power. Political ambitions were broadened and economic expectations heightened, infusing local conflicts with added passion. Since British intervention and mediation were dictated not by an involvement in the actual local issues dividing the antagonists, but by a concern for its own international interests, it was the regional forces themselves which finally established a new balance of power based on the outcome of their military confrontation.

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<sup>127</sup>Waterbury, *op. cit.*, p. 76.



## CHAPTER NINE

## KHURMAH, 1918: A CASE STUDY IN REGIONAL CONFLICT

Sarajevo, 1914, the Gulf of 'Aqabah in June 1967--it is sometimes possible to identify the time and place in which a political dispute turns dramatically into armed conflict. In one sense, Khurmah was the beginning of the war between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud which culminated in the conquest of the Hijaz in 1924-25. And in another sense it was the culmination of years of mutual hostility, fear and suspicion between the two amirs. But wherever it is placed in an historical chronology, Khurmah became in 1918 the focal point of the struggle, concentrating in one place and one time all the elements that comprised that bitter enmity. Inevitably it spilled over into a clash of arms, and significantly this took place while the war against Ottoman authority was still being waged and Medina was still in the hands of the enemy. Arabs fought Arabs on the very battle front of their war for "liberation." Because Khurmah illustrates graphically every aspect of the conflict between the Sharif and ibn Sa'ud as well as its importance in the context of the revolt against the Turks and the alliance with Britain, it serves as a convenient summary of our observations of regional conflict in a segmentary system. As a case study it enables us to see first the territorial issues dividing the amirs and the dispute for control of the tribes in the border areas. It shows the role of religion as a political force capable of mobilizing the Beduin to action. And it represents a trial of strength in the wider rivalry of the two chiefs for dominion over all Arabia. Finally, by polarizing the interests of all parties it allows us to see

the tensions between local objectives being pursued within the context of the traditional political system on the one hand and the intrusion of external forces on the other. In this chapter we shall look at each of these issues in turn, thus drawing together the main themes of the Sharif's external ambitions and the opposition they encountered at one historical point.

What happened at this small town, 200 miles east of Mecca in the border regions of the Hijaz and Najd? Khurmah is beyond the eastern border of most maps in the secondary literature on the Arab revolt and is not even mentioned by Zeine, Antonius, Graves, Nutting and most other historians of the period.<sup>1</sup> One must assume either that these writers were embarrassed by the spectacle of a major inter-Arab clash in what they assumed to be a united struggle for national liberation, or else that they divorced the conflict between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud from the real business of the Arab Revolt, represented by Faysal's gallant efforts on the Syrian front. Even in the British sources of the time, the dispute at Khurmah was not discussed or seriously considered until its ramifications for British interests could no longer be avoided. Aside from a passing reference by Philby in March 1918, the issue received no attention at all by British officers or observers until June of that year.<sup>2</sup> Although they were inevitably drawn into the conflict, the matter remained essentially an annoying "side-show" for the British that interfered with

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<sup>1</sup>It is, however, discussed by Busch, *op. cit.*, pp. 256-262, to illustrate divisions in the British administration.

<sup>2</sup>A.B. 81, Mar. 9, 1918, pp. 74-75, Philby describing his journey from Riyadh to Taif.

the military tasks at hand. "Our policy demanded its postponement as long as possible," the High Commissioner admitted frankly at the end of 1918.<sup>3</sup> However, in view of the fact that Khurmah was uppermost in the mind of the acknowledged leader of the Arab revolt, this failure by contemporary historians and initially by British participants in the movement to assign a central place to the confrontation, is itself significant. It indicates not only that contemporary historians have been unwilling to fracture the myth of Arab unity in the revolt, but that they have been more willing to buy the British perspective on the rising than that of the Sharif himself.

The town of Khurmah was part of a larger region that had been disputed for some time. The principal tribes involved were the Subai', Buqum, and some important sections of the 'Ataybah, and these were generally located in Wadis Khurmah, Turabah, Subai' and Ranyah.<sup>4</sup> Other smaller tribes in the area were the Shalawah, Dawasir and Qahtan. After ibn Sa'ud's capture of Riyadh in 1902 and the downfall of Rashidi power in Najd, the Ottoman Government placed these tribes and districts under the amirate of Mecca. Prior to that time, they had definitely been considered a part of Najd. For the next fifteen years representatives in the area were appointed by and responsible to the Sharif of Mecca. Since his accession in 1908, Husayn himself had chosen and replaced several

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<sup>3</sup>F.O. 882/3, AP/18/2, Wingate to Wilson, Cairo, Dec. 15, 1918.

<sup>4</sup>The chronology that follows is based primarily on facts in F.O. 686/10/2, p. 336, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Sept. 11, 1918; A.B. 112, June 24, 1919, pp. 80-88, report by H. Garland; and A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, pp. 111-119 summarizing reports and interviews representing opinions of Husayn, ibn Sa'ud, 'Abdallah, Faysal, Wilson, Hogarth, Lawrence and Philby.

emissaries, including the amir of Khurmah at that time, Khalid. Although Husayn claimed that "the amirs of Khurma have complete authority over the town and district of Khurma and the Hejaz section of the Subai tribe," it appeared that they had in fact very little real power and had shared the government of the country with the shaykhs of the Subai'.<sup>5</sup> Indeed the tribes of the area were regarded as "lawless" and had apparently never been reconciled to the rule of Mecca, partly because of the large Wahhabi element among them and partly because of their preference for authority remote, Riyadh being much further removed from their territory than Mecca. In 1914 Khalid converted to Wahhabism which had been experiencing a revival under ibn Sa'ud's aegis since about 1909. Probably because he did not have the military strength to do so, Husayn took no steps to rectify the situation for the next four years nor made any attempt to collect taxes from the area. At the beginning of 1918, however, he did send tax collectors who were immediately arrested by Khalid, who in turn raised a Beduin force from the Subai' tribe and ejected all pro-Sharifian elements from Khurmah. In February the Sharif commissioned the amir of Turabah and the neighboring Buqum tribe to attack Khurmah, but though the Subai' and Buqum maneuvered around each other for some time, there was no result. In May, Husayn sent a small expedition from Mecca which was defeated and Khalid continued to hold the town against all opposition.<sup>6</sup> A much larger force was dispatched under Sharif Shakir, amir of the 'Ataybah tribe, which was mauled by Ikhwan forces before it reached

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<sup>5</sup>F.O. 686/40, p. 3, Wilson to Wingate, Jiddah, Nov. 24, 1918.

<sup>6</sup>A.B. 81, Mar. 9, 1918, Philby report, pp. 74-75; A.B. 89, May 14, 1918, p. 164.

Khurmah. The conflict rapidly escalated with clashes becoming more and more frequent until 'Abdallah himself suffered a disastrous defeat at Turabah in June 1919 in which 250 of his men were killed. For a year from mid-1918, the dispute dominated Arabian politics, and while Faysal was fighting the Turks, the Sharif himself was preoccupied with a full-scale revolt within a revolt.

Husayn did not hesitate to accuse ibn Sa'ud of being "solely [and]...personally responsible" for the situation at Khurmah.<sup>7</sup> Immediately after his first punitive expedition had been defeated, the Sharif maintained that two convoys had been sent by ibn Sa'ud to assist the rebels and in the following months he reported that large numbers of armed men from Najd, including one force of 1,500 Ikhwan had arrived in Khurmah. As proof of ibn Sa'ud's active participation and support of Khalid, Husayn pointed out that the rebels were fighting with British rifles that had been supplied to ibn Sa'ud and that the guns lost by the Sharifian forces had been sent to Riyadh. The amir, he said, "created and is endeavouring to cause these troubles and disturbances."<sup>8</sup> That Ikhwan activity in Khurmah had ibn Sa'ud's approval and sympathy was indeed confirmed by a statement the latter made to Philby in which he swore to go and assist Khalid in the event of further alleged aggressive action

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<sup>7</sup>F.O. 686/39, pp. 230 and 237, Wilson interviews with Husayn, Jiddah, July 18 and 20, 1918; *ibid.*, p. 243, Husayn to Wilson, 13.10.36 (=July 21, 1918); F.O. 686/10/1, p. 14, Bassett to Arab Bureau for Wilson, July 27, 1918.

<sup>8</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p. 38, Wilson to Arab Bureau, July 4, 1918; *ibid.*, pp. 24-25, Wilson to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, July 18, 1918; F.O. 686/40, pp. 9-11, Wilson memorandum on relations between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud, Jiddah, Nov. 22, 1918, based on interviews with Husayn; F.O. 686/39, p. 230, Wilson interview with Husayn, Jiddah, July 18, 1918.

by Husayn.<sup>9</sup> However, the amir denied having instigated the uprising and there are no independent reports which bear out the Sharif's figures of troop movements from Najd. Both Husayn and ibn Sa'ud of course claimed to be acting in self-defense, accusing each other of provocation. But what is certain is that the Khurmah dispute drastically raised the level of enmity between them. For ibn Sa'ud, priorities shifted as the threat from Hail decreased by comparison. As one British correspondent observed in August, ibn Rashid was now "but a fourth on ibn Saud's list of enemies --the Sherif, the Ajman and ibn Sabah." Significantly, the Turks were not included here at all and there was even speculation that ibn Sa'ud was approaching ibn Rashid for an alliance against Husayn.<sup>10</sup> The deterioration in relations can be measured by the fact that while 12,000 Nadjis had attended the 1917 pilgrimage, ibn Sa'ud now issued orders that none were to attend in 1918. Despite intensive British pressure on the Sharif to write to ibn Sa'ud denying aggressive intentions on his own part, he refused to do so until all Ikhwan forces had been withdrawn from Khurmah, and on those grounds returned letters from ibn Sa'ud unopened.<sup>11</sup> The exchange of superficially friendly letters and the pilgrimage had been two of the main avenues by which the British had managed to maintain a certain level of cordiality between the amirs. But all such efforts, which had previously been relatively successful, now failed. The re-

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<sup>9</sup>F.O. 686/40, p. 3, Wilson to Wingate, Jiddah, Nov. 24, 1918 re Philby telegrams. Letters from Khalid to ibn Sa'ud further showed the bond between the two; A.B. 112, June 24, 1919, p. 82.

<sup>10</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p. 13, Yanbu' to Jiddah, July 26, 1918; A.B. 99, Aug. 6, 1918, p. 271; A.B. 105, Oct. 8, 1918, p. 338.

<sup>11</sup>A.B. 104, Sept. 24, 1918, p. 333; A.B. 107, Dec. 6, 1918, p. 361; F.O. 686/40, pp. 8-13, Wilson memorandum on relations between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud, Jiddah, Nov. 22, 1918; F.O. 686/39, p. 17, Bassett to Husayn, Jiddah, 11.1.37 (=Oct. 17, 1918); A.B. 106, Oct. 22, 1918, p. 359.

bellion at Khurmah had brought about a total impasse in which communication was no longer possible except by a clash of arms.

### Tribes and Territory

The territorial aspect of the struggle was the trigger of the collision. And in the British documents it received the most attention because it was also the only element amenable to adjudication. We have several times used the term "border areas," but where was the line separating the Hijaz from Najd? Did it in fact exist at all? The Khurmah incident gives us an opportunity to examine this issue more specifically. Although The Encyclopedia of Islam delineates "the historic boundary between al-Hidjaz and Nadjd," the term itself is somewhat misleading.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the modern nation state, the principalities of Arabia had no fixed territorial boundaries, as was seen by the Ottoman transfer of certain tribes to the jurisdiction of Mecca. Borders were determined according to the regional domains of the tribes whose allegiance the amirs claimed. The frontier disputes between Hail, Riyadh and Mecca in central Arabia were based therefore on competition for the loyalties of particular tribes rather than on the inherent integrity of the boundary lines themselves. According to their influence and power all three of the principal amirs had attempted at various times to bring the tribes of the Khurmah and Turabah districts under their control, but only the Sa'udis at the height of the Wahhabi movement a hundred years earlier had been really successful. Despite the Rashidi conquest of

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<sup>12</sup>The Encyclopedia of Islam, new ed., "Djazrat al-'Arab," in vol. 1, p. 542.

Najd, the authority of Hail had never been firmly established in that area and the subsequent transferral to Mecca, as we saw, did not alter the basic autonomy of the tribes.<sup>13</sup>

What was the situation in 1918? It was estimated that three-fourths of the Subai' tribe were Wahhabis, acknowledging ibn Sa'ud as their head and viewing the Meccans as kafirs, or unbelievers. Only in the past fifteen years had Sharifian influence begun to penetrate the area. The Buqum were regarded as a wild and violent tribe which had been under the influence of Hail, fighting for ibn Rashid in his campaign against the Sa'udis. However, since the decline of Hail they had tended to favor ibn Sa'ud over the Sharif. The 'Ataybah we have seen, were the principal bone of contention between Mecca and Riyadh, and during the war appeared to be fairly firmly under 'Abdallah's influence, although several 'Ataybah shayks switched their allegiance to ibn Sa'ud in the latter part of 1918.<sup>14</sup> The Qáhtan were mostly Wahhabi, and the Shalawah, sandwiched between the 'Ataybah and the Qahtan, were divided though probably more influenced by Najd than the Hijaz. The four to five thousand people who lived in the town of Khurmah itself were mostly Subai', with some Qahtan and Shalawah.

Given this complex mosaic of shifting loyalties, tribal autonomy, and largely nominal authority exercised from three directions in the past century, is not the very concept of a "boundary line" a misnomer? Not entirely, for tribal domains were fairly firmly established and the prin-

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<sup>13</sup>A.B. 114, Ramlah, Aug. 30, 1919, pp. 135-139, report by G.H. Goldie.

<sup>14</sup>A.B. 103, Sept. 10, 1918, p. 317, and A.B. 104, Sept. 24, 1918, p. 330, report such defections.



cialties could define their own borders according to the tribes they regarded as falling within their ambit. However, there was an additional problem where even a certain knowledge of the territorial limits of a tribal domain was not helpful. Since we have seen that centrifugation was a continuous process, it is clear from our evidence that internal segmentation did not stop with the tribe. Feuding clans, sections and families were constantly shifting their wider loyalties according to their domestic needs and advantages. Thus, parts of the 'Ataybah for example preferred the Hijaz and other parts looked to Najd, and even these affiliations were not permanent as the end of the war showed. "Tribal allegiance" was therefore as fluid a concept as "borders."

What is clear from the above is that the limits of influence of the three main principalities in central Arabia were in a state of continuous flux and that the borders themselves were therefore constantly changing and subject to differing interpretations. On a map they might most accurately be represented by dotted lines, the spaces between the dots representing not merely the ebb and flow of power between the three amirs, but the fact that, ultimately, authority rested with the tribes themselves. In the end the borders were determined as much by the interaction of the leading shaykhs with their nominal protectors as by the competition of the latter among themselves. Needless to say the tribes were adept at exploiting the rivalry of the amirs for their own benefit.

With these qualifications, let us now see how the Sharif and ibn Sa'ud defined their own borders and territorial rights in the Khurmah area, bearing in mind that this is merely one case study and that similar and equally complex disputes existed in relation to the Harb tribe, the

towns of Qasim, the vicinity of Taif and other regions. We do not need to consider ibn Rashid's claims here, since the power of Hail had been considerably weakened and posed no real threat to either Mecca or Riyadh by this time, though the amir's intrigues, offering alliances with each against the other, were still an element in the equation. Despite his accusation that ibn Sa'ud had fomented the trouble at Khurmah, the Sharif claimed that the entire disputed area belonged to Mecca and that he had appointed and paid the officials there, who were, he said, still receiving their salaries:

The affair at Khurma, in spite of its causes and source [an allusion to ibn Sa'ud], is an internal case which the Arab Government [Mecca] is determined to settle, and the said amir [ibn Sa'ud] has nothing to do with it. The distance from it to the nearest boundaries of his villages, which is over 1000 km., proves this.<sup>15</sup>

Husayn offered as further proof of his claims the fact that taxes and tribute had been sent to Mecca, that he had frequently visited Wadis Khurmah, Turabah and Subai' before the war, and had himself encouraged the cultivation of date palms there.<sup>16</sup> However, even sources sympathetic to the Sharif challenged his figure of 1,000 km. Some placed the border with Najd at the eastern edge of Subai' territory which was about 250 km. east of Khurmah, while others, who doubted the allegiance of the entire Subai' tribe placed it closer to Khurmah but still east of the town.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 156, Husayn to Bassett, Mecca, 28.10.36 (=Aug. 5, 1918); F.O. 686/10/2, p. 376, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Aug. 8, 1918; F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 24-25, Wilson to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, July 18, 1918.

<sup>16</sup>F.O. 686/40, pp. 13-14, (being pp. 6 and 7 of) Wilson memorandum, Nov. 22, 1918.

<sup>17</sup>A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, pp. 112-117, information gathered from various sources including Husayn, 'Abdallah, Faysal, ibn Sa'ud and

Ibn Sa'ud's case of course contradicted the Sharif's in almost every respect. Stating that Khurmah and Turabah were "parts of the countries of Najd...morally and materially," he dismissed the Sharif's appointment of officials as supererogatory and claimed the entire area on religious, territorial, historical, administrative and tribal grounds. He placed his border with the Hijaz fifty miles west of Khurmah at Wadi 'Aqiq to include all the disputed tribes, although Philby, while sympathetic to ibn Sa'ud's position, regarded the frontier as the recognized boundary between the Buqum and Subai' tribes, which was ten miles west of Khurmah.<sup>18</sup> Confident that the spread of Wahhabism had sealed the allegiance of most of the tribes in the area to Najd, ibn Sa'ud announced that the leading shakhs of the 'Ataybah, Subai' and Buqum should be allowed to state their preferences, and that he would be prepared to renounce his claim to Khurmah if they chose the Sharif.<sup>19</sup>

To make matters worse, both sides had the ability to escalate the conflict in other border areas where they felt they had an advantage. The Sharif felt more secure in the towns and settled areas where the population tended to be wary of the harsh puritanism of the Wahhabi revival, while ibn Sa'ud was better able to use his desert creed to win over the Beduin tribesmen. After the defeat of his first expedition to Khurmah, Husayn threatened to retaliate against ibn Sa'ud by intrigue in Qasim,

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officials of both the eastern and western branches of the Arab Bureau.

<sup>18</sup>Philby, Saudi Arabia, p. 95, in reference to the Wahhabi invasion of Mecca in 1803, does refer to Wadi 'Aqiq as the "Hijaz frontier."

<sup>19</sup>A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, pp. 116-117.

telling the British that it would be easy to raise all the people of that area in revolt against Riyadh. "...Most of the people of Qasim and in the towns of Najd are opposed to ibn Saud," he said, "and are only waiting for a signal to rise against him..."<sup>20</sup> For his part, ibn Sa'ud apparently sent his son Turki to Buraydah "to work influence" among several sections of the Harb and Hutaym tribes.<sup>21</sup> And Wilson saw the same potential for trouble in other places closer to Mecca, as had happened at Khurmah: "If the Amir of Taif [Sharif Sharaf of Wajh] joined the Ikhwan and defied King Hussein at Taif, I have little doubt that ibn Saud would send a force of Ikhwan to help him as soon as possible and might even claim Taif as his own by virtue of the Wahabi occupation about a century ago."<sup>22</sup>

But the strongest weapon in the Sharif's armory was the 'Ataybah tribe whose shaykhs 'Abdallah had been assiduously cultivating since before the war. Earlier we noted 'Abdallah's partiality and favoritism toward that tribe, having on one occasion declared himself to Lawrence to be "a Bedouin and an Ateibah."<sup>23</sup> And in the last chapter we saw the extent of 'Abdallah's investment of time, money and weapons to ensure that this crucial buffer with Najd would be at his service when he needed it. In July, 1918, 'Abdallah wrote secret and highly inflammatory letters

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<sup>20</sup>F.O. 686/39, pp. 230 and 236, Wilson interviews with Husayn, Jiddah, July 18 and July 20, 1918.

<sup>21</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 320, Husayn to Wilson, 21.9.36 (=June 29, 1918). The accusation is by Husayn and the sections referred to were the Banu Salim, Banu 'Am and Banu 'Abdallah sections of the Harb.

<sup>22</sup>F.O. 686/40, p. 4, Wilson to Wingate, Jiddah, Nov. 24, 1918.

<sup>23</sup>F.O. 686/6/2, p. 122, and again on p. 124, Lawrence to Wilson, Wajh, Apr. 16, 1917.

to the principal 'Ataybah shaykhs in which he informed them that the Sharif was at peace with ibn Rashid and directed the tribe to join him "in full force" in Wadi Subai' to punish ibn Sa'ud whom he stigmatized as a "rebel." He also called for a great gathering of tribes one day east of Khurmah which was apparently intended to take the conflict beyond the recapture of the town itself into territory which was definitely considered to belong to Najd. Some of the shaykhs, however, sent the letters on to ibn Sa'ud who in turn gave them to Philby. Worried by "the dangerous warlike tone of Abdullah's letters," the British brought them to the attention of the Sharif, who had clearly approved and been aware of the correspondence.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile Husayn prepared to send Sharif Shakir, his appointed 'Ataybah amir, with a force of a thousand men to retake Khurmah. Whether he really believed, as he told Wilson, that Shakir's mere presence on the scene as amir of the 'Ataybah would have an "influential and beneficial" effect on the tribes is not clear, but he was certainly taking no chances, arming and supplying the large force for an entire month.<sup>25</sup> Again concerned that the expedition might have aggressive designs and that the conflict would be expanded into other parts of ibn Sa'ud's territory, the British pressed Husayn for assurances that Shakir would stop with the capture of Khurmah and advance no further east. Despite almost daily British queries on the subject, the Sharif

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<sup>24</sup>F.O. 686/10/2, p. 362, 'Abdallah's letters of July 13, 1918, to Shaykhs Dhawi ibn Fuhayd and Hadhdhil ibn Hadhdhal, in High Commissioner to Husayn, Aug. 20, 1918; A.B. 101, Aug. 27, 1918, p. 293; F.O. 686/39, p. 121, Bassett to Husayn (being High Commissioner to Husayn), Jiddah, Aug. 28, 1918; F.O. 686/10/2, p. 354, Arab Bureau to Bassett, Aug. 27, 1918.

<sup>25</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 230, Wilson interview with Husayn, Jiddah, July 18, 1918; F.O. 686/10/2, p. 369, 'Abdallah to Husayn, 25.10.36 (=Aug. 2, 1918).

would not give this guarantee, promising only that Shakir would not attack ibn Sa'ud and would not proceed "beyond the boundary." According to Husayn's definition that could be 1,000 km. east of the town, the outcome of which, in the British view, would be "disastrous."<sup>26</sup> It is obviously not productive to argue whose intentions were aggressive and whose defensive. As far as the territorial aspect of the conflict between the Sharif and ibn Sa'ud was concerned, it is clear that both were prepared to press their advantages on the border to the limits that were possible within the perimeters of their alliance with Britain. Husayn, relying primarily on his bond with the 'Ataybah, and ibn Sa'ud on the political force of the Wahhabi movement, were now locked in a bitter struggle for the allegiance of the disputed tribes, from which there was no longer any retreat.

