РОССИЯ И ВОСТОК

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WESTERN ARABIA, SOVIET RUSSIA AND HIJAZ IN THE AFTERMATH OF WORLD WAR I

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Abstract: *This article is one of a series of articles earlier published or being published in various Russian science journals highlighting the history of relationships between Russia/the Soviet Union and some states in the Arabian Peninsula, primarily Saudi Arabia, the efforts of Soviet diplomats to foster such relationships after World War I and thwart the attempts of Western powers, particularly the United Kingdom, and their satellites to prevent the Soviet state from gaining a foothold in the subregion. The article also looks at the prewar period in the history of Western and Central Arabia, including the role played by the Hashemite Sharifs in the system of vilayet governance, likewise over the period during WWI, when local tribes commanded by the Hashemites launched an armed rebellion against the Ottoman rule. On the basis of archival materials, many of which are introduced into the science domain for the first time ever, inter alia the diplomatic correspondence, the initial steps made by the Soviet diplomats dispatched in the region with a view to exploring the domestic political environment in the host country and generating recommendations for Moscow to increase momentum of diplomatic activity are reviewed. The author did not overlook the importance of a personal factor in the evolution of the situation for both Saudi and Soviet (especially the role played by Georgy Chicherin, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs) sides, and also the impact of the interdepartmental rivalry in the Russian and British capitals upon the shaping of the foreign policy strategy.*

Keywords: Hashemite Sharifs, Hijaz, anti-Ottoman uprising, Jeddah, Soviet Russia, Great Britain, colonialism, McMahon's promise, Sykes-Picot Agreement, A.A. Svechin, S.D. Sazonov, T.E. Lawrence, League of Nations

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In the western vilayet of Arabia – Hijaz, the land of two cities sacred for the Muslims of the world – Mecca and Medina – before World War I secular power belonged to Ottoman vali, or the governor, appointed by the Sultan, who also bore the title of Caliph – the spiritual head of the Muslims. Jeddah was ruled by Kaimakam, and Mecca by an Emir, a Sharif of Arab origin, or the "Great Sharif"[1] from the Prophet Muhammad's family, the Hashemites. The Emir practically personified spiritual power as he was the trustee of the Hajj, mandatory for all Muslim pilgrimages to the shrines of Islam located in Mecca and Medina. Entrance to non-Muslims to these cities was

[1] In order to distinguish Hussein as Emir of Mecca, and then the King of Hijaz from other Sharifs, he was often called the "Great Sharif."

forbidden just as it has remained until today (some desperate Orientalists risked breaking the rule and some of them paid the ultimate price for such adventurism). The consulates of a number of Muslim and non-Muslim countries were located in Jeddah, including the Russian Empire, in the years 1890–1914. Among the main tasks of the consulate was working with pilgrims from the Russian Empire and neutralizing anti-Russian activities of Russia's strategic rivals, especially the Ottoman Empire itself.

THE LAND OF THE SHARIFS

The Arabic word *sharif* literally means "noble" and at first was used in its broader sense, pointing to the relevant human qualities. Yet it does not appear in the Quran.[2] Over time this word has also acquired a terminological meaning, indicating that a person is a descendant from Hassan and Hussein, the grandsons of Prophet Muhammad, the children of his son-in-law and cousin, Ali. According to al-Suyuti,[3] this happened only in the 10th century during the times of the Fatimids, and by the 13th century it had already become a title and such were called the rulers of Mecca. As Gerald de Gaury[4] writes, referencing Arab sources, the word '*ashraf*' (plural from '*sharif*') has already been applied to all Qureishis, the tribe to which the Prophet of Islam belonged [Gaury, 1951].

And for the title of Meccan Sharifs, descended from the clan of the Prophet, often a different plural form '*shurafa*' was used (but the famous dictionary E.W. Lane based on the classical works of Arabic lexicographers gives two plural forms: '*ashraf*' and '*shurafa*' as synonyms, but while referring to the ruler of Mecca the title "sharif" was always used with an article). From the beginning of the 13th century the representatives of two branches (Banu Fulaytah and Banu Qitadah) of the same clan of local sharifs, descendants of the grandson of the Prophet – Hassan through Abdullah al-Salih (al-Thani), began to rule Mecca.

In 1893 after the constitution was declared by the Ottomans, they invited one of the most influential representatives of the 'Awn clan from Hijaz, Hussein bin Ali (who was born in 1856) to Istanbul along with his entire family. They had to spend as much as fifteen years in the Ottoman capital, practically as captives of the Sultan, before Hussein was appointed the Great Sharif of Mecca in 1908 (the year of the revolution of the Young Turks), replacing his cousin, Ali bin Abdullah. The Ottomans clearly hoped for greater loyalty of the new Emir of Mecca compared to the former one but the Ottomans miscalculated. The Sharif had been obstinate and ambitious from his youth and now, feeling the growth of national attitudes towards liberation of the Arab world, he cherished the dream of becoming the ruler of a large Arab state – at least within the borders of Arabia. Arriving in Hijaz, Hussein did not find many changes, but he did notice that the railroad that now reached Medina had been built, and that this held great strategic importance for the Ottomans, and would allow the quick transfer of troops to the area of holy cities if necessary. However, in the future the First World War prevented the expansion of the railroad all the way to Mecca from ever being completed.