So far apart were the claims of the two sides, both physically in their boundary definitions and conceptually, that there appeared to be no basis for a compromise. If ibn Sa'ud's administrative title seemed weak, he drew on religious affiliations to support his case, and if the political preferences of the tribes did not sustain the Sharif's pretensions, he appealed to recent history to reinforce his argument. And while the dispute was centered on Khurmah itself, all the surrounding tribes were involved, so that hundreds of square miles of territory were at issue. We have seen that the claim of both sides to all this area was total. In groping for a solution Britain had hoped to find a legal basis for mediation in the 1910 treaty between the amirs, the provisions

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<sup>26</sup>F.O. 686/10/2, pp. 357-358, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, Aug. 24, 1918; and see also F.O. 686/39, p. 237, Wilson interview with Husayn, Jiddah, July 20, 1918; and F.O. 686/10/1, p. 19, Wilson to Arab Bureau, July 21, 1918.

of which were noted at the beginning of the previous chapter. But both regarded this agreement as obsolete and restrictive of the wider ambitions they now held. As late as July 1919, despite repeated British requests, neither side had been able to produce a copy of that treaty.<sup>27</sup> Nor were the official Ottoman boundaries any help, for while the Turks had formerly favored Sharifian control over Khurmah and its neighborhood, they now backed ibn Sa'ud's most extreme demands. The 1915 treaty between Britain and ibn Sa'ud had defined no boundaries for Najd, and the prewar negotiations between Husayn and McMahon, while deliberating at length on the northern frontiers of the independent Arab state, had not considered the internal borders of the Peninsula. There appeared to be no basis for a territorial settlement between the protagonists. As the British agent in Jiddah remarked in September 1918: "To attempt to negotiate any definite boundary between Hejaz and Najd at the present time I regard as a hopeless and dangerous undertaking."<sup>28</sup> Only a trial of strength could decide the issue.

### Religion

The second aspect of the conflict between the Sharif and ibn Sa'ud was religious and this also was reflected at Khurmah. As we have already seen, the spiritual and temporal elements were inextricably linked in Arabian politics and our purpose in mentioning religion separately here is precisely to draw attention to its crucial role as a mobilizing force

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<sup>27</sup>A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, pp. 112-117.

<sup>28</sup>F.O. 686/10/2, p. 336, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Sept. 11, 1918.

in the struggle for power in central Arabia. If theories of modernization are correct and the dominant ideology of modern nation states is secular in orientation, then the use of religion as a political strategy is in itself representative of a traditional political system.<sup>29</sup> Ibn Khaldun, as we saw, had observed that a ruler who could use "religious propaganda" in the service of his bid for royal authority, was able to unify the Beduin behind him and counteract their anarchic tendencies.<sup>30</sup> And at Khurmah, as in the conflict as a whole, it was not so much the puritanical tenets of Wahhabism, with their emphasis on extreme fatalism and submission, which were important in themselves, but the Ikhwan, or Brotherhood, which propagated that faith and turned it into a political force.<sup>31</sup>

There were undoubtedly large numbers who initially joined the sect out of fear, for the Ikhwan was definitely fanatical and preached by forcible conversion. Kafirs, or infidels, who included adherents of orthodox Islam, were put to the sword at least until the end of 1919 when

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<sup>29</sup>See, for example, International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, "Modernization"; Max F. Millikan and Donald L.M. Blackmer, The Emerging Nations: Their Growth and United States Policy, Boston, Little, Brown, and Company, 1961, pp. 34-37. Almost all the modernization theorists agree on this basic concept of secular versus religious authority.

<sup>30</sup>Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, pp. 120-127.

<sup>31</sup>Detailed references and descriptions of the Ikhwan and Wahhabism are in F.O. 371/3054, Lawrence, memorandum, Jiddah, July 29, 1917, being Husayn's views on the sect; A.B. 108, Jan. 11, 1919, pp. 3-5, Philby lists the main tenets of the movement, criticizing the views of Juhaynah shaykh Dakhil 'Allah al-Qadi given earlier in A.B. 105, Oct. 8, 1918, p. 340; also A.B. 112, June 24, 1919, pp. 86-88, Assistant Political Officer, Basrah; and Notes on the Middle East, No. 4, 1920, pp. 103-112, on the "Ikhwan, Its History and Beliefs," by Major H.R.P. Dickson, Political Agent, Bahrain. The Ikhwan was the name given to the brotherhood of all true believers and, according to Philby, represented those who had entered the inner circle of the Wahhabi sect and honored its practices completely; see Philby, Sa'udi Arabia, pp. 261 ff, 308 ff, and elsewhere.



ibn Sa'ud abolished this practice.<sup>32</sup> "It would appear that ibn Saud's policy is to extend his dominions by converting influential men and tribes to Wahhabism," wrote Wilson, "and where successful he claims the tribe, territory or town concerned."<sup>33</sup> The extent to which the movement was indeed a tool in his own hands can be gauged from the amir's statement to a British officer: "I am the Ikhwan."<sup>34</sup> The method by which ibn Sa'ud established and maintained his political control was as simple as it was effective. When a tribe had been converted he immediately appointed a specific location in which a village was to be built and at least part of the tribe permanently settled. The shaykh was then summoned to Riyadh and sent to a local school of 'ulama for religious instruction, while several Ikhwan were sent to the tribe to give daily classes on Islam and appeal to the "sleeping fanaticism" in the Beduin.<sup>35</sup> When the shaykh had finished his schooling he built a house in Riyadh and remained there to attend on the amir who was also the Imam of the sect. When ibn Sa'ud wanted to mobilize the Ikhwan forces in a particular area, he simply gave the word to his body-guard of shaykhs, dispatched them to their tribes, and the countryside was aflame within two days. Between 1916 and 1920, sixty-three new Ikhwan settlements were established in Najd. Within the space of a few years, ibn Sa'ud had molded the Ikhwan into a formidable political tool and was ready to challenge the Sharif's power on all fronts. Khumrah was the first major testing

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<sup>32</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 4, 1920, p. 110, Major Dickson, Bahrain.

<sup>33</sup>F.O. 686/40, p. 4, Wilson to Wingate, Jiddah, Nov. 24, 1918.

<sup>34</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 4, p. 104.

<sup>35</sup>Notes, No. 4, pp. 106-107; and A.B. 108, Jan. 11, 1919, pp. 3-5, Philby.

ground of the political salience of the Wahhabi revival.

It was the conversion of Khalid which sparked the rebellion and it is certain that at an early period of the trouble a considerable number of Najdi Ikhwan came to Khurmah to support the amir and proselytize among the tribes. We have already seen that the vast majority of the Subai' and Qahtan tribes owed allegiance to Najd by virtue of their Wahhabi affiliation and the creed was spreading rapidly among the 'Ataybah, Buqum and Shalawah tribes. Furthermore, as the representative of orthodox Islam, the Sharif was a direct target of the Ikhwan preachers, and while he was attacked in religious terms as a kafir, the challenge was obviously one to his political leadership as well. Husayn recognized that it was the continued Ikhwan presence that constituted the greatest single danger to his authority. Unlike the local rebellions among his tribes protesting arrears of pay and shortages of supplies, which were transitory and volatile affairs, the Ikhwan activity posed a continuing threat which created its own powerful momentum and placed the Sharif entirely on the defensive. When he suspended his correspondence with ibn Sa'ud he demanded first that all Najdi Ikhwan be withdrawn from Khurmah and then that Great Britain "compel the said amir [ibn Sa'ud] to cancel what he has titled as 'Ikhwan'--the political society appearing in a religious form."<sup>36</sup> Convinced that ibn Sa'ud had instituted the Brotherhood solely for political and aggressive purposes, the Sharif was emphatic that "the Ikhwan villages, which ibn Saud has been establishing in different parts of the country, must be broken up and the inhabitants return to their tribes if there is to be peace in Central Arabia....These villages

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<sup>36</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 61, Husayn to Bassett, 12.12.36 (=Sept. 18, 1918).

are really military posts and as such a constant threat to ibn Saud's neighbours."<sup>37</sup> It is for this reason that we may suspect, although we have no proof, that Sharif Shakir's instructions and intentions may have been not only to take Khurmah itself but also to attack the Ikhwan villages in the entire area, which would explain Husayn's unwillingness to give Britain the required assurances in relation to the expedition's objectives.<sup>38</sup>

While religion was therefore a vitally important factor both at Khurmah and in the conflict as a whole, the offensive was clearly ibn Sa'ud's. Orthodoxy by its very nature affirms the status quo and does not lend itself to the contagious fervor that characterized the Wahhabi movement. While he could appeal to the fear of forcible conversion to arouse resistance to the Ikhwan, ultimately the Sharif's only recourse was to traditional military means. But as Hurewitz points out, although Husayn had better equipment and military skill, he could not muster the zeal and devotion among his forces to match the Wahhabis.<sup>39</sup> The incident at Khurmah convinced Husayn that the Wahhabi movement not only endangered all the objectives for which he had fought the revolt, but by penetrating what he considered his own domain, threatened the very base of his power

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<sup>37</sup>F.O. 686/40, p. 8, Wilson interviews with Husayn on latter's relations with ibn Sa'ud, memorandum, Jiddah, Nov. 22, 1918; ibid., p. 12; ibid., pp. 86-87, Husayn's statement on Najd, Nov. 21, 1918; A.B. 105, Oct. 15, 1918, p. 34.

<sup>38</sup>F.O. 686/10/2, p. 375, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Aug. 10, 1918, Husayn Ruhi intercepted a letter from the Sharif to Shakir giving the latter instructions to "kill or expel all the unitarians (muwahidin) from Khurmah," indicating that it was the Wahhabis as a religious group and not just Khalid as a political rebel who was to be punished.

<sup>39</sup>Hurewitz, Middle East Politics, p. 243.

in the Hijaz. He knew that if it was successful at Khurmah, the Ikhwan would not stop there. The essence of the movement was expansion and Taif was only 170 miles away.<sup>40</sup> "This society is the only thing which is going to destroy all Arab affairs," wrote the Sharif. "Therefore every work will be useless so long as this society exists."<sup>41</sup> His own survival therefore seemed to demand resolute military action before it was too late, and the response of 'Abdallah and Shakir in the wake of the failure of the Sharif's first expedition to Khurmah indicated a determination to inflict a decisive defeat on ibn Sa'ud and to crush the Ikhwan. This raised the specter of a bloody civil war. Wilson wrote:

Unless Ikhwan activities and propaganda work are checked in the near future, a constant source of unrest will be ever present which may eventually become a great danger throughout central and southern Arabia by starting a religious war between the orthodox Moslems and the Wahabis. The possibility that the former may be driven--in order to safeguard their religion--to unite and take similar action to that of the Sultan of Turkey, through the agency of Mohammed Ali of Egypt about a hundred years ago, should not be lost sight of.<sup>42</sup>

Even a century earlier, however, the counteroffensive was not launched until the Holy Cities had been occupied and Wahhabi power had reached its zenith. And then it took nearly three decades to drive the invaders back to the neighborhood of Riyadh.<sup>43</sup> The Sharif did not begin to sap the strength of the Ikhwan, and ibn Sa'ud's genius, as Hurewitz notes,

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<sup>40</sup>F.O. 686/39, Wilson interview with Husayn at Jiddah, July 18, 1918.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 61, Husayn to Bassett, 12.12.36 (=Sept. 18, 1918).

<sup>42</sup>F.O. 686/40, p. 3, Wilson to Wingate, Jiddah, Nov. 24, 1918.

<sup>43</sup>de Gaury, Rulers of Mecca, chaps. 13 and 14.

was to transform the movement himself and to turn religious fundamentalism into a powerful force for state building and the creation of modern political institutions.<sup>44</sup>

#### Supremacy over Arabia

The competing territorial and tribal claims in the border areas and the religious dimension of the Khurmah rebellion have both alluded to the third and major theme of the struggle between the Sharif and ibn Sa'ud. Ultimately what that conflict was about was the assertion of supremacy in the Arabian Peninsula as a whole, and this brings us back to the question of the suzerainty. We have now come full circle and the discussion returns to the Sharif's principal objectives in launching his revolt. From the time of his negotiations with McMahon and throughout the war, Husayn had assumed, as Wilson frequently noted, that he would be head of the newly formed Arab nation whose independence Britain had promised to guarantee after the defeat of the Turks. While he had continually denied any thoughts of self-interest and self-aggrandisement, he had also taken for granted that there was no other serious candidate for the position. If the Turks were defeated, his faithful alliance with Britain would assure his own accession to the leadership.<sup>45</sup> Khurmah dramatically demonstrated that another candidate was indeed possible, and that the Sharif's loyalty to Britain was worth nothing if he could not maintain his authority in his own domain. Suddenly it became very clear

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<sup>44</sup>Hurewitz, Middle East Politics, p. 244.

<sup>45</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 227, Wilson interview with Husayn, Jiddah, July 18, 1918.

to Husayn that his dependence on an external power had not prevented a serious erosion of his authority from within the Arabian political system itself. The struggle at Khurmah in the largest sense was therefore an attempt by the Sharif to reassert his right to hegemony over all Arabia and by ibn Sa'ud to challenge that right.

That this aspect of the Khurmah dispute was uppermost in his mind and a determinant of his actions, is shown by the Sharif's numerous references to his prestige and status in relation to ibn Sa'ud. His ability to furnish seemingly limitless supplies of money and weapons to his tribesmen in the fight against the Ottoman Empire had earned him respect and regard as a leader of strength and military might. That reputation, he felt, had been considerably damaged as a result of his failure to retaliate at Khurmah. He told Wilson that his inaction had begun to make people believe he was afraid of ibn Sa'ud and it was therefore quite impossible for him to leave Khalid alone.<sup>46</sup> And in response to British requests that he write a conciliatory letter to Riyadh, Husayn's main argument was that after all ibn Sa'ud had done, such a letter would be an irreparable blow to his prestige. He felt he could neither send nor receive letters from ibn Sa'ud without humbling himself and publicly acknowledging his inferiority as long as the latter's troops were in what he regarded as Hijaz territory. In an indication of the extent to which his dependence on Great Britain had deprived him of the initiative in

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<sup>46</sup>A.B. 97, July 23, 1918, pp. 261-262; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 20, Wilson to Arab Bureau, July 20, 1918; *ibid.*, pp. 24-25, Wilson to Arab Bureau, July 18, 1918; F.O. 686/40, Wilson memorandum on relations between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud, Jiddah, Nov. 22, 1918, based on interviews with Husayn. Several references to this effect are on pp. 9, 10 and 13.

domestic politics, Husayn maintained that he would do whatever British interests required, even "throw himself from the window." If Britain insisted, he would write to ibn Sa'ud, provided that he himself resigned and left the country immediately afterwards.<sup>47</sup> The Sharif further accused ibn Sa'ud of deliberately undermining his authority and stirring up dissension by writing to various shaykhs, especially in the border areas pointing out that the King was King of the Hijaz only and that the Hijaz boundary was only a short distance from Taif. At the time of Khurmah, therefore, both Husayn and ibn Sa'ud clearly had in mind the implications of the regal title and the issue of the suzerainty.<sup>48</sup>

Certainly personal honor was a value of greater importance in the traditional Arabian context than in say a modern parliamentary system in which more impersonal, objective and legalistic standards of government applied. According to Arab tribal codes, military prowess and political influence were related directly to the notability and dignity of the leader. By contrast, a differentiated and specialized nation-state such as Britain would have been more able to separate the function of the army and the various branches of the administration from subjective evaluations of any individual within that system.<sup>49</sup> In the Peninsula, wrote Gertrude Bell,

the ultimate source of power, ... as in the whole course of Arab history, is the personality of the commander. Through him, whether

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<sup>47</sup>Wilson reporting Husayn's opinion after an interview; F.O. 686/40, ibid., pp. 10, 11, and 14.

<sup>48</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 231, Wilson interview with Husayn, Jiddah, July 18, 1918.

<sup>49</sup>Cyril Black, The Dynamics of Modernization: A Study in Comparative History, New York, Harper and Row, 1967, pp. 14-16, 64.

he be an Abbasid Caliph or an Amir of Najd, the political entity holds, and with his disappearance it breaks.<sup>50</sup>

In that light then, it is also possible to understand the Sharif's connection of Fakhri Pasha's refusal to surrender Medina after the Ottoman defeat at the end of 1918, with his own loss of prestige at the hands of ibn Sa'ud:

No doubt the arrogance on the part of the Commander of Medina is due to our known inability to even punish (or stop) the Wahabis at Khurma and therefore a Great enemy Commander who is more courageous, more able, more skilful and stronger (than they of Khurma), who was not defeated, is too proud to surrender.<sup>51</sup>

The mounting despair which becomes more and more evident in the Sharif's correspondence and conversations on Khurmah toward the end of 1918 reflected therefore the inseparability of his political position vis-a-vis ibn Sa'ud from the loss of personal authority and prestige which he experienced.

It was this aspect of the Khurmah rebellion, as the first crucial test of the wider claims of the two leaders to supremacy in the Peninsula, that gave the incident its intensity and defied any attempts to mediate it:

The Khurma affair [wrote Wingate to Balfour] is regarded by both King Husein and Amir ibn Saud as a trial of strength between them. The former has been alarmed at the insidious spread of Wahabite influence westwards. The latter has regarded this revival of "Ikhwan" activity as a bulwark against the extension of Sherifian authority eastwards. Both principals in the quarrel seek our support...Our energies at the present moment are directed to the localisation of the Khurma dispute and the prevention of hostilities ensuing between the King and ibn Saud.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Gertrude Bell, A Ruler of the Desert, a sketch of ibn Sa'ud, copies of the article sent to Delhi, Cairo and London by P.Z. Cox, Chief Political Officer, Basrah, Dec. 3, 1916.

<sup>51</sup>P.O. 686/40, p. 45, Husayn to Wilson, 19.3.37, (=Dec. 23, 1918).

<sup>52</sup>S.A. 149/3, Wingate to Balfour, Ramlah, undated, probably Sept., 1918, (emphasis added).



But while British policy interests demanded that the conflict be downplayed and minimized at least until the end of the war, the protagonists themselves were well aware of the role of Khurmah as a precursor to the larger battle that loomed ahead. As the British role declined with the defeat of the Turks, they had less hesitation in expressing these views frankly. 'Abdallah accused ibn Sa'ud of using the Ikhwan in order to become suzerain over all Arabia and "lord over all the territory of the Great Saud" (the leader of the Wahhabi conquest a century earlier),<sup>53</sup> a view frankly confirmed by ibn Sa'ud himself in a conversation with a British representative:

If you British would only allow me to carve out my fortune by the sword, I would have the Hejaz in a week and Syria in two months, and then what a friend you English would have in me.<sup>54</sup>

And as his own military strength crumbled, Husayn leaned more and more on the British to install him officially as suzerain and thus to establish for him the dominion he could no longer hope to create by himself.

#### The British Involvement

The fourth and final aspect of the conflict between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud which the Khurmah incident illustrates and throws into sharper perspective, is its relationship to the wider context of the alliance with Britain and the war against the Ottoman Empire. While Britain had hitherto been relatively successful in soothing tensions and marshalling

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<sup>53</sup>A.B. 114, Aug. 30, 1919, Ramlah, p. 137, 'Abdallah's talk with Wilson.

<sup>54</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 4, 1920, p. 121, ibn Sa'ud's meeting at Hasa with Major Dickson, Political Agent, Bahrayn, probably early in 1920.

Arab forces for the achievement of its own objectives, the internal struggle for power now forced its way to the surface and exposed the inherent contradictions of the British alliance that had lain dormant for more than two years. The confrontation at Khurmah was not only between the two amirs. It also pitted the Sharif's concerns and aims within the Arabian political system against those of Great Britain, and in that sense marked the beginning of the disintegration of the alliance between them. By tracing briefly the divergence of British and Sharifian interests at Khurmah, we may see the consequences of a functional loss of independence in a system of segmentary opposition.

By mid-1918 Faysal's northern army was at a crucial stage of the campaign from Britain's vantage point, cooperating with Allenby's Egyptian Army to drive the Turks from Palestine and Syria. The deployment of forces against ibn Sa'ud would clearly detract from that struggle, and Britain pleaded with the Sharif to reinforce Faysal's army on the grounds that "lesser issues should be subordinated to greater ones."<sup>55</sup> Previously the conflict between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud had been confined to the political realm, and even 'Abdallah had been able to maintain the pretense of a coincidence of interests with Britain. Khurmah however produced explicit military choices which could not disguise the incompatibility of the revolt's stated objectives with the imperatives of domestic politics. Husayn therefore replied that he could not repeat the mistake that he had already made when he acceded to British requests to send Zayd to Faysal. "Both actions are of equal importance," he wrote, stating that he was "afraid to

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<sup>55</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 17, Bassett to Husayn, Jiddah, 11.1.37 (=Oct. 17, 1918).

send any of the southern troops" because 'Abdallah needed them to counter ibn Sa'ud's aggression.<sup>56</sup> Thus, while the Sharif claimed that he could not "weaken his own forces," British officials accused him of doing just that by sending a large column under Sharif Shakir to Khurmah when the Turks had not yet been defeated. For Husayn the punitive expedition was "one of the most important things since the date of our Cause [Revolt]," while Britain saw it as having been undertaken "in the absence of any real necessity."<sup>57</sup> What was "necessary" clearly depended on whether the danger was perceived from within the system or from without, and whether it was defined as being the Turks or the Wahhabis:

The importance Wadi Khurma is unfortunately assuming among Hejaz Arabs [wrote Bassett] is probably largely due to Abdullah's own willfully exaggerated version of the seriousness of the situation there and of the Najd menace generally.<sup>58</sup>

That it was the British who underestimated the threat and 'Abdallah who perceived it correctly was of course proved by history.

Despite their differing priorities, both Britain and the Sharif still had a stake in their alliance. At Medina, Fakhri Pasha was hoping to take advantage of a major inter-Arab clash to launch an offensive, while the achievement of British military goals in Syria still required

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<sup>56</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 243, Husayn to Wilson, 13.10.36 (=July 21, 1918); ibid., p. 320, Husayn to Wilson, 21.9.36 (=June 29, 1918); F.O. 686/10/1, p. 14, Bassett to Arab Bureau, July 27, 1918.

<sup>57</sup>F.O. 686/10/2, p. 369, 'Abdallah to Husayn, 25.10.36 (=Aug. 2, 1918) forwarded by Bassett to Arab Bureau; ibid., p. 367, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, Aug. 14, 1918, referring to earlier telegraph of Husayn to 'Abdallah. For disagreements between Husayn and British officials on Shakir's expedition, see: F.O. 686/39, pp. 230-231, 236-237, 243, 381, 394; F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 20-28, 64-65; F.O. 686/10/2, pp. 361-364.

<sup>58</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p. 15, Bassett to Commandant, Yanbu' and Arab Bureau, July 26, 1918; ibid., p. 13, Yanbu' to Jiddah, July 26, 1918.

the cooperation of Mecca.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore the growing polarization between the amirs threatened to drive ibn Sa'ud closer to the Turks if Britain gave official sanction to the proposed expedition against Khurmah. In mid-1918, therefore, the regional conflict could not yet be divorced from the war against the Turks. Britain still needed a united Arab front and was not yet prepared to let the inherent oppositionist forces of the Arabian political system run their own course. In an attempt to defuse the Khurmah rebellion, British efforts were therefore necessarily directed toward discouraging or at least postponing any expansion of the conflict, and specific ameliorative actions were suggested in an attempt to reduce tensions. It was hoped that a summit meeting or a "friendly exchange of greetings" between the amirs might "for the time being suspend controversy," but Husayn was unwilling to make any conciliatory gesture and all Britain's mediation efforts proved futile.<sup>60</sup> Since 'Abdallah was the representative of Sharifian goals in central Arabia and the pivotal force in the campaign against ibn Sa'ud, Britain felt that in order to relieve the pressure at Khurmah, 'Abdallah had to be removed from the scene. For four months British officials attempted to persuade Husayn to recall his son to Mecca, arguing that he needed the help of his Minister of Foreign Affairs to shoulder the heavy burden of government and to act as

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<sup>59</sup>S.A. 150/4, Cairo telegram to Baghdad, Oct. 2, 1918; F.O. 686/10/1, Arab Bureau to Bassett, being His Majesty's Government to Husayn, August 3, 1918; F.O. 686/10/2, pp. 336-337, Bassett to Arab Bureau, two telegrams, Sept. 11, 1918; F.O. 686/9, pp. 16 and 17, Wilson to Husayn, two letters, June 27 and 28, 1918.

<sup>60</sup>For British mediation efforts at Khurmah, see: S.A. 149/9; F.O. 686/39, pp. 17, 60, 61, 121, 124, 130, 231; F.O. 686/40, pp. 10-14; F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 19, 336; F.O. 686/10/2, pp. 354, 362; A.B. 96, July 9, 1918, pp. 243 ff; and A.B. 106, Oct. 22, 1918, p. 359.

a direct liaison with Britain. The Sharif, however, absolutely refused the advice, saying that it would be "disastrous" to remove 'Abdallah from the field.<sup>61</sup> British and Sharifian interests were now pulling in opposite directions, and all attempts to bridge the ever widening gap only produced mutual exasperation and anger at the refusal of each to acknowledge the other's position. British officials expressed their weariness at Husayn's "long reiterations" of his loyalty and good intentions, and described him as "petulant," "obstinate" and "unreasonable," while Britain almost ludicrously affirmed that "mutual friendships and confidence [between the amirs] can be restored...and the prospect of an Arab unity be greatly advanced."<sup>62</sup> Rhetoric, as we have observed, was generally a cover for a real clash of interests. And the desperate attempts by both parties to patch up their differences while the alliance still served their separate purposes, could not conceal a marked deterioration in their relationship.

The disagreements with Britain over Khurmah drove Husayn into a total impasse, for his most pressing domestic objectives were being continuously hamstrung by the power on which he was politically, economically and militarily dependent and whose alliance he had sought in the hope of accomplishing those very objectives. Since he had lost the freedom to pursue those goals actively, he announced that he was no longer "the guardian of the Cause," and while there was certainly an element of bluff in his frequent threats of resignation and suicide, these symbolic acts have been too summarily dismissed both by contemporary historians

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<sup>61</sup>F.O. 686/39, p. 10, Bassett to Husayn, Jiddah, 17.1.37 (=Oct. 23, 1918); *ibid.*, pp. 231 and 234, Wilson interviews with Husayn, Jiddah, July 18 and 19, 1918.

<sup>62</sup>F.O. 686/40, p. 12, Wilson memorandum, Nov. 22, 1918, Jiddah; F.O. 686/10/2, p. 376, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Aug. 8, 1918; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 336, Arab Bureau to Bassett for Husayn, Aug. 3, 1918; F.O. 686/39, p. 156, Husayn to Bassett, Mecca, 28.10.36 (=Aug. 5, 1918).

and by British officials at the time.<sup>63</sup> On one occasion he threatened to abdicate unless 'Ali and 'Abdallah were "supplied with war material in the same way as their brother [Faysal] was," and on another he said he was retiring because his aims at Khurmah appeared to "oppose [Britain's] desires and intentions, the ends of which I cannot understand."<sup>64</sup> Since the Sharif was the Government of the Hijaz, it is impossible to separate the political dispute over the purpose of the revolt from the personal aspects of his resignation statements. "His Majesty's Government have stated," he claimed, "that they will help us when any war broke out in the interior of the country whether from enemy operations or from personal envy of some amir or Arab chief."<sup>65</sup> Although there is no documentary evidence of such a promise, the Sharif felt that by shirking from an endorsement of his claim to suzerainty and by opposing his plans on the eastern front, Britain was not only abandoning his interests but reneging on a personal commitment. But whatever justifications accompanied his stated desire to relinquish his position, all were an acknowledgement of his inability to act in accordance with his own interests and of the irreconcilability of these interests with Britain's own definition of the revolt's purpose. Symbolically at least, his threats of withdrawal sig-

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<sup>63</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p. 8, Husayn to British Agent, Mecca, 21.10.36 (=July 29, 1918); F.O. 686/10/2, p. 351, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Aug. 30, 1918; ibid., pp. 357-358, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, Aug. 24, 1918. And see Kedourie, In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth, pp. 196-202.

<sup>64</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 10-11, Husayn to British Agent, Mecca, July 28, 1918; F.O. 686/40, p. 45, Husayn to Wilson, 19.3.37 (=Dec. 23, 1918); ibid., p. 10, Wilson memorandum on relations between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud, Jiddah, Nov. 22, 1918; F.O. 686/9, p. 18, Husayn to Wilson, June 27, 1918; F.O. 686/10.2, pp. 357-358, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, Aug. 24, 1918.

<sup>65</sup>F.O. 686/9, Husayn to Wilson, p. 18, June 27, 1918.

nified the loss of his independence within the Arabian political system.

Finally, what effect did Britain's involvement at Khurmah have on the outcome of the regional power struggle and what did this reveal about the nature of external alliances in a segmentary system? In a franker appraisal than the British themselves were willing to make publicly, the Sharif stated that it appeared to him that he was pulling His Majesty's Government one way and ibn Sa'ud the other, which state of affairs could not continue, and the British Government must choose between them.<sup>66</sup> But Khurmah in fact accentuated a split that had already seriously divided the eastern and western branches of the British policy-making echelons in the Arab world. In London the Foreign Office supported the Sharif and the India Office backed ibn Sa'ud, while the closer that officials were to the local level the more strongly they seemed to identify with the protagonist in their own sphere of operations.<sup>67</sup> Husayn and ibn Sa'ud were not unaware that the relative justice of their claims was being argued by the British themselves, and this knowledge, in addition to the fact that both continued to receive weapons and supplies from Britain, probably blunted rather than encouraged any proclivity to compromise that might have existed on either side. In fact the justice of their respec-

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<sup>66</sup>F.O. 686/40, pp. 9-10, Wilson memorandum, Jiddah, Nov. 22, 1918.

<sup>67</sup>On divisions in the British administration over Khurmah, see especially, Busch, *op. cit.*, pp. 256-263; see also Lawrence, *Evolution*, p. 66; P. Graves, *Sir Percy Cox*, p. 206; A.T. Wilson, *Loyalties*, pp. 160-161 and 304; also A.B. 112, June 24, 1919, p. 83; A.B. 113, July 17, 1919; S.A. 148/1; S.A. 149/2 through 6 and 8; S.A. 150/9; F.O. 882/3, AP/18/12; F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 14, 19, 24-25; F.O. 686/10/2, pp. 336, 337; F.O. 686/39, pp. 165, 237; F.O. 686/40, pp. 3-4 and 8-9.

tive claims was debated much more hotly in the private correspondence of the various branches of the administration than in the councils of the two amirs who knew perfectly well what results they wanted from the confrontation. They were both concerned with pursuing their political interests, not in scoring debating points, and they were interested in the rights and wrongs of the situation only in so far as they needed to convince the British of their case.

It appeared to Foreign Office Personnel in Cairo and Jiddah as well as to the Sharif himself that the official British policy of neutrality was in fact helping ibn Sa'ud. The delay and inaction which was being urged on Mecca and the confessed attempt to postpone the inevitable confrontation between the amirs allowed the Ikhwan to press its offensive within limits and to continue its proselytizing activity in the border areas. To ask the Sharif to accept the temporary loss of the Khurmah district was to ask that he accept a defeat. Whatever the comparative justice of the competing claims, the undeniable fact was that pro-Sharifian elements had been forced out of the town and that tribes which had been at least nominally under Husayn's jurisdiction were now openly professing allegiance to his arch-rival. While Britain's immediate aim therefore was certainly the amelioration of the conflict, its intervention in the end both sharpened the rivalry between the amirs and probably favored ibn Sa'ud. Not only had the stakes in the conflict been drastically raised by the infusion of large quantities of money, arms and supplies, as we saw earlier, but the increasingly partisan positions of the British officials themselves acted to magnify the conflict. As the ally and arms supplier of both, Britain was able to exercise sufficient leverage and



pressure to prevent the dispute from aborting its own interests, but official policy never openly addressed the issues separating the two protagonists in the context of the traditional political system itself, and therefore was unable to take any action that would genuinely and permanently relieve tensions and ensure a peaceful settlement.

Since external alliances in a segmental system are based on temporary and mutual advantage rather than an ideological bond, each side must, as we have seen, retain the flexibility and option to free itself when its ties have become counterproductive and to change its affiliations if need be. The ability to act in pursuit of one's own interests is the sine qua non of such a system. Husayn's tragedy was precisely his inability to retain his independence when his interests had plainly diverged from those of his ally. Because his hands were tied, he could not act decisively. By contrast, ibn Sa'ud's relative autonomy and his reliance on religion as a traditional strategy of mobilization not only enabled him, despite his vastly inferior material resources, to pursue his interests at Khurmah, but even to appear more amenable to British advice. Paradoxically therefore, the very intensity of British involvement in the Hijaz had produced far greater strains and tensions with the Sharif who had actively fought the Turks, than with a treaty ally who had taken almost no part in the war. Let us see how this essential difference between the amirs manifested itself in the expansion of the Khurmah dispute after the war.

Postscript

If it did not resolve the conflict between the Sharif and the ibn Sa'ud, British policy had at least delayed a final showdown. The High Commissioner was realistic enough to admit that a "straight fight" was inevitable and that British policy had merely "postponed it as long as possible because the Sherifians wouldn't win and because we wanted to avoid side-shows."<sup>68</sup> If Britain had not held the two rivals at bay, the conflict almost certainly would have exploded into an open, armed struggle before the end of 1918. With the fall of Medina in January, 1919, there was a definite sense that the final obstacle had been removed to the real battle that was to follow. One report noted that 'Abdallah was at last free for his "long-cherished" expedition to Khurmah, that he was planning a major offensive against Turabah and prophesied the complete defeat of ibn Sa'ud's forces. It was as though he had only been waiting for this opportunity, that having for two years shunned an assault on Medina, he was now ready to launch a full-scale attack to establish Sharifian dominance once and for all and to eliminate the real enemy. Having achieved their objectives, British interests no longer demanded a facade of Arab unity, and earlier counsels to the Sharif that the settlement of inter-Arab quarrels should be left until after the war and that "lesser issues should be subordinated to greater ones," were no longer operative.<sup>69</sup> As early as January 1918, some British observers had recog-

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<sup>68</sup>F.O. 882/3, AP/18/12, Wingate to Wilson, Cairo, Dec. 15, 1918; S.A. 149/3, Wingate to Balfour, undated, Ramlah; S.A. 149/5, Wingate to Graham, Ramlah, Aug. 25, 1918.

<sup>69</sup>A.B. 112, June 24, 1919, p. 83; F.O. 686/39, p. 17, Bassett to Husayn, Jiddah, 11.1.37 (=Oct. 17, 1918).

nized that "a rapprochement between the two...would appear to be quite impossible" and that they would be lucky to "keep these two firebrands off each other," at least until the defeat of the Turks.<sup>70</sup> With the external forces finally removed, or at least more distant, local Arabian politics could reassert itself and the struggle for power within that system continue from where it left off prior to the war. The Sharif had not succeeded in using the revolt to achieve his regional goals, and, together with ibn Sa'ud, he was now compelled to resort to traditional means to accomplish traditional ends.

Husayn wasted no time in formulating his plans, and in January sent a force to attack Turabah which had now also been seized by the Wahhabis. When they discovered the town strongly held by Amir Khalid, the Hijaz forces "retired without showing fight."<sup>71</sup> All of Husayn's attempts to regain control of the area had failed and Ikhwan influence was spreading rapidly. It was in that light that 'Abdallah himself attacked and captured Turabah with a force of over 10,000 on May 21. One week later the Ikhwan under Khalid surprised the Sharifians during the night, killing two hundred and fifty of them, including several 'Ataybah shaykhs, and driving the rest out of the town. 'Abdallah and Shakir themselves were slightly wounded, all their guns and supplies were lost, and the large Beduin force simply "melted away," one observer reporting that "...everything points to the majority of tribal elements who profess allegiance to King Hussein being absolutely unreliable." Several 'Ataybah

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<sup>70</sup>S.A. 148/1, Bassett to Wingate, Jiddah, Jan. 13, 1918; S.A. 149/5, Wingate to Graham, Ramlah, Aug. 25, 1918.

<sup>71</sup>F.O. 686/10/2, pp. 268-269, Goldie to Wilson, Yanbu', Feb. 11, 1919.

sections defected wholesale to the Wahhabis.<sup>72</sup> After two and a half years of war service, the Sharifian forces had been put to their first crucial test, and failed. The intensity and scale of the Turabah battle and the number of casualties sustained had no parallel in the revolt against the Turks except perhaps in the final assault on the retreating Ottoman fourth army in Syria, so vividly described by Lawrence.<sup>73</sup> But if in addition we compare 'Abdallah's determination in this case with his vacillation around Medina and if we consider also the numerous other clashes with the Ikhwan in 1919, it can readily be seen that greater importance was attached by the Sharifians to the defeat of the Ikhwan than to the expulsion of the Turks. While British reports in previous years had abounded with complaints of inaction and delay on the part of the Sharif's forces, and of their total lack of "the offensive spirit,"<sup>74</sup> British efforts after the armistice were directed toward "restraining" and "discouraging" the very "warlike tone" they had hoped to foster against the Turks.<sup>75</sup> Since the Sharifians suffered more casualties at Turabah than in any other single encounter since the revolt was launched, it is tempting to correlate the greater sacrifice of manpower with the importance of the "cause" at stake, and to postulate that the issues which divided them from the Sa'udis were of greater moment in the eyes of the participants than the war against the Turks.

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<sup>72</sup>A.B. 111, May 24, 1919, p. 62; A.B. 112, June 24, 1919, pp. 84-85.

<sup>73</sup>Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom, chaps. 115-118, and Anthony Nutting, Lawrence of Arabia, pp. 156-157; also in A.B. 106, Oct. 22, 1918, pp. 347-348.

<sup>74</sup>A.B. 72, Dec. 5, 1917, p. 485, Licut. Kernag (French artillery).

<sup>75</sup>F.O. 686/10/2, Bassett to Arab Bureau, p. 361, Aug. 22, 1918.

Having expelled 'Abdallah from Turabah, Khalid pressed his advantage. As the Sharifians scrambled to recover from their disastrous defeat it was reported that the road to Taif lay open and even Mecca and Jiddah were at the mercy of the Ikhwan.<sup>76</sup> It appeared that only his alliance with Britain restrained ibn Sa'ud from conquering the Hijaz outright at that moment and we have already noted his boast to Major Dickson that he "would have the Hejaz in a week... if you British would only allow me..."<sup>77</sup> But Khalid had no bond with the British and the Ikhwan were in any case fiercely anti-foreign and anti-Christian, so that without appearing to be directly involved, ibn Sa'ud was able to make significant political and military gains at the expense of the Sharif. Khalid had formed his Wahhabi adherents into the Mudayana sect which became the spearhead of further attacks, unrest and tribal conversion in the border regions. One Arab correspondent reported that while ibn Sa'ud had no personal, direct connection with Khalid's overtly aggressive activities, the latter was "employed, assisted and protected" by the amir.<sup>78</sup> The Mudayana sect spread rapidly, gaining fresh adherents from the tribes, attacking and looting recalcitrant villages and threatening Medina and Mecca themselves. Probably because of his support of the Sharif, Shakir's own village was invaded, and when two 'Ataybah sections attempted to counterattack, they were badly mauled. Not all tribes succumbed to Wahhabi influence and

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<sup>76</sup>A.B. 112, June 24, 1919, p. 84.

<sup>77</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 4, 1920, Ramlah, p. 121. Ibn Sa'ud interview with Major Dickson.

<sup>78</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, pp. 143-144, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, Apr. 8, 1920.

several Shammar shakyhs, who came to Mecca to ask the Sharif's protection against raids from Najd, were promised pecuniary aid and support. In addition, Husayn attempted to recruit fighters from the 'Ataybah, the Bisha (originally black slaves from Africa who supplied the royal body-guard and palace domestic services at Mecca), the Hudhayl tribe near Yemen and the Sharifian clans themselves.<sup>79</sup>

However, military measures seemed of no avail and each new clash with the Ikhwan further demonstrated the Sharif's weakness and resulted in new defections. Unable to dislodge the rebels by force or by British intervention, Husayn attempted to save his position by political and economic means. In a clear demonstration that he considered ibn Sa'ud and not Khalid the real enemy, he tried unsuccessfully to induce Khalid back by promising him Turabah permanently on condition that he consider himself under the Hijaz and not Najd. When Mudayana influence penetrated the Taif area the Sharif refused to allow supplies from Mecca to reach that town for fear that they would find their way to Najd, preferring to starve the inhabitants rather than concede any further advantage to the rebels. By the end of 1920, he was telling the inhabitants of eastern Hijaz villages to come to terms with the Najdi Ikhwan who were arriving there in ever-increasing numbers, hoping in this way to prevent their outright defection to the other side. A correspondent from Mecca reported that since these villages had received money and weapons from the Sharif, the latter "naturally does not want to arm the country against himself."<sup>80</sup> It can be seen

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<sup>79</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, p. 104, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, May 19, 1920; ibid., p. 171, Ayyub Khan, intelligence report, Mecca, Mar. 28, 1920; ibid., p. 99, Ihsanullah to British Agent, Mecca, May 29, 1920.

<sup>80</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, p. 42, Nasir al-Din, Mecca, Sept. 18, 1920 to British Agent; ibid., p. 85, Nasir al-Din to British Agent, Jiddah, June 24, 1920; F.O. 686/12/1, p. 67, Nasir al-Din to British Agent, Mecca, Nov. 16, 1920.

that the Sharif was resorting to stop-gap actions that were frequently contradictory, in his desperate attempt to stave off the threat from the east. 'Abdallah's views about ibn Sa'ud were reported to be "very violent," while he appeared eager to come to an agreement with the nationalists in Turkey. In 1919 and 1920 Husayn himself attempted to strengthen his ties with Hail, promising Britain that he would advise ibn Rashid not to attack Najd, but privately writing to the amir: "...Consider that everything is at your disposal."<sup>81</sup> Wartime enmities were therefore quickly forgotten as the power struggle in central Arabia entered its final stages. When ibn Rashid was murdered on April 10, 1920, however, only ibn Sa'ud had the power to take advantage of the situation, and by the end of that year had established his dominion over most of the Shammar. Ibn Sa'ud had now only to wait for Britain to abandon Husayn and to allow the internal politics of the Peninsula to take their own course before moving openly against the Hijaz.<sup>82</sup> Less than a decade after he had launched his revolt against Ottoman authority in the hope of establishing his supremacy over all Arabia, the Sharif of Mecca was driven from the Holy Cities themselves, not by foreign oppressors, but by fellow Arabs. On October 13, 1924, the Wahhabis took Mecca, and the Sharif went into exile first in Cyprus and then in Amman. There he died in 1931, a broken man, the "champion of the Arab people" having been defeated finally by an opponent from within the Arabian political system itself.

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<sup>81</sup>A.B. 114, Ramlah, Aug. 30, 1919, p. 139, quotes letter from Husayn to ibn Rashid; also F.O. 686/12/2, p. 85, Nasir al-Din to British Agent, Jiddah, June 24, 1920, on relations between Mecca and Hail and 'Abdallah's overtures to the Turkish nationalists.

<sup>82</sup>Hurewitz, Middle East Politics, p. 243; and Notes on the Middle East, No. 4, 1920, pp. 119-120. On ibn Rashid's assassination, see Philby, Sa'udi Arabia, p. 280.

## CHAPTER TEN

## THE HIJAZ REVOLT AND THE POLITICS OF SOUTHERN ARABIA

We have focused primarily on central Arabia to demonstrate the patterns of coalition and conflict at the regional level, because the struggle between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud was undoubtedly the pivotal one for the balance of power in the Peninsula. Furthermore it led directly to the Sharif's collapse and the establishment of the present Sa'udi dynasty in Arabia, and in its result therefore provides a particularly dramatic and poignant contrast to the Sharif's ambitions and objectives in launching his revolt. Since the implications of this struggle for the workings of the Arabian political system have been spelled out and described at length, this chapter will explore the Sharif's relations with his southern neighbors somewhat more briefly. In addition, since we are concerned with Husayn's motivations, it is significant that in his own mind he was not as preoccupied with 'Asir as with Najd simply because there was no direct threat to his survival from there. The Idrisi Sayyid's forces had never occupied Mecca as the Wahhabis had, nor did the Sayyid have a sufficiently strong base in 'Asir itself to launch a successful external invasion.

While the conflict in southern Arabia was definitely secondary therefore, the issues and nuances of the relations between the amirs and the tribes in that area were no less complex than in the east. Our task, however, is not to explain every aspect of this interaction, but to draw conclusions about the context in which it took place. We are examining individual trees only in order to see what kind of forest they are growing



in. Since there were striking similarities in the political processes of both regions we shall adopt the same structure as in the previous two chapters paying attention nevertheless to important problems peculiar to the politics of southern Arabia. We shall look first at the issues dividing Husayn and the Idrisi Sayyid, especially the question of the Sharif's suzerainty and their rivalry on the border, in order to identify more precisely their separate interests. The dispute over Qunfidhah will be taken as a case-study which involved all aspects of the conflict and therefore serves as a useful illustration. As we expanded the horizon of the central Arabian conflict by introducing ibn Rashid and other more peripheral actors who directly influenced and participated in the major confrontation between the Hijaz and Najd, we shall here draw in the Yemen and its role in the politics of southern Arabia during the revolt. The effect of outside forces, especially Britain, will here be examined in the context of the case study and we shall again see how a regional power struggle was filtered through the intrusion of the world war. In short, we shall add another piece to our political mosaic, which, being both unique in itself and representative of the larger whole, should provide a final testing ground for our observations of the segmentary political system of Arabia.

#### Issues Dividing Husayn and the Idrisi Sayyid

Historically, the distinguishing feature of the relationship between the Sharif and the Idrisi Sayyid contains a particular irony, which even more plainly than central Arabia illustrates the primacy of the goals of traditional Arabian politics over the stated objectives of

the Arab revolt. Of all the amirs of the Peninsula probably no one had disputed Ottoman domination in his own area more vigorously or consistently than the Idrisi Sayyid of Sabya ('Asir). He was "a life-long foe of the Turk," reported the Resident at Aden, who had "proved his willingness to operate against them when given a fair opening."<sup>1</sup> And in Chapter Five we saw that prior revolts against Ottoman authority in southern Arabia, which, beyond the factor of British intervention, differed little in essence from the Sharif's movement, could be classified more realistically as traditional tribal rebellions which had always existed in the Peninsula to resist the encroachment of central power, than as expressions of modern Arab nationalism. What is significant here, however, is that the Sharif who, unlike the Sayyid, had been installed by the Turks and therefore owed his position to them to a greater extent than his southern neighbor, had actively assisted the Porte in crushing the "Arab" uprising in 'Asir. On the eve of the surrender of the Ottoman garrison in Mecca it is not surprising then to find the Idrisi Sayyid still deeply suspicious and distrustful of Husayn's motives:

...The Idrissi believes the Sherif to be powerless to resist the Turks and probably in league with them. He does not forget the attack that the Sherif's son Abdulla made on him in 1910 at a time when the Sherif was the representative of the Ottoman Government.<sup>2</sup>

And in 1911 it was Faysal's armed intervention in support of 'Izzet Pasha

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<sup>1</sup>F.O. 371/2770, Resident, Aden, to Foreign, Delhi, March 19, 1916.

<sup>2</sup>F.O. 371/2773, Sykes, memorandum, June 5, 1916; F.O. 882/2, p. 196, AP/16/1, Col. Jacob, March 14, 1916; F.O. 371/2769, Col. Jacob, interview with the Idrisi Sayyid, Jan. 17, 1916; F.O. 371/2770, the Idrisi Sayyid to Walton, 9th Sha'ban, 1334, reply to Walton's letter of June 10, 1916; A.B. 103, July 17, 1919, p. 107.

which was instrumental in finally quelling the rebellion. At that time at least, five short years before his own revolt, Husayn was clearly more concerned to expand his own influence within the Peninsula at the expense of a fellow Arab ruler, than to resist Ottoman rule. 'Asir, it should be added, had once been a part of the Hijaz, and there was no reason to believe that the Sharif was any less determined to regain what he considered to be lost territory, in 1916 than he had been in 1911. The only apparent difference was that he would now use British rather than Ottoman assistance to achieve his ends. Historically at least, it is apparent that the ultimate objectives of the Sharif derived from the traditional political structure of the Peninsula and that both the British and the Ottoman presence were significant as intermediate factors and as means by which those aims might be achieved. That the tribal loyalties and territorial considerations of 1911 were still very much alive in 1916 will be seen when we discuss the confrontation over Qunfidhah.

The Sharif considered his rights to hegemony over 'Asir even stronger than in central Arabia, for he placed ibn Sa'ud on a higher social plane than the Idrisi Sayyid, whose ancestors were from North Africa rather than Arabia, and who had "just landed and made himself sheikh."<sup>3</sup> While maintaining the pretence of cordiality for the sake of the British, Husayn made little secret of his scorn for the Sayyid, regarding him as a "comparative nobody" in the political hierarchy of the Peninsula. On this attitude, Aden commented, "The Idrissi has greater influence in Arabia than the Sherif of Mecca seems to think."<sup>4</sup> When his

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<sup>3</sup>A.B. 32, Nov. 28, 1916, p. 473; on the Idrisi Sayyid's origins and ancestry, see Busch, op. cit., pp. 218-219, footnote 2.

<sup>4</sup>A.B. 14, Aug. 7, 1916, p. 148; F.O. 686/36, p. 21, Wilson to

initial plea to be recognized as "King of the Arabs" received no satisfactory response from his neighbors, the Sharif explicitly asked for British assistance in inducing the Sayyid to recognize him at least as "leader of the Arab movement."<sup>5</sup> And in separate discussions with Lawrence, both Faysal and 'Abdallah emphasized their ambition to see 'Asir incorporated into the Arab kingdom under Sharifian control. Lawrence apparently had a way of extracting more honest and explicit statements of intention than were conveyed in official correspondence with Jiddah and Cairo. And Faysal boasted that he himself still had a great personal following in 'Asir and could within ten days rally every fighting man in that territory in his banner.<sup>6</sup> If anything, his inability to obtain recognition of his suzerainty over 'Asir caused the Sharif more immediate frustration than his struggle for supremacy in central Arabia, precisely because of his disdain for the Idrisi Sayyid.

But if the Sayyid had fought against the Turks in the past in order to maintain his independence, it was not likely that he would now relinquish that aim and succumb voluntarily to the Sharif's domination. In a definition of Arab union that had as little in common with Husayn's ambitions as with the objectives of Arab nationalism, the Sayyid wrote:

The unity of Arabia which the [British] Government assured me at the beginning of the war it would foster and protect, cannot be

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Director, Arab Bureau, Oct. 12, 1917; A.B. 30, Nov. 15, 1916, p. 446, Aden report.

<sup>5</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/638, Secretary of State to Viceroy, Foreign Department, June 23, 1917; ibid., J.E.G. Minute, July 16, 1917; F.O. 371/3054, Shuckburgh to Foreign Office, July 17, 1917.

<sup>6</sup>F.O. 686/6/1, p. 121, Lawrence to Wilson, Yanbu', Jan. 8, 1917, Lawrence's talk with Faysal; A.B. 51, May 22, 1917, p. 241, Lawrence's talk with 'Abdallah.

accomplished unless the ruler of every quarter keeps his own bounds, the ruler of the Hejaz to the Hejaz, the ruler of Najd to Najd, of Asir to Asir, of Sanaa to the Yemen; and if this arrangement is disturbed, the unity is impossible.<sup>7</sup>

In various forms the Sayyid repeated this view throughout the war, with the curious exception of the Caliphate, which, like ibn Sa'ud, he apparently regarded as presenting no political threat. He was prepared, Aden reported early in the revolt, "to assist the Sherif even to the point of supporting him for the Caliphate. He would, however, resent any claim by the Sherif to the ownership of any parts of Asir."<sup>8</sup> Ignoring Husayn's assumption of the regal title, the Sayyid referred to him always as the "Sherif of Mecca," and Britain quickly abandoned any attempt to persuade him to acknowledge Husayn as "Leader of the Arab Movement," instructing its Resident at Aden "to proceed no further in the matter." The Sayyid's adamant refusal to accord the Sharif the smallest measure of recognition underwent no modification, and after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, he was reported by a British observer "not...in the least likely to admit any assumption of superior standing on the part of the King, far less to make any kind of real submission to him..."<sup>10</sup>

Since a voluntary acceptance of the Sharif's suzerainty was therefore clearly out of the question, what then of the possibility that it might be imposed by force? We have already seen that ibn Sa'ud was confident of his own ability to resist any such attempt by Husayn despite

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<sup>7</sup>A.B. 30, Nov. 15, 1916, p. 446; F.O. 371/2775, the Idrisi Sayyid to Commander Turton, Aug. 8, 1916.

<sup>8</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/598, Walton to Secretary etc., Simla, July 4, 1916.

<sup>9</sup>F.O. 371/3054, H.G.N. (for Balfour) to India Office, July 25, 1917.

<sup>10</sup>A.B. 111, May 24, 1919, p. 58.

the massive financial and military resources at the latter's disposal, and was concerned only that Britain might apply coercion on the Sharif's behalf. Once again, this position was paralleled in the south, for although the Sayyid did not have a comparable ability to mobilize the tribes of his area as ibn Sa'ud was able to do by means of the Ikhwan, his determination to defend his own absolute independence was no less strong. When the dispute over Qunfidhah produced an apparent military threat from the Hijaz, the Sayyid declared:

If it is a question of force, in the past I have opposed his force by force, although with him were the whole forces of Turkey, and at the present time I am ready with the help of Allah to oppose him more energetically, but I see that you do not wish this owing to the criticalness of the situation.<sup>11</sup>

After a long interview with the Sayyid, one observer even concluded that "the Idrissi intends eventually to take an offensive action against the Sherif, should a favorable opportunity occur." And in response to the Sharif's own contemptuous attitude toward him, the Sayyid pointed out:

This is the first time the Sherif has ever fought independently ...he never had any fighting against the Turks and has no experience of the conduct of the tribes in the fight. He placed no reliance in one like ourselves who had experience of the same, year after year..."<sup>12</sup>

But it is also clear from the Sayyid's statements that he was aware that he had no choice but to defer to British wishes. As we shall see in our discussion of Qunfidhah, Britain was indeed able to lean far more heavily on the Idrisi Sayyid than was ever the case with ibn Sa'ud, and the fear

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<sup>11</sup>F.O. 371/2775, the Idrisi Sayyid to Turton, Aug. 8, 1916; A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 109; F.O. 371/2770, Turton; H.M.S. Northbrook, June 12, 1916.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. and F.O. 371/2775, the Idrisi Sayyid to Major-General Stewart, Political Resident, Aden, 21st Shawal, 1334 (=Aug. 20, 1916).

that the Sharif would accomplish his aims in 'Asir through such pressure caused the Sayyid considerable anxiety. What prevented this in the end was Britain's own need to maintain a united Arab front and the certainty that the Idrisi Sayyid would not sacrifice his authority and independence for the sake of the alliance.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the immediate focal point and testing-ground for the much wider trial of strength in central Arabia, was the "border" between the amirates and more correctly the struggle for control of those tribes in the disputed areas. The very intensity of that struggle showed its broader ramifications. In southern Arabia the same was true, and a generalization may be made that disequilibria in the balance of power, which were almost a chronic feature of the political system of the Peninsula, were reflected first and foremost in rivalry among the competing amirs for the allegiance of tribes in their frontier regions. While Khurmah and Turabah were pivotal confrontations in a conflict that brought dynastic upheaval and changed the entire face of the Arabian Peninsula, the southern border in a way, even more dramatically illustrates the fact that traditional political considerations were of greater moment for the tribes than the fight against Ottoman authority. Except for their influence over Hail, the Turks had very little effective power in central Arabia. Although some chieftains of the central desert, like 'Ajaymi Sa'dun, remained faithful to the Turks, the real choice for the tribes in the border lands between the Hijaz and Najd was between Husayn and ibn Sa'ud. And while we could show the primacy of this conflict in its own right we had little opportunity to determine the place of Ottoman authority in the loyalties of these tribes. In 'Asir and Yemen, however, the

Turks retained powerful garrisons and represented a real political force. Being a maritime province, 'Asir had important ports which served the Ottoman trade routes and allowed its soldiers to be supplied far more readily than in the inaccessible deserts of central Arabia. The Porte had intervened directly in almost all the major uprisings of southern Arabia and had managed to maintain its physical presence there by fighting the rebels at least to a stand-off, having taken no action in central Arabia since Muhammad 'Ali's incursion into Najd a century earlier. The place of Ottoman authority in the traditional power structure, and Arab attitudes toward the revolt against it, can therefore be seen more clearly in the south by virtue of the more immediate Ottoman involvement in regional politics.

To the extent that it represented an additional political force in the area, the Ottoman presence simply provided the Arab tribes with a greater choice of masters. By multiplying the ambiguities in the struggle for control of the disputed areas, it allowed the tribes more room to maneuver and a greater ability to play off one political force against another. In all the correspondence, interviews and reports from the field, there is no evidence of allegiance to an Arab master for the sake of freedom from Turkish rule, or even for "preference" for Arab over Turkish authority. Of the desire for independence there is ample proof, but in the tribal sense only, with no collective consciousness of an "Arab" destiny. That the various shaykhs were primarily and intensely determined to pursue their own tribal interests, the Idrisi Sayyid was realistically aware:

When they find three rulers in their country, the Sherif, the Turk, and myself, it follows that they must either stay neutral



or go over to the most powerful. Indeed I have today received news that the Ebha tribes, who are the pick of Asir. and the Shabran and Qahtan tribes in the neighborhood of Ebha have gone over to the Turks, and that, after many of them had held aloof for a long time.<sup>13</sup>

In the account that follows therefore, it will be possible to recognize all the elements of the traditional political system already identified in the discussion on Khurmah, as well as the role and consequence of the British intervention, with the additional factor of a strong Ottoman presence in the area, which accentuates rather than obscures the workings of the system.

#### Qunfidhah: A Case Study

Prior to the declaration of revolt in Mecca on June 6, 1916, the Idrisi Sayyid, as we have seen, was deeply distrustful of the Sharif and rejected British requests to cooperate with his former enemy on the grounds that Husayn had in the past and was still collaborating with Istanbul.<sup>14</sup> Immediately after the action in Mecca, British officials renewed their exhortations to the Sayyid with offers of arms and ammunition if he moved against the Turks. This was the time to act, they said, because the Turks were engaged elsewhere and could not send reinforcements to their garrisons in 'Asir. Promising that he would "gain the goodwill of the British Government" if he acted now, he was urged to abandon "the memory of by-

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<sup>13</sup>F.O. 371/2775, the Idrisi Sayyid to Turton, Aug. 8, 1916.

<sup>14</sup>The following chronology of the Qunfidhah dispute is a composite account based on various reports, descriptions and correspondence in F.O. 371, vols. 2768, 2769, 2770, 2774, 2775 and 3042; F.O. 686/7; I.O. L.P. & S./10, vols. 598, 600 and 645; S.A. 138/16 and 139/3; A.B., several issues, especially numbers 14, 15, 16, 26, 30, 37, 85, 111 and 113.

gone feuds" with the Sharif for the sake of joint action. Finally, and most significantly, the Aden Resident told him:

I feel confident that by means of timely action and strong measures against those who are opposed to your interests, Your Excellency will seize the present opportunity to consolidate your state and extend your dominions.

This reference was clearly to Yemen, and British officials in addition held out the inducement of bribing certain of Imam Yahya's tribes to join him:

If the Imam cannot move on account of his agreement [with the Turks], it is well-known that his tribesmen are not equally bound. If we make it profitable for them to join in this rising, they will hereafter be attached to your cause and will thus strengthen your position when the Turks are finally disposed of.<sup>15</sup>

Britain thus appealed unashamedly to the Sayyid's regional political interests, even suggesting its support for territorial expansion on his part. On June 12, the Idrisi Sayyid declared his willingness to cooperate and announced that his first efforts would be directed against the Ottoman garrisons at Qunfidhah, Muhayl and Ibhah.<sup>16</sup> Britain approved the plan and the Sayyid asked for time to negotiate with the tribes in those areas. Tribal adherence, as we have stressed repeatedly, was not automatic, but the result of a lengthy process of bargaining. For military reasons the British however, were impatient for a show of support for the Sharif and on July 18 bombarded the port of Qunfidhah from the sea. Though the action was definitely premature from the Sayyid's point of view since he had been deprived of the crucial time for negotiation, the Ottoman garrison

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<sup>15</sup>F.O. 371/2770, Brig.-Gen. Walton to the Idrisi Sayyid, Aden Residency, June 8, 1916; and A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 107.

<sup>16</sup>F.O. 371/2770, Capt. B.R. Reilly to Turton, H.M.S. Northbrook, June 12, 1916, after interview with the Idrisi Sayyid.

in the town quickly surrendered to the British ships, whose officers immediately hoisted the Idrisi flag and arranged with the Sayyid for his own garrison to occupy the town. With the Sayyid's forces in possession of Qunfidhah, preparations were made to attack the Turks at Muhayl.

The first indication of impending trouble was a report at the end of July that Shaykh Muhammad Nasir of Lith was advancing on Qunfidhah by order of the Sharif and at the request of certain shaykhs in the area of the town. Naturally perturbed at the news, the Sayyid appealed for British intervention, while the commander of his garrison at Qunfidhah declared that he would not surrender to the Sharifian troops. The initial British reaction, in the words of one telegram was "to get the Sherif to cease this foolishness; otherwise anticipate big Idrissi-Hejaz fight, inspired by ancient animosity." Colonel Wilson was instructed to inform Husayn "that we are arming him and the Idrissi against the Turks and not against each other or against other Arabs." and "to impress on [the] Sherif as strongly as possible the folly of making an enemy in his rear... and of driving [the] Idrissi into [the] Turkish camp."<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the first British response was unanimously firm and vigorous and it was believed that these diplomatic representations would nip the Sharif's military adventure in the bud. Within a few days however, it became apparent that the Sharif was holding firm "in his uncompromising attitude," refused to recall Nasir, and "confessed his inability to avoid [a] collision now."<sup>18</sup> Husayn claimed it would be a breach of faith on his part to hand

<sup>17</sup>F.O. 371/2774, McMahon to Foreign Office, Ramlah, July 31, 1916, reports R.N.O., Port Sudan, H.M.S. at Qunfidhah.

<sup>18</sup>S.A. 139/3, Aden to Arab Bureau, Aug. 4, 1916, report from Fox, H.M.S. Suva, off Qunfidhah; F.O. 371/2774, McMahon to Foreign Office, Aug. 3, 1916.

over to the Idrisi Sayyid the tribes in the Qunfidhah district with whom he had definite agreements, and accused Britain of violating its own commitments to him by bringing the Sayyid's forces north without his consent. By August 1, the Sharif was reported to be about to attack the Sayyid, with Nasir and a thousand Arabs within striking distance and "eager" to launch the assault.<sup>19</sup> As the Sharif issued a virtual ultimatum that Britain would have to choose between him and the Idrisi Sayyid, the united British front collapsed, and officials in Aden and Cairo began to back their respective clients with the same vigor that Baghdad and Cairo later evinced on opposite sides of the debate over Khurmah. Indeed by early August, the confrontation had developed a momentum that not only threatened a major inter-Arab clash between the two leaders most actively engaged in fighting the Turks, but also embroiled the various branches of the British administration so deeply that England's own ability to mediate the dispute effectively and without prejudice was seriously jeopardized.

Despite strong protests from India and Aden, London finally accepted Cairo's recommendation to withdraw the Idrisi garrison immediately by sea and gave forty-eight hours notice for the evacuation to be completed and the town turned over to Nasir's troops. Not surprisingly the Sayyid was exceedingly angry, feeling that he had been treated without any consideration. Quite aside from his claims to the town, he insisted that the summary ejection of his garrison would entirely destroy his prestige in 'Asir. Realizing that the British decision to install the Sharif in his place was irrevocable, he asked for a twenty-day extension "to en-

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<sup>19</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/598, A.H., Minute, Aug. 1, 1916; F.C. 371/2775, Turton to the Idrisi Sayyid, H.M.S. Northbrook, Aug. 7, 1916.

able him to save face with the tribes," and to allow delegates from both sides to meet so that it would at least appear as though his withdrawal was the result of mutual consultation. "Refusal of such an extension," a British official reported after a "distinctly stormy" interview with the Sayyid, "would mean [the] immediate cessation of his offensive against [the] Turks and [the] commencement of hostilities against [the] Sherif."<sup>20</sup> The proposal was approved and the withdrawal took place peacefully, though it left a residue of deep resentment that prevented effective cooperation against the Turks throughout the war. Nasir's own occupation was short-lived, for on September 27 he was attacked and driven out of the town by the Turks with the assistance of those very tribes who in July had petitioned the Sharif's intervention against the Idrisi Sayyid. He escaped by sea and Qunfidhah was plundered by the local Arabs who, fearing a further British bombardment, then left the place deserted. In the continuing see-saw for control, Nasir reoccupied the town without opposition, with the Turks encamped five miles away. 'Ataybah reinforcements were hurriedly sent to Qunfidhah but in December these tribesmen, restless at being so far from their own territory, deserted the Sharif after firing the markets. The following day the Turks with their Arab irregulars took over the town and held it until the end of the war.<sup>21</sup> When the Turks surrendered, Britain told both the Sharif and the Idrisi Sayyid not to move there pending a territorial settlement which

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<sup>20</sup>F.O. 371/2774, High Commissioner, Cairo to Viceroy, Simla, Aug. 13, 1916, conveying report from H.M.S. Northbrook of Aug. 8, 1916; ibid., Political Resident, Aden to Secretary etc., Simla, Aug. 9, 1916.

<sup>21</sup>F.O. 371/3042, Nalder to Political Resident, Aden, H.M.S. Lunka, at sea, Jan. 2, 1917; A.B. 37, Jan. 4, 1917, pp. 3-4.

would decide the future ownership of Qunfidhah and various other disputed areas. But by May 1919, no progress had been made and the Sharif unilaterally reoccupied the town, rousing further resentment on the Sayyid's part and threatening renewed inter-Arab clashes in southern Arabia.

As the chronology itself demonstrates, Qunfidhah contained all the elements of traditional political conflict which appeared at Khurmah, with the exception of the use of religion as a mobilizing force among the Beduin. But even ibn Khaldun did not specify religion as a necessary factor in the struggle for royal authority. He merely saw it as a possible strategy which could in certain circumstances be employed by a leader to overcome other inherent weaknesses in the 'asabiyya (or group spirit) of his own house. However, the three-cornered conflict for control of Qunfidhah does illustrate conflict and opposition between segments at the various levels of the regional political system. There was competition for the shifting loyalties of the tribes in the area who acted according to their own interests and to preserve their own functional autonomy as the primary units of the system. It was a trial of strength at the level of the amirate and represented the wider aspirations of the protagonists for supremacy in the area as a whole. It pitted the traditional rivalries of the Arab chiefs against their relationship to Ottoman authority. And it showed the response of the regional political leaders to the intervention and mediation of an external power, in this case, Great Britain. Each of these themes will be discussed briefly in the context of the collision at Qunfidhah. If they confirm our conclusions for central Arabia, we may assume the two areas representative of a segmentary political system which existed in the Peninsula as a whole.

In order to understand the role of the tribes we must trace their loyalties back to the previous confrontation between the two leaders in that area. In 1911, Faysal and 'Abdallah had led a force of Arab irregulars along the 'Asir coast to help the Ottoman army suppress the Idrisi Sayyid's revolt. At Goz and in the Qunfidhah district severe fighting had taken place during which several of the Sayyid's tribes were won over to the Sharifian-Ottoman side while others were defeated. The Turks had regained control of the area and, with help from the Sharif's forces and the newly-enlisted 'Asir tribes, moved to relieve the Sayyid's siege of the Ottoman garrison at Ibhah, thus finally crushing the rebellion. Before his defeat, the Sayyid had managed to take as hostages fifteen sons of the shaykhs of those tribes who had gone over to the Turks, and he was still holding them in detention in 1916. These shaykhs, who represented practically all the tribes on the Qunfidhah-Muhayl road, petitioned the Sharif, before his own rising, to help them secure the release of the hostages. Despite two letters to the Sayyid on the subject, the latter refused to yield on the grounds that "should hostilities against the Turks occur, there would be nothing to prevent them giving the Turks their full assistance." He insisted that the hostages could not be released until the Turks had finally been ejected from Arabia.<sup>22</sup> With the Idrisi garrison installed at Qunfidhah in August, it was these tribes, whom the Sayyid described as "loyal to the Turks," which wrote to the Sharif acknowledging him as their overlord. In a joint letter, thirteen

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<sup>22</sup>F.O. 371/2768, p. 264, Husayn to the Idrisi Sayyid, 25 Jamad Awal, 1334; F.O. 371/2775, Turton to Political Resident, Aden, H.M.S. Northbrook, Aug. 14, 1916; ibid., the Idrisi Sayyid to Turton, Aug. 8, 1916.

prominent shayks from the Qunfidhah neighborhood, appealed to their association with the Sharif five years previously and implied their willingness to take up arms against the Sayyid. It was an opportunity which Husayn could not pass up, though one British official warned that "the Sherif's thus forcing himself into this district, where he gained his footing as the friend of the Turks, will be a source of trouble in the future."<sup>23</sup> When these same tribes later helped the Turks to expel Nasir, the Sayyid was reported to have remarked, no doubt gleefully, that "...he had always been convinced of the pro-Turkish attitude of the tribes and of the certainty of their treachery to the Sherif and that this had been the only consideration which had prevented him attacking the Sherif when he was forced to evacuate Kunfidah."<sup>24</sup>

In the space of six years the tribes had therefore professed their allegiance at various times to all three of the political forces in the area, and it is difficult to find any consistent ideological consideration beyond the determined pursuit of tribal independence and material advantage, to explain their shifting loyalties. Whatever their racial feelings as Arabs toward Turks, they apparently did not allow these to interfere with their political judgments and actions. As we saw earlier, feuds among mutually antagonistic shaykhs also influenced their choice of a protector, and the presence of three competing powers allowed ample scope for intertribal intrigue. One shaykh, Baytali, was reported to have be-

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<sup>23</sup>F.O. 371/2775, Lieut. L.F. Nalder, Political Officer, Southern Red Sea Patrol, to Turton, aboard H.M.S. Northbrook, Aug. 16, 1916.

<sup>24</sup>F.O. 371/2770, Nalder to Political Resident, Aden, aboard H.M.S. Minto, Oct. 13, 1916, after interview with the Idrisi Sayyid; also A.B. 26, Oct. 16, 1916, p. 371; and A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 110.



trayed four kinsmen of a pro-Idrisi shaykh, Bahran, to the Turks who summarily hanged the offenders. Having witnessed Husayn's cooperation with the Turks, Baytali then declared his adherence to the Sharif, whose own representative, however, confessed that the shaykh and his followers "were actuated by love of self."<sup>25</sup> The tribes also jealously guarded their own territorial integrity, the powerful Banu Mughayd shaykhs, for example, supporting the Sayyid provided that he made no encroachment on this inland domains. The Idrisi Sayyid, the Sharif and the Turks all attempted to maintain and expand their control over the tribes by a mixture of coercion, persuasion and bribery. To a large degree their success depended on their own strength, but this in turn was dependent upon the extent of support they received from the tribes. Again there are several reports of tribes receiving arms and supplies from more than one of the competing powers. Despite the active manipulation by the three powers of all the resources at their disposal, the inescapable conclusion from an analysis of the Qunfidhah incident is that it was the tribes which ultimately called the shots and determined the scope, nature, and success of any military operations in their area. If they combined temporarily, as thirteen shaykhs had done, it was for their mutual advantage, such coalitions constantly changing according to circumstance. On no occasion did they act as a corporate group or as a collectivity in defense of "Arab" interests. Rather, the desire and motivation to free the Idrisi Sayyid's hostages and to pursue historical feuds, to take money from the Turks and to loot the markets of Qunfidhah, and above all to maintain their tribal

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<sup>25</sup>F.O. 371/2775, Nalder to Turton, H.M.S. Northbrook, Aug. 21, 1916; A.B. 14, Aug. 7, 1916, p. 151.

autonomy and ensure their own security were time-honored and traditional responses to the imperatives of an ancient political system that far predated the advent of Islam.

But at Qunfidhah as at Khurmah, the local dispute had far more wide-ranging consequences, and represented the whole gamut of relationships between the amirs. Once again the justice of the respective claims is less important than the overall struggle for ascendancy in the region. By all accounts Qunfidhah was "debatable territory," the Idrisi Sayyid claiming that it constituted his "natural boundary" and was indisputably part of "northern Asir," and the Sharif that the whole area had once been part of the Hijaz and that the leading shaykhs were loyal to him.<sup>26</sup> Ironically, this was almost exactly the reverse of the Khurmah situation in which ibn Sa'ud's leading argument was the allegiance of the tribes and the Sharif's case was based on administrative grounds. The debate is hardly constructive and even Britain was not prepared to deal with the relative justice of the opposing claims, insisting that the question of actual ownership must be postponed until after the war. "...The matter goes deeper than the mere possession of the town of Kunfidah," wrote one official.<sup>27</sup> The ultimata which both sides issued revealed their perception of the conflict as a serious trial of strength. "The Sherif announces that he must have Kunfidah peaceably or by force or he will discontinue his offensive against the Turks in the north."<sup>28</sup> Al-

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<sup>26</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/600, A.H., Under-Secretary of State, Minute, Sept. 17, 1916.

<sup>27</sup>F.O. 371/2775, Nalder to Turton, H.M.S. Northbrook, Aug. 16, 1916.

<sup>28</sup>F.O. 371/2775, Turton to the Idrisi Sayyid, H.M.S. Northbrook, Aug. 7, 1916; A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, pp. 108-109.

though the threat was certainly intended to exert pressure on Britain, this time successfully, it also expressed very resolutely Husayn's attitude that his revolt was worth nothing if it did not enable him to expand his influence and extend his domains. Although a corner of 'Asir may have appeared insignificant in the perspective of an Arab revolt against Ottoman dominion, this position was not shared by the Sharif who viewed the possession of Qunfidhah as "vital to his interest."<sup>29</sup> According to basic principles of tribal politics, unless he could respond to the request of the Qunfidhah tribes for protection, then his newly-found independence and his claim to suzerainty would be revealed as empty words.

That the Idrisi Sayyid concurred in this view of the dispute as a crucial trial of strength is clear from his own frequent references to the "loss of prestige and dignity" he would suffer throughout 'Asir, and his determination to attack the Sharif if the forty-eight hour deadline for the evacuation of his garrison was adhered to. "He insisted that if [an extension] were refused, his prestige would be so destroyed that he might just as well retire to private life in Aden or Egypt."<sup>30</sup> One cannot help noting here how reminiscent the Sayyid's remarks are of the Sharif's own threats of resignation after Khurmah. While the Sayyid's statement may have been equally a bluff, it reveals the intimate connection between political strength and personal honor in the Arabian system. It became important therefore for the Sayyid to prove to the British his own power in 'Asir that appeared to have been called into question by the Qunfidhah

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<sup>29</sup>A.B. 15, Aug. 10, 1916, p. 106; F.O. 371/2774, McMahon to Foreign Office, Aug. 3, 1916; ibid., McMahon to Viceroy, Simla, Aug. 18, 1916; A.B. 14, Aug. 7, 1916, p. 153.

<sup>30</sup>F.O. 3771/2775, Turton to Political Resident, Aden, H.M.S. Northbrook, Aug. 14, 1916; ibid., Nalder to Turton, H.M.S. Northbrook, Aug. 16, 1916.

incident, and to belittle the Sharif's strength in the region. He insisted that the tribes of 'Asir were generally loyal to him and cast scorn on the Sharif's difficulty in subjugating "one of the weakest sheikhs" in the vicinity of Qunfidhah.<sup>31</sup> And as Husayn had drawn Britain's attention to ibn Sa'ud's Ottoman ties in order to discredit him, the Idrisi Sayyid lost no opportunity to emphasize that by his intrigues with "the Turkish sheikhs," the Sharif had "actually assisted the partisans of the Turks."<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, the Idrisi Sayyid had apparently come to the same conclusion as ibn Sa'ud: that the predominance of the Sharif that would likely result from the total defeat of the Turks was not necessarily to his advantage and possibly represented a greater danger to his authority and independence than the Ottoman authority against which he had previously rebelled. Just as the Sharif had issued an ultimatum that he would stop fighting the Turks unless he had Qunfidhah, the Sayyid now abandoned his earlier undertakings to attack Ottoman garrisons in 'Asir and pursued a policy of inaction. From Aden Colonel Jacob reported that the Sayyid was "completely dispirited...after his humiliation at Kunfida" and would do no more than defend himself "if the Turks attacked him."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>F.O. 371/2775, the Idrisi Sayyid to Turton, Aug. 8, 1916; A.B. 37, Jan. 4, 1917, p. 6; and I.O. L.P.& S./10/645, the Idrisi Sayyid to Stewart, 4th Safar, 1335 (=Nov. 29, 1916).

<sup>32</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./10/600, and F.O. 371/2775, the Idrisi Sayyid to Stewart, Aug. 20, 1916.

<sup>33</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./10/645, Jacob, Aden Residency, Dec. 20, 1916, Notes on the Idrisi Sayyid's letter of Nov. 29, 1916, emphasis is Jacob's; I.O. L.P.& S./10/600 and F.O. 371/2775, the Idrisi Sayyid to Stewart, 21st Shawal, 1334, (=Aug. 20, 1916); A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 109; I.O. L.P.& S./10/638, Aden to High Commissioner, Feb. 9, 1917; A.B. 30, Nov. 15, 1916, p. 446.

Bitterly recalling Britain's earlier advice "to seize the opportunity to consolidate your state and extend your dominions," the Sayyid now observed that all his anti-Ottoman activities for the past eight years in the interests of his own independence had been "wasted."<sup>34</sup> Indeed the sense of abandonment and personal affront at Britain's refusal to support his position, which emerges in many of the Sayyid's remarks, is also comparable to Husayn's growing perception at the end of the war of the divergence of his interests from those of his ally. For both Husayn and the Idrisi Sayyid therefore, the collision over Qunfidhah raised issues within the traditional political system which vitally affected the balance of power in the Peninsula, and which superseded the importance of prosecuting the war against the Ottoman Empire. Britain of course saw the Sharif as having "lost sight of [his] main objective,"<sup>35</sup> an accusation that was to be repeated two years later at Khurmah. When all energies should have been directed northward, British officers felt, the Sharif kept facing south and east. But for the two chiefs, Qunfidhah was the "main objective" because it provided a testing ground for the clash between Husayn's claim to suzerainty and the Idrisi Sayyid's determination to maintain and if possible expand his own autonomous authority.

And finally we must consider the role of Great Britain which demonstrates even more clearly than in central Arabia, the inability of an external force to resolve a salient regional conflict. Britain's de-

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<sup>34</sup>F.O. 371/2775, the Idrisi Sayyid to Turton, Aug. 10, 1916; ibid., the Idrisi Sayyid to Turton, H.M.S. Northbrook, Aug. 8, 1916.

<sup>35</sup>F.O. 371/2774, Political Resident, Aden to Secretary etc., Simla, Aug. 15, 1916.

cision to oust the Idrisi garrison and install the Sharif was in fact based entirely on its own military and political requirements and transcended any concern with the actual political issues dividing the amirs. Recognizing that to support the Sayyid "must entail a complete breach with the Sharif which would probably mean the return of the Turks to Mecca," Britain capitulated to Husayn's threats to discontinue the war.<sup>36</sup> And noting that "the Idrissi's importance cannot be compared with that of the Sherif," British policy at Qunfidhah ignored earlier promises made to the Sayyid to lure him into the war, contradicted itself by installing and then ejecting him from the town, and failed to address itself to the very real anxieties he experienced as a result.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, it was felt, his break with the Turks and his dependence on Britain would prevent the Sayyid's outright defection. Undoubtedly the reason that the Sharif's threat was successful was that the Qunfidhah incident occurred at the very beginning of his revolt, at a time when Britain had not yet recovered from serious reverses in the Dardanelles and Mesopotamia, and needed all the support it could muster in the war against the Ottoman Empire. The Idrisi Sayyid, being of less military value and in this case the weaker of the two chiefs, necessarily suffered. Later in the war with victory in sight, Britain had less to lose and therefore had no inclination to submit to similar threats made by the Sharif in relation to Khurmah. There Husayn's position was weaker and the British policy, albeit one of inaction,

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<sup>36</sup>F.O. 371/2775, Turton to the Idrisi Sayyid, H.M.S. Northbrook, Aug. 7, 1916; I.O. L.P. & S./10/600 and F.O. 371/2775, the Idrisi Sayyid to Stewart, Aug. 20, 1916.

<sup>37</sup>F.O. 371/2774, High Commissioner to Viceroy, Simla, Aug. 13, 1916; ibid., Political Resident, Aden to Secretary etc., Simla, Aug. 15, 1916.

nevertheless acted to favor the stronger side. At Khurmah, it should be noted, Britain's appeal to the ideology of Arab unity to justify its refusal to take sides and to press for a reconciliation between the rival chiefs, was consistent with its war aims. At Qunfidhah on the other hand, British military considerations acted directly to endorse and even embitter existing divisions, revealing plainly that for Britain as well as for the Arabian chiefs, Arab unity was not a goal in itself but occasionally a useful means toward an end, and an expendable one at that. In both crises British interests were paramount, and questions of strength and dependence, rather than ideology, determined its action.

Since Britain had taken sides for its own purposes, it could not assume the role of a disinterested third party to which the litigants might look for arbitration and compromise. Even the limited mediation that was possible in central Arabia did not therefore take place at Qunfidhah. On the contrary, the polarization of opinions within the British administration again enhanced the ability of the two amirs to exploit the British alliance to further their regional political interests.<sup>38</sup> It was this split between Cairo and Delhi which produced the contradictory twists and turns in British policy early in the crisis, and which encouraged the amirs to hold fast to their most extreme demands. The Sayyid, for example, had been "told by Aden that Kunfida is his entirely."<sup>39</sup> The

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<sup>38</sup>On divisions between the Foreign Office, India Office, Cairo and Delhi in relation to the conflict between Husayn and the Idrisi Sayyid, see Busch, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-130; I.O. L.P. & S./10/600, A.H., (Under-Secretary of State), minute, Sept. 17, 1916.

<sup>39</sup>S.A. 138/16, Wilson to Wingate, Part Sudan, July 30, 1916; F.O. 371/2774, McMahon to Foreign Office, Ramlah, July 31, 1916; ibid., High Commissioner to Viceroy, Simla, Aug. 13, 1916, reporting S.N.O., Red Sea.

degree to which the Foreign Office position supporting Husayn was in fact under attack may be gauged from the following minute by a member of the War Committee:

I believe that to abandon the Idrissi will destroy what trust there is left in us in southern Arabia, will make the Sherif believe more than ever that he can do what he likes with us, and will have the worst effect on our Senussi negotiations. The Sherif is in reality so dependent on us that he cannot break away, and in my humble opinion, the right attitude is to make him see that we will not tolerate his forces, fed and armed with our help, being used against our friends, instead of against the common enemy.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed the India Office Secretary of State described the confrontation between the chiefs as "a fine commentary on Arab unity and on the policy of the Arab Bureau," adding that "a union of Kilkenny cats would be hardly less fanciful."<sup>41</sup> It was perhaps the realization at Qunfidhah that a united Arab front against the Turks was impossible that led Britain in the end to affirm the divisions and to impose its policy with the same blend of persuasion and coercion that the Sharif, the Sayyid and the Turks all attempted to apply to the tribes.

But finally Qunfidhah demonstrated at the level of both tribe and amirate the inherent instability of alliances in a segmented political system in which each unit was determined above all to retain its own functional autonomy. The coalition between the two amirs collapsed in less than two months, while the tribes changed their allegiance between all

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<sup>40</sup>F.O. 371/2774, G.H.C., War Committee, handwritten minute on McMahon telegram of Aug. 3, 1916, to Foreign Office, Aug. 4, 1916. Note that the Senussi chief in Libya and the Idrisi Sayyid were bound by a direct blood tie and that the latter's origins were in North Africa. See also F.O. 686/7, Symes to Wilson, p. 47, Aug. 22, 1916.

<sup>41</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./10/598, J.W.H. (Secretary of State), minute, Aug. 1, 1916; I.O. L.P.& S./10/600, J.W.H., minute, Sept. 18, 1916.



three regional powers (including the Turks) so often that any excessive reliance on their support would necessarily prove fatal. When it became apparent that the Sharif regarded union as synonymous with his own suzerainty and domination, the Sayyid indicated that he would tolerate no surrender of his own authority, his hostility to the Turks and his alliance with Britain notwithstanding. That the Sayyid lost this particular round of the struggle provides an interesting counterpart to the confrontation in central Arabia. By the time of Khurmah, the Sharif had become locked into a total dependence on Great Britain while ibn Sa'ud had retained his maneuverability. At Qunfidhah by contrast, the Sharif's options were still broad enough that he could threaten to stop the revolt while the Sayyid had virtually lost his independence, as he himself realized: "Our hands are tied since this decision has been reached by the Power which we reckon as our greatest friend."<sup>42</sup> But the ultimate victors were the tribes, who, having rebelled against the Sayyid and deserted the Sharif, were able to plunder the town in the absence of any constituted authority at all.

#### Postscript

While certainly the most dramatic, Qunfidhah was not the only border clash between Husayn and the Idrisi Sayyid. In central Arabia Khurmah became the focal point for a struggle for supremacy that was being waged also in Qasim, among the Harb and 'Ataybah tribes and indeed in every region where the influence of the two leaders overlapped. The

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<sup>42</sup>F.O. 371/2775, The Idrisi Sayyid to Turton, H.M.S. Northbrook, Aug. 8, 1916.

same was true on the Sharif's southern border, where he and the Sayyid competed actively for the allegiance of any doubtful tribes and districts.<sup>1</sup> At Wayzat, for example, in an area considered part of 'Asir but over which neither leader had any real control. Shaykh ibn Ahmad al-Hayj was regarded as "pro-Turk but...wavering." The Idrisi Sayyid had for some time been attempting to bring the chief into his sphere of influence, but after the Sharif's revolt an active correspondence also began between al-Hayj and Mecca, which was regarded by the Sayyid as interference in his own domain. To complicate matters further, al-Hayj asked the Aden authorities to intercede and expressed a desire to come under British protection, which in turn roused resentment in the Sharif who requested his allies to leave the negotiations to him.<sup>43</sup> And to show that he had no compunction about interfering in Hijaz affairs, the Sayyid began negotiations with the dissident shaykh of Rabigh, Husayn ibn Mubayrik, an action which could not help but provoke the Sharif's ire.<sup>44</sup> In the Bisha district of north-eastern 'Asir, the conflict became a three-cornered one. As Wahhabi influence penetrated to south-central Arabia, ibn Sa'ud competed with both Husayn and the Sayyid for control of that region.<sup>45</sup>

In April 1918, the Sharif sent a military expedition to Guz Abu

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<sup>43</sup>The dealings of the Sharif, the Idrisi Sayyid, Britain and the Ottoman Empire with Shaykh ibn al-Hayj are described in: F.O. 686/6/1, p. 178, Ruhi, Jiddah, Oct. 25, 1916; I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Political Resident, Aden, to Secretary etc., Delhi, letters of Dec. 15 and Dec. 22, 1916; ibid., the Idrisi Sayyid to Stewart, 4th Safar, 1335 (=Nov. 29, 1916); A.B. 37, Jan. 4, 1917, p. 6, on the Idrisi Sayyid's letter to the Political Resident, Aden; F.O. 686/10/1, p. 207, Ruhi to Wilson, Mar. 2, 1917; A.B. 71, Nov. 27, 1917, pp. 474-477, Hogarth report.

<sup>44</sup>F.O. 686/38, p. 239, Husayn to Bassett, 5.6.36 (=Mar. 18, 1918).

<sup>45</sup>A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 105.

al-Ayr, eighteen miles east of Qunfidhah, in an attempt to reassert his jurisdiction over the coastal tribes south of Lith and to avenge his betrayal by the shaykhs who had initially invited him there and then joined the Turks to expel Nasir from Qunfidhah. By May, serious inter-Arab clashes were taking place on the southern border of the Hijaz. The Sharif's forces were reported to have burnt several villages belonging to hostile tribes, but were finally driven back and defeated with the loss of 150 men killed and many wounded. The Sayyid's role in this affair is not clear, but what is certain is that this setback, followed immediately by the rebuff of the Sharif's first expedition to Khurmah, evoked passions which were rarely encountered in the war against the Ottoman Empire. Husayn told 'Abdallah that "the defeat at the Goz and Hedamah took place and I never felt so disappointed as in these two things," to which the son replied:

I will never, oh Master of Favours, forget this sentence, God willing, until I see those rascal infidels under the hoofs of the horses of Your Majesty's army.... This caused my anxiety and roused all my zeal and anger.<sup>46</sup>

At Guz, as at Turabah after the war, the casualty figures were significantly higher in this inter-Arab fighting than in any engagement with the Turks. The Sharif, aware of the value placed by Britain on a united Arab front, deliberately withheld information from his allies on these actions. The fate of the Guz expedition did not become known to British officials for almost three months. Once again the affective value of the

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<sup>46</sup>F.O. 686/10/2, p. 369, 'Abdallah to Husayn, Aug. 2, 1918; *ibid.*, pp. 363-367, Bassett to Arab Bureau, comment on Husayn-'Abdallah correspondence re Guz, on Aug. 12, 14, and 16, 1918; also A.B. 85, Apr. 15, 1918, p. 121; and A.B. 89, May 14, 1918, p. 164.

evidence is relevant, and the virulence of 'Abdallah's remarks indicates the importance attached to regional power struggles and trials of strength among the amirs throughout the Sharif's revolt.

As in central Arabia, the end of the war and the decline of British interest in the maintenance of Arab unity brought the conflicts between the Sharif and the Idrisi Sayyid to the surface. The immediate issue was the surrender of the Ottoman garrisons at Qunfidhah, Ibhah and other towns. Husayn arrogated to himself the right to appoint his own officials to replace the Turks in all the disputed territories and went so far as to designate the chief of the Bani Mughayd tribe, Hassan ibn 'Ali ibn 'Aydh, as independent Amir of 'Asir, an action which even the Sharif's supporters in the Arab Bureau declared "impolitic."<sup>47</sup> The tribes of Ibhah, which had formerly supported the Turks, now preferred the Sharif over the Idrisi Sayyid, but Husayn was separated from them by a wedge of two tribes on the Hijaz-'Asir border, the Zahran and Ghamid, who declared their allegiance to the Sayyid, a situation which reportedly made the Sharif "very angry." By May 1919, the Sharif was described as being involved in a "vortex of intrigue" over Ibhah. Even ibn Aydh's allegiance was doubtful and one British correspondent noted that like other Arab chiefs, he wanted "as much security as possible from a powerful protector with as little in return as possible."<sup>48</sup> Though the Sharif had

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<sup>47</sup>A.B. 107, Dec. 6, 1913, p. 369; A.B. 109, Feb. 6, 1919, p. 24; F.O. 686/10/2, Wilson to Arab Bureau, p. 294, Dec. 4, 1918; A.B. 76, Jan. 13, 1918, p. 13. (The Bani Mughayd had been the dominant influence in the area prior to the arrival of the Idrisi Sayyid's ancestors.)

<sup>48</sup>A.B. 113, July 17, 1919, p. 58.

sponsored the shaykh for the emirate of 'Asir in January and claimed his loyalty, it seemed likely by the middle of the year that ibn 'Aydh would choose the Idrisi Sayyid as his overlord.

Once again, it was logical in a segmentary system, for separate rivalries with a common enemy to produce unified action. The Sayyid therefore viewed ibn Sa'ud's progress at the Sharif's expense "with complaisance" and was said to be considering an alliance with Riyadh against Husayn in order to isolate the Hijaz on the east and south. He told Aden that the Sharif should be restrained in his propaganda against ibn Sa'ud and asked that his own subsidy be restored on a scale commensurate with Husayn's.<sup>49</sup> On the postwar process in southern Arabia it is well to recall Waterbury's caution that "segmentary systems tend toward an internal equilibrium which, it cannot be too strongly stated, is seldom achieved nor long maintained." The end of the war therefore plunged southern Arabia into a turmoil of intrigue, negotiation and rivalry for the allegiance of disputed tribes, as the traditional political forces of the Peninsula attempted to adjust to the new balance of power created by the expulsion of the Turks. Of course, the Sharif's ambitions in 'Asir were cut short by his defeats and eventual overthrow at the hands of the Wahhabis in central Arabia. But these descriptions of southern Arabia leave no doubt that not only the political objectives of the Sharif and his rivals but also the manner in which they were pursued lay firmly within the ancient political system of Arabia.

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<sup>49</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 4, 1920, Cairo, pp. 122-123.

Yemen and the Politics of Southern Arabia

One other major amirate falls within the purview of our study. Although peripheral to the Sharif's rising, both geographically and militarily, Yemen was nevertheless an important link in the interlocking complex of relationships which constituted the Arab movement. Neither the Sharif's ambitions in southern Arabia nor his conflict with the Idrisi Sayyid can be fully understood without taking this principality into account. Furthermore, the Imam Yahya was a major pro-Ottoman force in the Peninsula throughout the war, and if we are to speak of an "Arab" revolt, we must at least pause momentarily to consider why an important Arab leader remained loyal to Ottoman authority. The internal politics of Yemen were extraordinarily complex, even by Arabian standards, with a multiplicity of rival shaykhs and cross-cutting tribal loyalties, of feuding factions within the ruling house and of competing territorial claims involving Aden, 'Asir and the Hadhramawt. In addition there were religious divisions between Zaydi and Shafa'i and geographical ones between the mountain tribesmen and those of the plains. Whether this extreme lack of cohesion was the result of Yemen's isolation, as Col. Jacob claims, or of particular demographic factors is a matter for some speculation.

Repelling intercourse with other nations, the Yemen is thrown back upon herself, [Jacob wrote]. This isolation, however, does not unite the separate tribes in any community of national feeling. The contrary is the case. Bound together in provincial clanship, the inhabitants know themselves and their neighbours not so much as Arabs, [but according to their tribal, territorial and religious affiliations]. Tribes may be bought and re-bought by different and opposing parties.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>F.O. 371/2770, "A Political Policy in our Hinterland," note by Lt.-

The British presence in Aden further complicated the situation at the time of the war, for unlike its role in the Hijaz and central Arabia, Britain was not here merely an external force which could withdraw at the cessation of hostilities, but a competing power in its own right, drawn directly into the web of traditional politics in the region. Since Britain's own military forces were involved in this theater of the war, the Imam's evaluation of his relationship with the Ottoman Empire was subject to somewhat different considerations than those of the other amirs whom we have discussed.

It is impossible to deal with all these factors in detail here, since the focus of our discussion is after all, the Hijaz and not Yemen. To do justice to the politics of southern Arabia requires separate studies. Here we shall ask only how the Imam's role in the regional political network of southern Arabia affected the Sharif's movement and influenced the latter's ambitions in the area. And more importantly, we shall identify those patterns and political processes at work in Yemen which influenced the Imam's policy and affiliations and see whether these confirm earlier descriptions of the Arabian political system as we have observed it in the Hijaz and central Arabia.

According to an Istanbul newspaper, "the Imam Yahya denounces and disapproves the attitude adopted by Hussein, late Amir of Mecca, who in collusion with the English, revolted against the Ottoman Government."<sup>51</sup>

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Col. Jacob, Aden Residency, May 10, 1916; A.B. 111, pp. 64-66, May 24, 1919, deals with some of the complicated internal divisions and intrigues of Yemen politics.

<sup>51</sup>F.O. 371/3045, "Osmanischer Lloyd" of Constantinople, dated Feb. 20, 1917, sent from Berne to War Office, London, Mar. 3, 1917.

In correspondence with Arab chiefs in southern Arabia the Imam's representative wrote:

We now inform you that the solidarity of interests of our Lord the Imam...and that of the Sublime Porte have become identically one and the same, for the purpose of driving away by the help of God the cursed Christians from the blessed clime of Yemen and for the purpose of occupying the whole of that province [an allusion to Aden and the Hadhramaut].<sup>52</sup>

And to British representatives at Aden, the Imam explained his adamant refusal to join the Sharif and the anti-Ottoman alliance by his inability as a good Muslim to break his pact with the Ottoman Sultan and Caliph whose attitude toward him had been uniformly correct. He would not, he said, be a traitor before the world.<sup>53</sup> However, in view of the fact that he had in the past revolted against Ottoman rule and that no religious compunctions had apparently inhibited the rebellions of 1891, 1903 and 1911 in Yemen, we may suspect that these ideological justifications do not tell the whole story. In order adequately to explain the Imam's stance, we must look again at the classic imperatives of Arabian politics that have emerged time and again in this discussion. And as before, the parallels with central Arabia are too striking to be ignored.

Earlier we noted that one of the primary factors influencing the choice of alliances in central Arabia was the regional struggle for supremacy. Ibn Rashid's loyalty to Istanbul, ibn Sa'ud's treaty with Britain, and ibn Subhan's defection to the Sharif were inseparable from their local ambitions and historical rivalries. Similarly the Imam and

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<sup>52</sup>I.O. L.P.& S./10/598, Imam's commander to Aulaki Sultan, May 2, 1916, in A.N., minute, July 18, 1916.

<sup>53</sup>F.O. 371/2770, Imam to Walton, Shaharah, Oct. 16, 1916, reported Walton to Foreign, Delhi, Dec. 4, 1916; F.O. 371/3044, Stewart, Aden Residency, to J.E.C. Jukes, Government of India, Bombay, Dec. 9, 1916.



the Idrisi Sayyid were actively contesting the domination of southern Arabia and using the opportunities afforded by the war to pursue their own ends at each other's expense, a dispute in which the Sharif himself was not a disinterested bystander. Long before the revolt in Mecca, Yahya's pro-Ottoman position was described as being "partly due to his hatred of al-Idrisi, who is now fighting the Turk....," the same report pointing out that since the Imam had "spent the greater part of his life in fighting the Turks by the sword and intrigues," his present alliance should be viewed as tactical rather than ideological.<sup>54</sup> The hostility between the amirs was certainly mutual, as the Idrisi Sayyid's own representative emphasized:

The Idrissi and the Imam are irreconcilable; each has his own ends in view. [The] Imam is altogether pro-Turk, [the] Sharif is inwardly pro-Turk and is assisting them.<sup>55</sup>

Late in 1910 the two chiefs agreed to a truce in their dispute, confirmed by an official treaty in May 1912, which delineated their territorial boundaries and confirmed their independence in their own domains, and according to which they would cooperate to expel the Turks from the area. In October 1912, however, the Imam, having decided that the defeat of the Idrisi Sayyid was a prior objective to complete autonomy from the Porte, joined with Ottoman forces under 'Izzet Pasha to launch an attack against 'Asir which the Sayyid successfully resisted.<sup>56</sup> The breach opened up by

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<sup>54</sup>S.A. 134/8, War Office, Cairo, Intelligence Department, Jan. 5, 1915.

<sup>55</sup>F.O. 371/2769, Political Resident, Aden to Foreign, Delhi, Jan. 29, 1916; F.O. 686/34, p. 132, Wilson to Husayn, Jiddah, Feb. 2, 1917; F.O. 371/3049, Resident, Aden, to India Office, Aug. 17, 1917; F.O. 371/2770, Resident, Aden, to Foreign, Simla, July 9, 1916.

<sup>56</sup>A.B. 30, Nov. 15, 1916, pp. 441-443; F.O. 882/2, AP/16/1, pp. 197-198, Col. Jacob, Mar. 14, 1916; F.O. 371/2770, Political Resident, Aden

this clash enabled both sides to define their ambitions in the most extreme terms. The Sayyid claimed the entire Yemen Tihamah, or coastal plain, as far south as Hudaydah and probably beyond, while the Imam unconditionally demanded the removal of the Sayyid from Arabia as the price for his renunciation of his Ottoman affiliation.<sup>57</sup>

As ibn Sa'ud regarded his struggle with ibn Rashid for consolidation of his power in central Arabia as his immediate priority and his conflict with Husayn as the ultimate one, so too the Imam and the Sayyid regarded the direct threat posed by their mutual hostility as demanding their present attention while the Sharif's pretensions to suzerainty in the area were a more distant danger. Thus despite his jealousy and suspicion of Husayn, the Sayyid was nevertheless prepared to lay aside his differences with him, especially after Nasir's expulsion from Qunfidhah, because of his greater dislike of the Turks and the Imam Yahya, and in order to pursue his objectives in Yemen.<sup>58</sup> The preeminence of these regional political considerations over the stated goals of both Britain and the Ottoman Empire is even more pronounced in the case of the Imam. Historically it is impossible to explain his allegiance to the Sublime Porte by any innate sympathy or ideological bond with the Turks. Indeed

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to Foreign, Simla, May 23, 1916; ibid., Resident, Aden to Foreign, Simla, July 9, 1916.

<sup>57</sup>On the competing territorial claims of the Imam and the Sayyid, see A.B. 71, Nov. 27, 1917, pp. 474-477, Hogarth report; F.O. 371/2770, Resident, Aden, to Foreign, Simla, July 9, 1916; F.O. 371/3045, Resident, Aden to Foreign, Simla, July 20, 1917; I.O. L.P. & S./10/638, A.H. Minute, Feb. 13, 1917; A.B. 58, Aug. 5, 1917; F.O. 371/2770 telegram from Resident, Aden, Dec. 23, 1916; I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Nalder to Political Resident, Aden, H.M.S. Lunka, at sea, Dec. 20, 1916.

<sup>58</sup>A.B. 41, Feb. 6, 1917, p. 60.

he had fought harder against the Turks than most other amirs, with the exception of the Idrisi Sayyid, and certainly more than Husayn. His alliance with the Porte was dictated as much by his local political interests, especially his dispute with the Sayyid, as was ibn Sa'ud's treaty with England. And probably for the same reasons that ibn Sa'ud took no active steps against the Turks, the Imam loudly proclaimed his adherence to the Caliph while keeping his options open for a later accommodation with Britain should the latter prove victorious. That Yahya was not burning his bridges became clear in the middle of 1917 when he sent an envoy to Aden to propose an agreement with Britain. Although the Imam's conditions were rejected as "preposterous" and "altogether unacceptable" since they included the expulsion of the Idrisi Sayyid and the recognition of his own authority in all of Yemen including 'Asir and Hadhramawt, British officials nevertheless regarded his overtures as "highly significant":

It would we think be a serious mistake to rebuff them and close the door to further negotiations since the Imam is the one really powerful influence in southern Arabia and his cooperation would be invaluable both now and hereafter.<sup>59</sup>

A reply was therefore sent, welcoming this evidence of the Imam's friendly attitude and stating Britain's willingness to come to an agreement with him, while making it clear that Britain could not intervene in inter-Arab quarrels nor overthrow a faithful ally.

As might be expected, the Sayyid was said to be "very much afraid of an alliance between us and the Imam":

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<sup>59</sup>F.O. 371/3045, Resident, Aden to Foreign, Simla, July 20, 1917; *ibid.*, Viceroy, Foreign Department, to India Office, July 23, 1917; see F.O. 686/6/2, pp. 114, 116, A.T. Wilson to Arab Bureau, Cairo, Mar. 18, 1917, forwards letters of Sharif Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah al Hajuri al Yamani to Ibn Sa'ud of Jan. 31, 1917, and ibn Sa'ud to Cox, Feb. 8, 1917, about the possibility of the Imam uniting with Britain.

He realizes that this alliance would mean an immediate end of the Turks in the Yemen, leaving him in a solitary state and unable to resist our occupation of the seaboard should we so desire. As long as he is the only accessible factor in Yemen, he thinks we shall continue to make overtures to him: but that if allied with the Imam, we should have no further use for him.<sup>60</sup>

The British occupation of Aden and his bitter experience over Qunfidhah left the Sayyid with no illusions that his present ally was equally as concerned with considerations of strength and influence and might turn into an enemy overnight. To this end he did his utmost to prevent communication with San'a, advising Britain that he did not wish letters from Aden to the Imam to pass through his territory, discouraging the sending of envoys and refusing passage to a Sharifian delegate proceeding south from Mecca.<sup>61</sup> The Sayyid's attitude here illustrates our point dramatically. For all his antipathy to Ottoman authority, past and present, the Sayyid preferred the Turks in Yemen than not, and showed great anxiety at any possibility of cooperation between the Imam and either the Sharif or Britain. It is therefore mistaken to label the Sayyid as unequivocally anti-Ottoman. Rather, as we saw previously with both ibn Sa'ud and several of the Hijaz tribes, a non-ideological ambivalence toward one's friends and enemies is the most politic attitude for members of a segmentary system to adopt. Although he did not waver from his own strenuous opposition to Ottoman interference with his own authority, he was equally concerned to keep his options in the regional political system as wide open as

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<sup>60</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/645, Nalder to Political Resident, Aden, H.M.S. Lunka, at sea, Dec. 20, 1916.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.; and A.B. 49, p. 198, Apr. 30, 1917; F.O. 371/2770, telegram from Resident, Aden, Dec. 23, 1916; F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 192-193, British report from Arab informant from Hadhramawt in contact with the Idrisi Sayyid, Aug. 21, 1916.

possible. Without any conflict of interest, according to the values of tribal government, the Sayyid could view Ottoman authority in other parts of the Arab world as an effective countervailing force to his indigenous rivals. In that sense his conflict with the Imam had precedence over any combined Arab opposition to the Turks. Clearly not only the Imam's tribes, as Col. Jacob had pointed out, but also the amirs of the Peninsula defined themselves according to their parochial affiliations and local interests, rather than as "Arabs."

Another political factor alluded to earlier as a determinant of the Imam's allegiance was the British possession of Aden. The Imam's claims in the hinterland of the protectorate dated back to the 1630's when his ancestors took over the area with the end of the Ottoman occupation of Yemen. Over two centuries, the authority of the Imams gradually weakened until Britain established a protectorate in 1839 at a time when neither the Porte nor the Imam had any real influence in the neighborhood. However, the boundary was determined by agreement with the Ottoman Sultan and had never been recognized by any Arab chiefs. Though it split tribes and bore no relation to demographic or tribal factors, the line had been confirmed as recently as March 1914 in a treaty between Britain and the Ottoman Government without consultation with the Imam. The latter now regarded his alliance with the Porte as an opportunity to recover what he considered his "lost lands" in the same way that the Sharif hoped to use British support to regain parts of 'Asir for the Hijaz. Even British officials conceded that the Aden frontier would be a "tabula rasa" when the Turks were defeated:

When the Turks retire, the border line will be a thing of the past. Chaos will succeed. The Turk is at present the cork in

a bottle of beer. When the cork is drawn the beer will foam over. The democracy of the Arab only adds to the difficulty.<sup>62</sup>

As for the attitude of the local Arab shaykhs in the region, the majority remained neutral:

This war they consider as waged between two Governments. They will prefer us as a Government, but as one afar off; one that grants largesses and protects them against foreign intrusion. Their present neutrality does not argue love for the Turks, but shows that they would be left alone to live their own lives.<sup>63</sup>

Throughout the war the Imam carried on an active correspondence with the tribes of the Aden hinterland in an effort to win their adherence. That his territorial ambitions in the area were independent of his alliance with the Ottoman Empire, though he used the latter to further his own claims and aspirations, is seen by his armed incursions into Aden after the defeat of the Turks.<sup>64</sup> And once again the attitude of the Arab chiefs in the area confirms our conclusions for the Hijaz tribes that local autonomy, political security and material acquisition were primary aims of the tribes of the Peninsula.

Aside from the regional power struggle, other elements of the traditional political system which we have encountered throughout this thesis, also influenced the Imam's attachment to the Ottoman Empire. In the first instance, he was receiving an annual subsidy of £12,000, which either the Sharif or England would have to match in order to wean

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<sup>62</sup>F.O. 371/2770, Jacob, Aden, Note: "A Political Policy in our Hinterland," Residency, May 10, 1916; *ibid.*, Col. R.A. Wauhope, Political and Military Intelligence Officer, Aden, enclosed in Walton to Government of India, Foreign Department, May 13, 1916.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, Jacob, May 10, 1916.

<sup>64</sup>F.O. 686/10/2, p. 243, Aden to High Commissioner, Cairo, Jan. 1, 1920; *ibid.*, Aden Resident to Arab Bureau, p. 342, Aug. 24, 1918; *ibid.*, p. 335, Capt. Goldie, Jiddah, to Bassett, Sept. 12, 1918.

away the amir to their side.

On this subsidy, the Imam's position in the Yemen is based, [wrote a British official] and it is one of the ironies of the military situation that we should have to consider the desirability of spending large sums to bolster up a man who will always be potentially, if not actually, an enemy....We may keep the Imam temporarily neutral but not permanently friendly except at a price which we may well hesitate to pay, but we may reduce him eventually to economic dependence by intermediary control of his trade routes to coast both west and south.<sup>65</sup>

Yemen, being as dependent an economy as the Hijaz was therefore sustained by external subsidy in the same way as the tribes themselves were.

Earlier we compared ibn Sa'ud's role as a unifier of tribes in Najd with his opposition to unifying attempts at the regional level which threatened his own independence. We also noted that this apparently paradoxical situation simply represented two sides of the same system in which the tribe and the amirate coexisted in a state of continuous tension between their functional independence as units and their mutual dependence for support and protection. The same was true of the subsidy. In Yemen as in the other principalities, the Imam's power was to a considerable extent a function of his own ability to make generous payments to the tribes, while he himself depended on an external source for his survival. As Husayn himself was to find out, the amirate was altogether a shaky institution, being in a sense doubly dependent--internally on support from the tribes, externally on the resources and means to purchase this support. The Idrisi Sayyid recognized the role of material incentives when he advised Britain before the Sharif's revolt: "You will not conquer

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<sup>65</sup>I.O. L.P. & S./10/598, A.N., minute, July 18, 1916; F.O. 371/2770, Resident, Aden to Foreign, Simla, July 8, 1916; ibid., Political Resident, Aden to Foreign, Simla, July 15, 1916. The £12,000 is presumably sterling, though the British sources do not say so specifically. If it were Turkish pounds it would be equivalent to £stg.10,800.

the Yemen by force. It is a case of purchase."<sup>66</sup> And noting the Imam's indebtedness to the Porte for his stipend and for troops to assist him in maintaining order in his territory, Clayton had remarked: "The Imam is a broken reed, being too dependent on the Turks and very jealous of the Idrissi."<sup>67</sup> After the war, one British dispatch concluded that the Imam was "amenable ultimately to anyone who is in a position to subsidize him."<sup>68</sup>

The role of money as an instrument of political power was nowhere clearer than in dealings with two Yemen tribes, the Hashid and Baqil. Both were reported to be "dissatisfied with the Imam's meanness," and as independent "soldiers of fortune" were prepared to give their allegiance to whomever would pay for it whether the Sharif, the Idrisi Sayyid, or Britain, and they made overtures to all three. "The Idrissi said that if the Government would assist these people pecuniarily, they would come down en masse against the Turks," stated a British correspondent. "It was purely a question of bribery." Britain finally provided £7,000 a month through the Sayyid to maintain five thousand of the tribesmen in the field, but it was recognized that the Hashid and Baqil, being Yemen tribes, would probably prefer to join the Imam if the latter joined the Sharif and received a sufficient subsidy from him. Indicating Britain's own motivation very plainly one official commented that either way, it

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<sup>66</sup>F.O. 882/2, p. 197, AP/16/1, Jacob, Mar. 14, 1916; F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 192-193, British report of interview with Arab informant from Hadhramawt in contact with the Idrisi Sayyid; F.O. 371/2770, Political Resident, Aden to Foreign, Simla, May 23, 1916; A.B. 30, Nov. 15, 1916, p. 443.

<sup>67</sup>S.A. 134/2, Clayton to Sirdar, Cairo, Feb. 11, 1915.

<sup>68</sup>A.B. 109, Feb. 6, 1919, p. 27.



"will not matter to us so long as they attack the Turk."<sup>69</sup> Lest it be thought that there is any implied criticism here that a "traditional" political system such as that which we are describing is any more mercenary than a "modern" one, it is well to recall the political bonds and power alignments which are established in a world of nation-states through foreign aid, resource dependencies and arms supplies. In both cases money and weapons are simply strategic options that can be used to achieve diverse political goals. The object in examining a strategy is to determine the goals toward which it is directed and the structure of interaction between the units by whom it is used. In that sense the subsidy well illustrates the relationship between tribe, amirate and foreign power in Arabia. And by contrast to the Imam's dependence, we may conclude from our earlier observations that the status of the Hashid and Baqil as "free-lance" warriors was perhaps the ultimate guarantor of their independence in a segmented tribal system.

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<sup>69</sup>On the Hashid and Baqil, see: I.O. L.P. & S./10/638, A.H., minute, Feb. 13, 1917; F.O. 371/2769, Jacob report on interview with the Idrisi Sayyid, Jan. 17, 1916; F.O. 371/2770, Walton, Acting Political Resident, Aden, to Secretary etc., Simla, July 4, 1916; ibid., Political Resident, Aden to Foreign, Simla, July 9, July 15, and July 22, 1916; ibid., Sayyid Mustafa, conversation with G.A. Richardson, Political Officer, Kamaran, sent by Richardson to Military Administrator, Kamaran, June 8, 1916; ibid., the Idrisi Sayyid to Turton, dated 27th Sha'ban, 1334; F.O. 371/3049, Vice-roy, Foreign Department to India Office, Aug. 16, 1917; I.O. L.P. & S./10/638, Stewart to High Commissioner, Aden Residency, Sept. 14, 1917; and ibid., Ahmad ibn Yahya Ibn Farah, "Shaykh of Shaykhs of Hashid" to Husayn, 10th Shawal, 1335; F.O. 686/10/2, p. 346, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Sept. 1, 1918; ibid., p. 340, Yahya Yahya al-Shayyif of Baqil tribe to Husayn, June 30, 1918; ibid., p. 338, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Sept. 2, 1918. The last references show negotiations between Husayn and the Hashid and Baqil shaykhs. Ibid., p. 286, Bassett, undated note, probably Dec. 1918; ibid., pp. 280-281, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, Dec. 9, 1918; ibid., p. 287, M. (Arab agent in Mecca), report, Dec. 5, 1918; ibid., p. 316, telegram from Aden to High Commissioner in Egypt, Oct. 14, 1918; ibid., pp. 307-313, Goldie note by Muhammad Hasib Lutfi, Oct. 30, 1918; A.B. 49, Apr. 30, 1917, p. 196, Col. Jacob, Apr. 30, 1917; A.B. 66, Oct. 21, 1917; and A.B. 71, Nov. 27, 1917, pp. 474-477.

One other determinant of the Imam's loyalties which also confirms tendencies identified earlier in the Hijaz and central Arabia, was the perception of military strength. In their ceaseless search for security, the tribes turned to the amirates, and the amirs in turn sought alliances with the foreign powers, which could best afford protection and guarantee their livelihood. In southern Arabia the first major military clash of the war was the Ottoman defeat of British forces at Lahij in 1915, a setback which Britain had taken no steps to remedy. British inaction following the loss of Lahij and further minor reverses in the Aden hinterland were interpreted both by Arab shaykhs and by the Imam as a sign of weakness and Britain's inability to protect her supporters.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, since Ottoman troops were in Yemen itself, the Imam had no confidence in his own ability to expel them at this point in time. And, unlike the Idrisi Sayyid's position on the coast at 'Asir, the Imam was an island power and could not expect help from British ships. It was these considerations which, according to both British and Arab informants, prompted Yahya to decide that the Turks were still an important power in the Peninsula and were likely to remain there, being persuaded by what he saw, to continue assisting them. It should be recalled that the Ottoman Empire did not lose the war in southern Arabia. With few exceptions its forces had not been defeated and its garrisons were still in place when the armistice was signed. At Qunfidhah and Luhayyah where the Turks were temporarily dislodged, they soon drove out the Arabs and recaptured the towns, holding

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<sup>70</sup>S.A. 136/5, Apr. 26, 1916, unsigned report from Arab correspondent; A.B. 30, Nov. 15, 1916, p. 443; F.O. 371/2770, Resident, Aden to Foreign, Simla, July 9, 1916; ibid., Note from Jacob to Resident, Aden, on political situation, undated, probably Dec. 1916.

them until the end of 1918.<sup>71</sup> From his isolated corner of southern Arabia the Imam was less likely to set store by vague reports of Ottoman reverses in distant theaters of war than by what he witnessed on his own borders. Though he was astute enough to close no doors completely and continued his correspondence with both Husayn and Britain throughout the war, one Arab informant noted that the tone of the Imam's letters to Husayn "will be guided by the success or failure of the Sherif's movement."<sup>72</sup> Even ibn Sa'ud, we saw, did not believe the Turks would disappear as a political force from the Peninsula and was thus reluctant to rupture relations with them.

Having observed therefore the regional power struggle in southern Arabia and the competition for the loyalties of disputed tribes, the Imam's territorial ambitions, his dependence on an external subsidy and evaluations of military strength and success as determinants influencing his affiliation to the Turks, we may conclude that the patterns confirm the political processes described earlier in the Hijaz and central Arabia, and may therefore be taken as representative of the political system of the Arabian Peninsula. One further task remains in relation to Yemen and that is to identify the Sharif's own ambitions there. Again the situation is similar to central Arabia where the Sharif had a license to attack and bring under his own sway the amirate of Hail by virtue of its alliance with the enemy, but where there was also no real historical con-

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<sup>71</sup>S.A. 150/7, telegrams, Foreign Office to Prodcome, Constantinople, Nov. 24, 1918, Britannia, Nov. 26, 1918, and Foreign Office to Britannia, Nov. 27, 1918; also letter in S.A. 150/8, Wingate to Sir Ronnell Rodd; A.B. 97, July 23, 1918, and A.B. 100, Aug. 20, 1918, p. 281.

<sup>72</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, pp. 192-193, British report of an interview with an Arab informant from Hadhramawt in contact with the Sharif, Aug. 21, 1916.

flict to justify such action. The irony of his policy on both his borders was that the immediate neighbors with whom he had traditionally disputed the supremacy of the area were protected from his designs by their association with Britain, while his logical allies being more peripheral to his own sphere of influence, yet bordering the territory of his ancient enemies, were loyal to the Turks. We noted in our discussion of the Hijaz tribes that the old formula, "the enemy of an enemy is a friend," had practical application in the Arabian system. In that sense the wartime alliances contradicted the imperatives of Arabian politics from the Sharif's perspective and caused him endless frustration. It is no coincidence, as we have already seen in the case of ibn Rashid, that the armistice had barely been signed before Husayn was negotiating settlements with his erstwhile opponents during the war, and arranging for joint action against his former partners.

Meanwhile the question facing the Sharif was whether to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the war to make gains at the Imam's expense. 'Abdallah was apparently quite willing to do so, noting that since Britain had no treaty with Yemen, it would not object to a Sharifian attack on the Imam.<sup>73</sup> In a discussion with Lawrence, 'Abdallah asserted that dominion over Yemen would transform the Sharif's state from a loose hegemony of Beduin tribes into a populous, wealthy and vigorous kingdom of villages and townspeople, though it is almost certain that the amir's definition of Yemen here included 'Asir.<sup>74</sup> However, there may have been a real difference of opinion between father and son, because we also saw

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<sup>73</sup>A.B. 76, Jan. 13, 1918, p. 13.

<sup>74</sup>A.B. 51, May 22, 1917, p. 241.

earlier that 'Abdallah had direct ambitions in Hail which were apparently not shared by the Sharif since the latter took no steps to achieve that end. Or 'Abdallah's fantasy may have been mere wishful thinking because we have no evidence of any action or behavior designed to implement his plan. While 'Abdallah had talked of military supremacy in Yemen, the Sharif's only military activity in that sphere was directed against the Idrisi Sayyid, while his efforts in relation to the Imam consisted of an exchange of correspondence and envoys. No overt hostility was apparently ever expressed toward the Imam by Husayn, and dealings between them were confined to an attempt by the Sharif to have Yahya recognize his suzerainty and leadership of the Arab movement, while offering generous inducements to the latter to join his cause.<sup>75</sup>

As with ibn Rashid, it was the end of the war, with the consequent diminution of British influence and the lifting of the taboo on action against his former alliance partners, which allowed the Sharif's political ambitions to come to the fore and which enabled the traditional political processes to run their course unfettered by the imposed affiliations of an external conflict. In relation to Yemen, the Sharif adopted two separate strategies, negotiating directly with the tribes in an attempt to expand his influence and secure the adherence of important shaykhs, and later approaching the Imam for an alliance against 'Asir. In December 1918, a delegation of Yemen shaykhs arrived in Mecca offering their allegiance and asking Husayn to fix salaries for them, and the Sharif in turn began an extensive propaganda campaign in southern Arabia to secure recognition

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<sup>75</sup>F.O. 371/2768, p. 120, McMahon to Foreign Office, Apr. 18, 1916; *ibid.*, Husayn to the Imam, 25 Jamad al-'Awal, 1334.

for his titles and claims to hegemony. Letters were written to Husayn by the Sharif's own representative who then persuaded influential Yemen shaykhs to attach their seals, and these were then published in the Qibla.<sup>76</sup> Throughout 1920 and 1921, Husayn's opinions and remarks about both ibn Sa'ud and the Idrisi Sayyid became increasingly vituperative and hostile. After an interview with the Sharif, the British Agent at Mecca stated that Husayn's bitterness about the Sayyid was leading to a growing identification of interests with the Imam. The Qibla carried "diatribes" against the Sayyid and it was reported that "the King was trying to make a common cause with the Imam against the Idrissi."<sup>77</sup> Early in 1920, Husayn sent a mission to San'a with a view to establishing an alliance with the Imam against 'Asir.<sup>78</sup> The Sharif was reported to have asked Yahya to recognize him as King of the Arabs to which the Imam was said ready to agree, provided that Husayn recognized him as Amir al-Muminin, a proposal so preposterous that it can only be interpreted as a refusal to recognize the Sharif's suzerainty.<sup>79</sup> However, by this time Husayn's own base at home had become so weak that his intrigues in southern Arabia carried no weight, and he was unable both financially and militarily to take any serious

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<sup>76</sup>F.O. 686/10/2, pp. 296-299, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mussayd Yafi to British Agent, Dec. 1, 1918, and British Agent to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, Dec. 3, 1918; ibid., pp. 289-291, Husayn to Wilson, 29.2.37 (=Dec. 3, 1918); ibid., pp. 233-247, correspondence between Mecca, Jiddah and Cairo of Aug. 5, 1919 and Oct. 18, 1919, forwarding letters of Yemen shaykhs of June 22, 1919 and June 24, 1919.

<sup>77</sup>F.O. 686/12/1, pp. 37, 24, and 17, Nasir al-Din, Mecca, to British Agent, Jiddah, letters of Jan. 29, 1921, Feb. 9, 1921, and Feb. 27, 1921, respectively.

<sup>78</sup>Notes on the Middle East No. 3, Apr. 1, 1920, Cairo, p. 99.

<sup>79</sup>Notes on the Middle East No. 4, 1920, Cairo, p. 117.

action to support his claims. As his very survival came increasingly under threat, the Sharif's attention became riveted on the eastern frontier and his activities in the south were reduced to a frustrating exercise in impotence.

To a remarkable degree we have seen the Sharif's relations with the amirs of southern Arabia parallel those in the east. On both borders the Sharif had an immediate neighbor who was also allied with Britain and a more peripheral one who remained loyal to the Ottoman Empire. And in both cases these neighbors were pursuing a struggle for supremacy in their own areas among themselves, which was magnified by their allegiance to opposite sides in the world war, and at the same time disputing the control of frontier districts and tribes with the Hijaz. And while Britain temporarily eased and mediated the Sharif's conflicts on his borders with ibn Sa'ud and the Idrisi Sayyid of 'Asir, Husayn was jealous of their treaties with Britain and eventually preferred to conclude agreements with their opponents, ibn Rashid and the Imam Yahya of Yemen. Like ibn Sa'ud, the Idrisi Sayyid resisted any Sharifian encroachment or pretensions to dominion over his own territory and though equally willing to acknowledge Husayn's right to the Caliphate, he also never accepted the regal title. And as in the conflict with Najd, Husayn and the Idrisi Sayyid both attempted to manipulate the British alliance to their own advantage against the other.

Of course there were unique aspects to each case, but the striking similarities in the mode of interaction, in the nature of the alliances formed, and even in the issues at stake in the conflicts on both borders, drew attention to the common elements and principles of the Arabian po-

litical system as a whole. Above all, they confirm that the relationships among the amirs represented at the regional level, the same segmentary tribal system operating according to the same principles, goals and strategies, which we observed governing the participation of the Hijaz tribes in the Sharif's revolt. On the 'Asir border as in central Arabia, the struggle for power was dependent on the shifting loyalties of the tribes and the ability of the amirs through coercion, persuasion or even conversion, to command the allegiance of the leading shaykhs. In both southern and central Arabia, therefore, the Sharif attempted to use his revolt in order to expand his authority and establish his suzerainty, encountering resistance from his neighbors. And the weather-vane of his success or failure in the ensuing conflict at Qunfidhah as at Khurmah, was the adherence or defection of the tribes. That the essential unit of authority in the Arabian political system was still the tribe, is shown by the humility of the Idrisi Sayyid's admission:

The tribes of Asir are powerful, which cannot be entered either by the Sherif or by me except with their consent.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>F.O. 371/2775, The Idrisi Sayyid to Commander L.N. Turton, Commanding H.M.S. Northbrook, Aug. 8, 1916.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

## CONFLICT AND COALITION IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF ARABIA

By his declaration of independence in June 1916, the Sharif of Mecca had become the first Arab sovereign in modern times to break the bonds of Ottoman authority, and with the surrender of the Ottoman garrison at Medina in January 1919, his autonomy became a reality. Four centuries of Ottoman rule had ended but the Peninsula was embroiled in an upheaval of such proportions that Husayn and the Idrisi Sayyid, the two amirs who had most strenuously opposed the Turks, were shortly to disappear, and the political face of Arabia was to change irrevocably within a few years. By mid-1919, the Sharif's forces were engaged in battle against ibn Sa'ud's Wahhabi troops at Khurmah and Turabah in bloodier confrontations than ever occurred during the revolt. On the southern border of the Hijaz, territorial disputes flared with the Idrisi Sayyid over the possession of Qunfidhah and Ibah. All three of the above rulers vied for control of the Bisha district in northern 'Asir. The Idrisi Sayyid fought Imam Yahya for the Yemen Tihamah which he had invaded during the war and for the important coastal town of Hudaydah from which the Turks had recently been evacuated. And the Imam came into conflict with the British as he encroached on the Aden Protectorate. While Husayn's dispute with ibn Rashid over the ownership of towns invaded during the revolt was fairly quiescent during 1919, ibn Sa'ud's conflict with the Amir of Jabal Shammar flared into the open once more as he prepared to eliminate once and for all Rashidi influence in central Arabia. The entire Peninsula was in turmoil as the various amirs scrambled to fill the power vacuum left by the retreating Turks. Far from having created a new

sense of Arab unity the war against the Ottoman Empire had left behind a legacy of territorial disputes which was grafted on to prior regional conflicts. The intrusion of an external war and the Sharif's consequent alliance with one party in that war, had shattered the traditional balance of power in Arabia. When Britain had achieved its own goal of military victory and no longer had a stake in the fiction of Arab union, the politics of the Peninsula were left to run their own course, and the immediate victim was the man who had been hailed as "the great champion of the Cause of Arab freedom."<sup>1</sup>

And in his own domain, the tribes after the war were in open rebellion against the Sharif, whose influence and prestige was at a lower ebb than before the war. The Hijaz was in a state of chaos, feuds which had been temporarily suspended during the revolt now surfaced with renewed virulence, and roads which had been safe at the peak of hostilities against the Turks were now impassable as the Beduin returned to their "old methods of livelihood."<sup>2</sup> Even before Faysal's final thrust into Syria, Lawrence had expressed bitter disillusionment as he saw his dream of Arab nationhood torn apart from within:

The splendid mosaic of a united Arabia, which Feisal and Lawrence had tried to piece together with so much care, precision and diplomacy from so many jagged and conflicting tribal fragments, was beginning to fall apart. At the very moment when a joint Arab movement on Damascus was most imperative...the whole Arab movement seemed to be breaking into rival factions under the divisive influences of internecine envy.<sup>3</sup>

But if this judgment was too harsh, then it was only because Lawrence's

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<sup>1</sup>F.O. 685/40, p. 120, Wilson to Husayn, Cairo, Oct. 28, 1918.

<sup>2</sup>Notes on the Middle East, No. 3, Apr. 1, 1920, p. 81, report by Colonel Vickery.

<sup>3</sup>Nutting, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

own vision was not in accord with the reality which he had so accurately described. Modern nationalism, as we saw at the beginning of this work, is not "pieced together," with "care" and "precision" from disparate fragments. And national union is a less fragile construct than the tribal alliance which by Lawrence's own accounts, had been so painstakingly created by an unending series of arduous negotiations. The Arab army was, in the end, a temporary coalition of autonomous tribes, which had come together for the achievement of the specific goals and objectives which the Sharif's movement promised. When advantage had been obtained and the benefits of unity were no longer consonant with their separate interests, they withdrew their support from the central authority to which they had provisionally given their allegiance. At the end of the war the tribesmen were still beholden only to their own shaykhs, jealous of their political and territorial independence, and concerned, as for centuries past, to protect their own security and to ensure their means of economic livelihood.

From a military point of view the Arab revolt had certainly been victorious--the Turks had been defeated and expelled from Arabia, the Sharif's son was in Damascus and, for the first time in centuries, Arab soil had been "cleansed...of foreign oppression."<sup>4</sup> It is not the aim of this study to show how that victory was subverted in Damascus or Versailles or to determine whether the Arabs were "betrayed" by the postwar settlements.<sup>5</sup> Our focus has been on the Peninsula where the Arab revolt was launched and fought by the desert tribesmen, and it is there that we must remain to

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<sup>4</sup>Nutting, Lawrence, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup>Antonius, op. cit., p. 305; Zeine, Emergence of Arab Nationalism, pp. 71-72.

reassess both the creation and destruction of the coalition on which the uprising was based. If the revolt had achieved its professed goals, it had entirely failed its own leader, and if the victory was subverted, then it was ultimately from within the Arabian political system itself.

In considering that apparent paradox, we must look again at the specific historical questions which it raises, in the light of the operational rules of the political system which spawned the revolt. Why did the tribes of the Hijaz join the Sharif's coalition? Why did they withdraw their support at the end of the war? And why did the Sharif himself fail not only to achieve his goals but even to survive in his own domain? Our aim has been to extrapolate modes of behavior and determinants of action from the evidence itself, to ascertain the objectives of leaders and followers in a particular historical setting, and thereby to formulate generalizations about tribal organization and the nature of the Arabian political system. Since our method has been to investigate these questions by observing the actual interaction of individuals and groups within the political system, we must acknowledge that any explanation is necessarily partial and imperfect, because of the impossibility of chronicling every relationship. However, it is possible at this point to draw together some of the principal recurrent patterns of coalition and conflict which we have observed. After reviewing briefly the objectives of the actors and the strategic options available to them, we shall attempt, at the risk of some oversimplification, to present diagrammatically the processes of interaction between the several units of the system.

We have observed among the tribes a constant tension between the conflicting drives toward independence and security, goals which are cer-

tainly not unique to the Arabian system. Ultimately, total independence is permanent insecurity, and survival demands a delicate balance between the two. What distinguished the Arabian system from that of a nation-state was not the goals in themselves, but the multiplicity of political units or segments which defined their own interests as autonomous entities. rather than in relation to any larger whole. Although all the units of the system were interconnected, an upset in the balance between independence and security for any one of them, could mean its functional extinction as a political entity within that system. Thus we have seen tribes seeking the security of a powerful protector and adjusting their allegiances among the amirs in accordance with perceived changes in the balance of power at the regional level, yet at the same time jealously guarding their own autonomy and strenuously resisting any encroachment, even from their protector, on their own independence. The Khurmah tribes for example generally preferred the distant authority of Riyadh to the greater interference which they expected from the proximity of Mecca.

In the definition of goals and objectives, there was one major difference between the tribe and the amirate. The territorial limits of tribal domains were generally well-defined and, with few exceptions, we have not found the expansion of territorial influence to be a major preoccupation of the tribes. Indeed, their very nomadism precluded this concern, for it deprived them of the means to "rule" over neighboring provinces and peoples. By contrast, the seat of the amirate was a fixed location which allowed for the establishment of institutions of government capable of exercising a measure of authority over distant tribes, but its "borders," if indeed they may be called that, were in a state of constant flux. Since the tribe was the primary unit of authority in the system,

the ambitions of its shaykhs were limited by definition to the consolidation of control over their own clans and sub-sections. Hamad ibn Jazi and 'Awda abu Tayih could struggle for control of the Huwaytat but there was no scope for the ambitions of either beyond the boundaries of the tribe. For the amirate, on the other hand, the possibility of expansion was almost limitless, as the Sharif's vaulting ambitions and ibn Sa'ud's eventual conquest of almost the entire Peninsula showed. The functional equivalent at the regional level of the tribal pursuit of security, was therefore the amir's attempt to expand his influence over the tribes. And we have seen that the unifying efforts of the amirs were balanced by their determined resistance to any infringement of their own autonomy.

The tension between considerations of power and the need to preserve their independence of action was illustrated at both the tribal and regional levels by the use of the subsidy. A single strategy could be directed toward different purposes. For the tribe, the wealth which the Sharif could provide was at least a temporary guarantor of security, while Britain's subsidy to Mecca created the opportunity for a consolidation and expansion of power. In both cases, however, these objectives were balanced by the dependency relationship inherent in the economic transaction. Being the conduit between an external purveyor which could withdraw when its interests were no longer served, and a primary unit which could always sever its ties and return to its "old methods of livelihood," the amirate was therefore particularly vulnerable to a possible loss of independence. When his own subsidy decreased or ceased, the Sharif's ability to maintain his hold over the tribes decreased accordingly. Ultimately, the tribes depended on no one, and although they could barter some of

their autonomy for the wealth and security which attachment to a powerful amir could provide, they were equally able to rescind that bond if their independence within the system was threatened. The political base of the amirate, on the other hand, relied entirely on the support of the tribes, and its constant striving for the consolidation and expansion of its influence was therefore a condition for its very survival. After the war, 'Abdallah frankly recognized the limits of his father's power, when he told a British agent at Jiddah that

[The] Hejaz was not rich enough to pay its way. A strong and rich sovereign, with extensive dominions could command respect, but a petty chief like the King of the Hejaz was no better than the sheikh of a tribe, and therefore the people consider him incapable of being a leader in the sense of the word.<sup>6</sup>

The ramifications of the Sharif's growing dependence on Britain, however, went far beyond his need for resources to buy tribal support. If there was any single reason that the Sharif was unable to use his revolt for domestic advantage, it was that his reliance on Britain and his total breach with the Ottoman Empire, drastically restricted his political options and seriously impaired his ability to respond to changed circumstances. We have noted that ibn Sa'ud retained ties to the Turks and the Imam sent envoys to Aden, while the Idrisi Sayyid, despite his hostility to the Turks, attempted to prevent a British accord with the Imam. Because enmities were not ideological, the potential to convert an enemy into a friend was always present. But whereas the Sharif's alliance with Britain was intended as a grand strategy for the accomplishment of extravagant but nevertheless traditional objectives, it had finally deprived him of his maneuverability and his freedom of action, and thereby subverted his

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<sup>6</sup>F.O. 686/12/2, p. 77, Nasir al-Din discussion with 'Abdallah, reported, Nasir al-Din to British Agent, Jiddah, June 24, 1920.

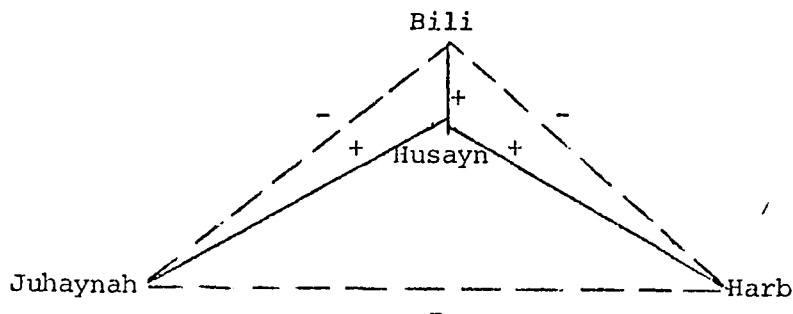
goals. He had contravened the cardinal principle of survival in a system of segmental opposition--the maintenance of a functional autonomy.

It is important not to confuse the strategies for the goals, the former being options available to the actors rather than the rules of the system itself. The fact that material or military aid was particularly significant as an instrument of mobilization in the case of the Arab Revolt is not to imply that other strategies might not be equally important in other circumstances. If Najd rather than the Hijaz had been the focus of our study, the role of religion as a powerful force in coalition formation would have figured far more prominently in our evidence. Indeed its strength may be gauged from the effectiveness with which Ibn Sa'ud was able to use the Ikhwan as a spearhead to forge a formidable political alliance by 1918 despite his paucity of material resources. Because the needs of the Arab revolt required an immediate and large-scale military mobilization, the infusion of money and weapons as a concrete inducement to action perhaps took the place of smaller and more partial steps that might have been adequate in normal times. As it was, Faysal's negotiations were protracted and difficult, often causing long delays in military operations. Longer-term strategies and more ambiguous alliances may finally have served the Sharif better, but the urgency of his immediate goals foreclosed such options. In the course of this study we have noted other significant considerations which affected tribal allegiance to or abstention from the revolt. The protection of property, the dependence on access to markets and the pursuit of trade whether with friend or foe, were all vital aspects of the subsistence economy of the Beduin tribes which had important political implications. For the Sharif himself, the concepts of secular kingship and suzerainty appeared to be a



direct channel to his goals, while the terminology of nationalism and of orthodox Islam provided useful ideological tools capable of rousing support for his cause in diverse quarters. What has been important in our consideration of these factors, however, is the relationships which they represented. Whenever a strategy is applied, it is transmitted through the existing power structures, and it is these which we have attempted to uncover. Having taken note therefore of the goals and strategies of the actors in the revolt, we must turn finally to our major concern--the identification of the political processes of the tribal political system through which these objectives were mediated.

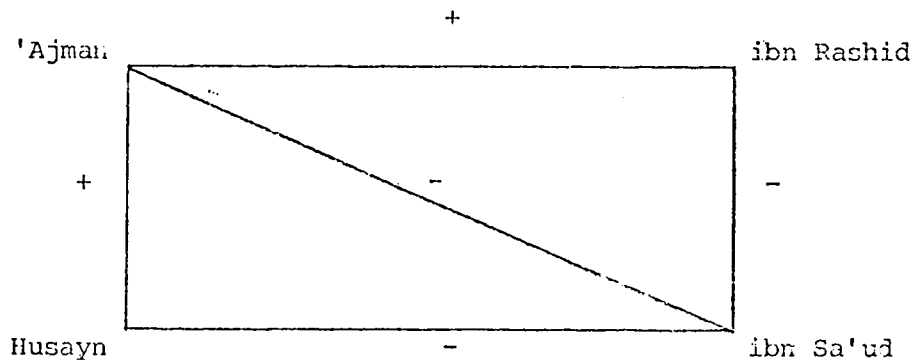
Among the tribes of the Hijaz and the amirs of the Peninsula we have seen a constant process of fission and fusion in a state of chronic tension between the centralizing efforts of more powerful leaders and the inherent centrifugal tendencies of a political system in which each unit sought to insure its own autonomy and survival. In the formation of an alliance, divisions could be temporarily overcome or suspended through mediation and the infusion of external resources, inducing rival groups to cooperate as long as the benefits continued to accrue. This was Faysal's task in the northern campaign as he attempted to make the bond of individual tribes to the Sharifate of Mecca stronger than the divisions which separated them. Thus, the Harb, Juhaynah and Bili tribes, which had been feuding before the war, were induced to cooperate, not with each other, as witnessed by their adamant refusal to serve under alien shaykhs, but with the Sharif. The negative signs in this and subsequent diagrams indicate conflict, while the positive ones represent coalition.



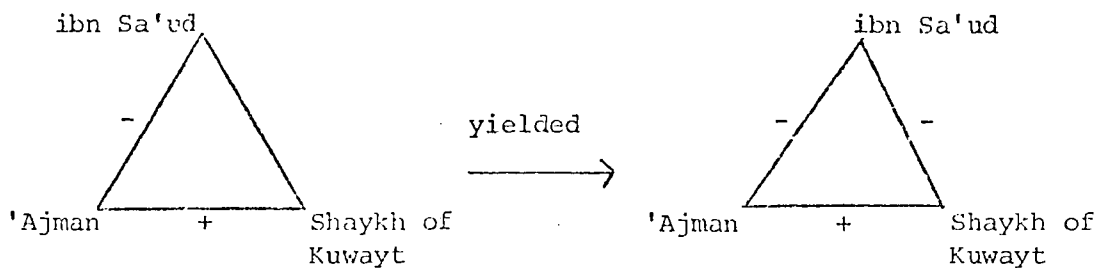
We noted that such cooperation and suspension of rivalries became possible when the resource base of Hijaz society changed radically, and ceased, by virtue of the British subsidy, to represent the zero-sum game characteristic of a subsistence economy. However, we saw also that by early 1919, the Harb were already threatening war against the Juhaynah and that even during the revolt, the hostility of both to the Bili had prevented its paramount shaykh from travelling to Mecca. One of the salient features therefore of a coalition based on mediation and the suspension of rivalry, was its temporary and conditional nature. Since cooperation did not emerge from the interaction of the tribes themselves, these being relationships of hostility, the survival of the coalition depended on the continued intervention of an external force.

However, there was also what might be called an "intrinsic" pattern of coalition formation, since it did not depend on third-party mediation nor the infusion of external resources, but emerged from the very imperatives of the interaction itself. This situation obtained at the regional level where the other actors did not stand to share, as did the Hijaz tribes, in the increased wealth and power, and where the Sharif's stated goals and the resources at his disposal raised the possibility of a gross imbalance of power which presented an immediate challenge to his neighbors. Here we have located what might be regarded as a basic principle of the

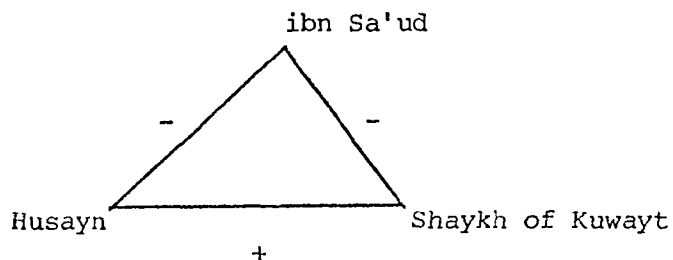
Arabian political system and the primary rule in negotiating an alliance: the enemy of an enemy is a friend, or, in mathematical terms, two negatives yield a positive. From the several examples of this operational rule which we have observed, it is possible to extract certain representative patterns. First of all, a tribe could manipulate the relationships among the amirs for its own purposes, ibn Sa'ud's hostility to Husayn and ibn Rashid giving the 'Ajman ample opportunity to seek an alliance in Mecca and Hail. Only British pressure prevented the Sharif from responding to the 'Ajman overtures.



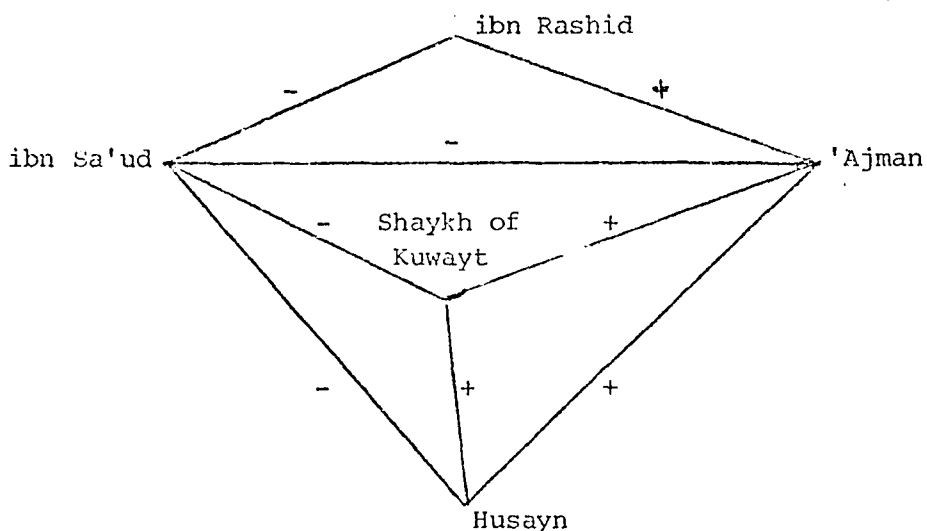
This process could work equally well in reverse, a positive and a negative yielding another negative. Thus, ibn Sa'ud's friendly relations with Kuwait, whose shaykh had helped him conquer Riyadh in 1902, were disrupted when sections of the 'Ajman were granted refuge in the shaykhdom.



Since ibn Sa'ud was now hostile to both Mecca and Kuwayt, it was logical that the Sharif should appeal to Britain on behalf of the Shaykh of Kuwayt:



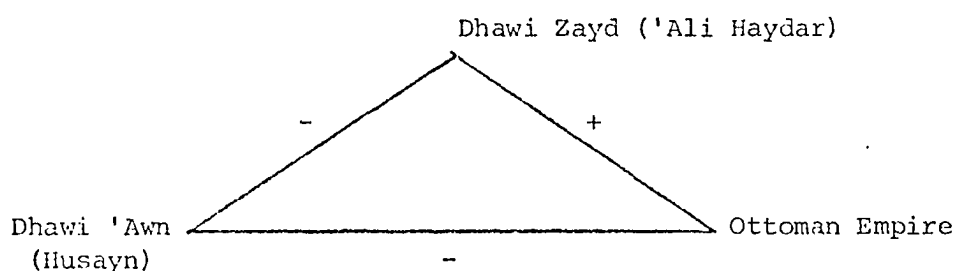
The entire relationship can now be represented as a series of multiple triads:



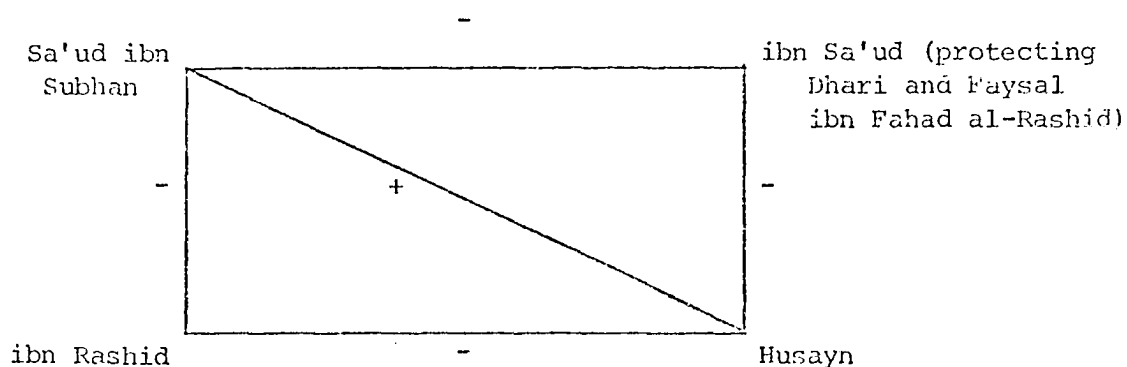
However, this increasingly complex relationship grew from just one essential hostility, which was not necessarily of primary importance to other participants in the interaction. Thus ibn Sa'ud's conflict with the Shaykh of Kuwayt was secondary to that with the 'Ajman, while Husayn's link with Kuwayt was four steps removed from the original dispute: 'Ajman vs. ibn Sa'ud; therefore 'Ajman + Kuwayt; therefore ibn Sa'ud vs. Kuwayt; therefore Husayn + Kuwayt. In order to represent these conflicts and

alliances accurately therefore, some lines should be darker and others lighter according to the intensity of the interaction. In addition, the Sharif and the Shaykh of Kuwayt both had their own primary and secondary conflicts which overlaid the relationships stemming from the 'Ajman dispute. It is possible therefore to portray the Arabian system as a complex series of interlocking triadic relationships, maintained by the tension between its several parts.

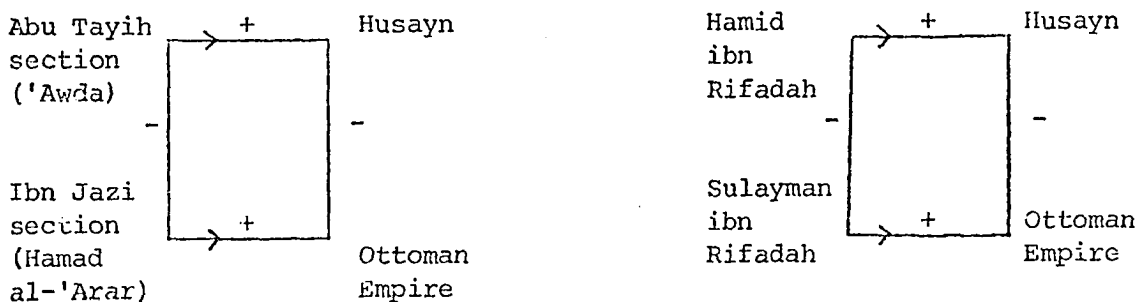
We have seen evidence of similar patterns in the process of internal segmentation within a tribe, clan or even family. The rivalry between the Dhawi Zayd and Dhawi 'Awn Sharifian clans impelled the former to ally itself with the latter's enemy, producing:



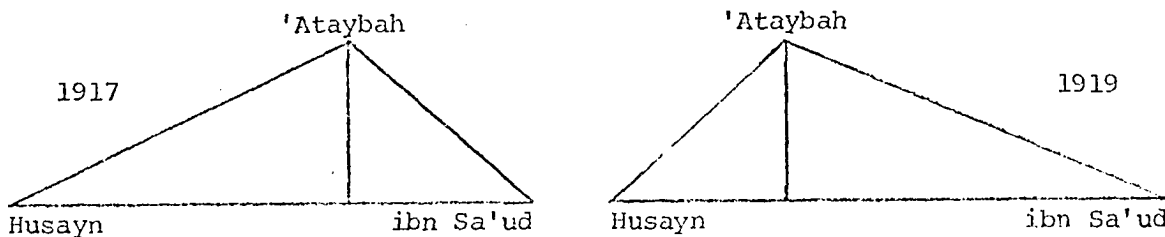
Sa'ud ibn Subhan's ambition to depose his brother-in-law at Hail produced a complex pattern of interaction as he sought an alliance with ibn Rashid's wartime enemy and attempted to stave off two rival contenders for the throne who had taken refuge with ibn Sa'ud at Riyadh:



In addition we have seen examples of intratribal feuds which were simply grafted on to wider regional or international conflicts, following Barth's observation that segments ally themselves with the rival of their own rival's ally. Within the Huwaytat and Bili tribes, we saw:



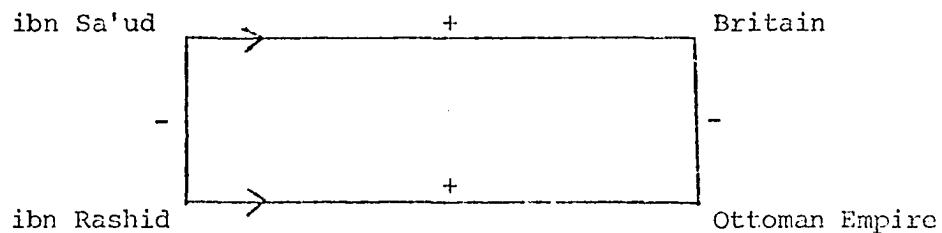
The importance of the zero-sum concept of power for these patterns of coalition formation is readily apparent from the internal segmentation of the 'Ataybah tribe. During the revolt, 'Abdallah had lavished his resources and his attention on the tribe, but with the spread of Wahhabism and the decline of the Sharif's authority at the end of the war, the power balance shifted.



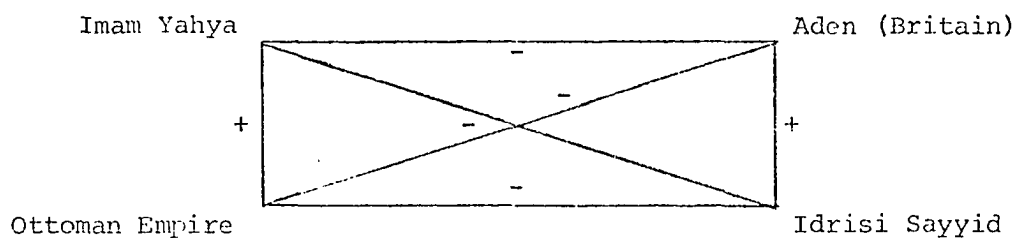
If we view the space within the large triangle as a fixed quantity of power, it is clear that ibn Sa'ud's gain was the Sharif's loss, and that power relations between the two were at least partially defined by the degree of control

which they could exercise over the tribes and the number of tribal sections which owed them allegiance.

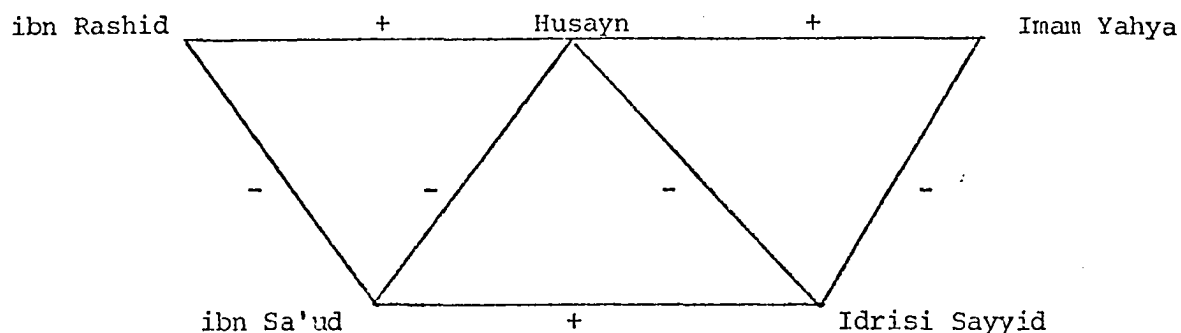
If we now sketch this process at the regional level, we may obtain some insight into the Sharif's inability to convert the military success of his revolt into political advantage within his own system. The immediate conflicts in central and southern Arabia confirm the rule that opposition determines alliance. Ibn Sa'ud's treaty with Britain impelled ibn Rashid to increase his reliance on Istanbul:



In southern Arabia where Britain's possession of Aden and the Ottoman presence in Yemen and 'Asir drew these two powers more directly into the regional conflict, we find four intersecting and complementary triads.



When we attempt to add in the Sharif's rivalries with ibn Sa'ud and the Idrisi Sayyid, however, we are confronted with an anomalous situation. According to traditional Arabian principles of coalition formation, the pattern should look like this:



The irony here is that in order to pursue his objectives at the expense of his traditional rivals on his borders, Husayn should have been allied with his two official wartime enemies. The Sharif's international alliance with Britain against the Ottoman Empire had in fact contradicted his domestic priorities. No wonder then that the Idrisi Sayyid initially refused to believe that the Sharif would revolt against Ottoman authority. Husayn had clearly hoped to short-cut traditional processes through his alliance with Britain, and to achieve instant supremacy over all his neighbors. But in doing so he had broken important rules of the Arabian system, and it was left finally to ibn Sa'ud, the master traditional politician, to perform the nation building process in the Peninsula. If, as it appears, the internal mechanism of alliance formation was based ultimately on opposition, we may confirm Evans-Pritchard's formulation that tribal structures are maintained by the tension and conflict between their several segments rather than by adhesion to any unifying principle.

Here we have drawn separate patterns of coalition and conflict as if they were discrete interactions either at one level (among tribes or among amirs), or across levels (between tribe and amir), or in a process of internal segmentation (within a tribe or within the ruling house of an amirate). But clearly all of these processes were operating simultaneously,



producing an infinitely complex network of relationships. We have attempted to deduce the whole by observing a replication of patterns among some of the parts. Because the Arab revolt challenged the existing balance of power, it highlighted tensions and brought into clearer focus conflicts which had been simmering beneath the surface. The feud between the family of Husayn ibn Mubayrik and that of the Sharif, for example, might have continued for generations as it had already done, flaring up occasionally and then lying quiescent. Warfare and open conflict, however, allowed for less ambiguity, and ibn Mubayrik joined the Turks and was finally murdered in Mecca. In this sense the revolt has been a useful tool to identify the workings of the Arabian political system. But it is fair to assume that in normal times, the triads which we have drawn were less clear and more fluid. Indeed, even within the short time span of our study, we have seen significant shifts in several alliances. What was advantageous in 1916 might be a liability in 1919, and the system demanded, above all, a willingness to respond to new circumstances. A change in one area inevitably set off chain reactions throughout the system as the actors attempted to find a new equilibrium which would itself be subject to immediate challenge.

Alliances based on the opposition of segments were inherently unstable, yet the very instability of the system was also its guarantor of survival. For whatever disruptions the war caused within the existing power structures of the Arabian Peninsula, the segments displayed a remarkable ability to manipulate the intrusive forces to their own advantage. If the Arab revolt proved anything about the tribal political system of Arabia, it was its resilience in the face of external challenge. The revolt had provided new strategic options for the achievement of traditional

goals and it had closed others, but all were finally filtered through processes of conflict and coalition which predated Islam. The mobilization of the tribes and their subsequent defection therefore was a single process of fusion followed by fission, while the Sharif's very failure underlined the resistance of the system to attempts to bypass its traditional processes. Those who would see the temporary response of the tribes to Faysal's mediation as a permanent subscription to unity, have bought the British definition of the Arab revolt, and have failed both to explore the motivations of its participants and to recognize the integrity of the system which provided its context. Ultimately, each unit in the triadic interactions which we have noted, was functionally independent, and any attempt at permanent fusion in the name of collective unity, would have threatened its claim to absolute autonomy and been rejected as intolerable. These then were the "values" of the participants in the Arab revolt, and their motivations must be traced to the tribal politics of Arabia. Since our study, however, is about the interaction of people and not the diffusion of ideologies, we cannot close without returning to the man who has been at the center of this inquiry.

When all the evidence has been presented, it is difficult to emerge without compassion for the Sharif of Mecca in his almost insurmountable dilemma. Of his unbridled ambition, his autocratic rule, his narrow prejudice and his unscrupulous attempts to impose his authority on his neighbors, there is no doubt. But Lawrence, for one, dismisses him too cavalierly as a "foolish" old man and a "nuisance," remarking after his overthrow by ibn Sa'ud, that he was "glad beyond words when he went."<sup>7</sup> The Sharif had

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<sup>7</sup>The Letters of T.E. Lawrence, edited by David Garnett (New York, 1939),

wagered everything and, ultimately, lost everything. Ibn Sa'ud had played his hand far more cautiously, risking little throughout the war, consolidating his power and striking when the time was ripe. Husayn was fighting and negotiating on four distinct levels, and at each his authority and very survival were at stake. He was at open war with the Turks, who would certainly depose and probably hang him if they recaptured Mecca, a possibility which was very real for the first eight months of the revolt. He was engaged in a bitter struggle with his Arab neighbors, from where the death-blow finally came. He was challenged by a rival Sharifian clan at his very base of power, and uncovered plans for sedition among the nobles at Mecca. And he negotiated endlessly for the support of the tribes upon whose loyalty he ultimately depended. The cleavages on every front proved too great for him as Turks, hostile tribes, the Dhawi Zayd clan, and Ibn Sa'ud all worked to overthrow him. But perhaps the most significant reason for his final collapse lay, ironically, in his relationship with his ally. In real economic and political terms, Sharif Husayn was never an "independent" ruler, and the closer he came to military victory the greater was the burden of his crippling dependence on Great Britain. Between that and the challenges to his authority at every level, he foundered and was overwhelmed. The enormous strain and isolation of constant struggle took its personal toll,

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p. 267: Lawrence in a secret report for the British Cabinet, entitled "Reconstruction of Arabia," Nov. 4, 1918; p. 577: T.E. Shaw (Lawrence) to D.G. Pearman, Karachi, undated, probably February, 1928; p. 671: T.E. Shaw (Lawrence) to William Yale, Professor of History, University of New Hampshire, London, Oct. 22, 1929. See also Aldington, p. 273, for Lawrence's opinions of Husayn.

and before the last shots had been fired against the Turks, the embattled ruler of Mecca was being described as "extremely worried," "highly strung," "overwrought" and "overworked."<sup>8</sup> The Sharif of Mecca himself represented the final tragedy of the Revolt in Arabia.

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<sup>8</sup>F.O. 686/10/1, p. 6, Bassett to Arab Bureau, Jiddah, July 30, 1918; F.O. 686/39, p. 323, Wilson to Director, Arab Bureau, Jiddah, June 30, 1918; ibid., p. 334, Wilson to Arab Bureau for High Commissioner, June 29, 1918.

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