At the beginning of the war Hussein established the first contacts with Arab nationalists. In November 1914 he began a correspondence with their nationalist associations, which had unsuccessful negotiations with the British in Egypt. [Tauber, 1993, p. 57–59] The absolute

[2] It is strange that in the Holy Book of Muslims there is a lack of this important word (at least in its everyday meaning – noble, worthy), as well as the word *sharaf* (honor). I do not exclude that this can be explained by the negative connotation of these words with the tribal values of the Jahiliyyah era, which Islam rejected.

[3] As-Suyuti, Jalal ad-Din (1445–1505) – the most famous Egyptian theologian, author of numerous works, a number of which were translated into Russian by D.V. Frolov with his colleagues (with his research and commentary).

[4] Gaury, Gerald de (1897–1984) – British officer, World War I participant, Arabist, historian, diplomat, also gained fame as an excellent amateur photographer and author of watercolors.

majority of their intellectual activists were Syrians, so one of the authors who had studied a great deal of Ottoman archives proposed to call them "Syrianists" [Dawisha, 2016, p. 30; Kayali, 1997, p. 212] instead of Arab nationalists in the period prior to the World War I. Iraqi-American historian Adid Dawisha quotes a Syrian Christian judge who became a minister in the Arab administration in Damascus after the World War I at a time when the son of Sharif Hussein – Faisal who had been ruling there for two years (see below) noticed that even though at the beginning of the century there had been certain nationalist tendencies in the region, they were spread only among individual members of the upper class [Dawisha, 2016, p. 34].

If one were to continue the discussion of this trend in the socio-political thought of the Levant Arabs, it should then be noted that the very first nationalist groups originated here already in the middle of the 19th century. The first of them was the clandestine Syrian Scientific Assembly (al-Jam'iyyah al-'ilmiyyah al-suriyyah) formed in 1857, according to the famous Lebanese historian of the 20th century, George Antonius (1891–1942) [Antonius, 1938, p. 53–55]. In 1875, another underground organization [Antonius, 1938, p. 79–89] appeared in Beirut and another two organizations of a similar orientation emerged in the beginning of the 20th century: the Literary Club (al-Muntada al-Adabi) and the Ottoman Party of Decentralization [Antonius, 1938, p. 108–121; Dawisha, 2016, p. 29].

Arab nationalist groups first proclaimed moderately anti-Ottoman slogans and only after the repressions the Turks undertook against them in Syria and Iraq, the nationalists began to take more irreconcilable positions, demanding full independence. At the beginning of 1915 two underground nationalist societies, Al-Fatat[5] and Al-'Ahd, decided to work out a joint plan for an uprising against the Ottoman Empire, whose new center would be located in Syria and the main force of which would consist of Arab soldiers of the Ottoman army. Since "the planned uprising was to spread to the Arabian Peninsula, these societies chose the Meccan Sharif Hussein as a partner, or one might say as their supreme leader" [Tauber, 1993, p. 6]. While in Mecca during the Hajj in October 1915, their representative, Kamil al-Kassab persuaded Hussein to revolt [Tauber, 1993, p. 6]. One of Hussein's sons, Faisal, "traveled to Damascus to inform these nationalists about Britain's ongoing secret negotiations with Hussein while Al-Fatat and Al-'Ahd joined forces and offered their support to Hussein" [Alangari, 1998, p. 5]. The latter also instructed Faisal to verify the seriousness of the conspirators' plans.

However, the nationalists did not enjoy the support of the broad masses of the Arab population and did not have sufficient military resources to captivate Hussein with the proposed perspective of acting as an all-Arab negotiator with Britain for the liberation of the Arab nations. According to famous American historian Ernest Dawn (1918–2016) only 126 people "openly propagated Arab nationalism or were members of Arab nationalist societies" [Dawn, 1973, p. 152] up to October 1914.

Even among the Arab supporters of the uprising against the Turks there was no agreement that the Sharif should lead it and even the British had not yet advocated this idea. One cannot ignore the fact that some influential Arab communities rejected the power of the sharifs altogether so the prospect for replacing the Ottomans as overlords for the Meccan sharifs was unacceptable to them. According to Israeli-British historians Efraim and Inari Karsh who studied a great deal of British archival materials, including dispatches of diplomats and intelligence reports, the support of the Great Sharif even in Hijaz was not as strong as some authors later depicted and it was said

[5] Al-Fatat and Al-'Ahd, as well as Al-Qahtaniyyah, which appeared in Syria at the beginning of the 20th century, were the first underground nationalist Arab organizations in the Ottoman Empire (see about them: [Antonius, 1938, p. 53–55]). Al-Fatat was created in 1911 by immigrants from aristocratic circles who were in exile in Paris, and Al-'Ahd was formed in 1913 by Iraqi officers serving in the Ottoman army. After World War I, Al-'Ahd split into Syrian and Iraqi factions [Tauber, 1993, p. 333].

in one of the reports from British intelligence dated December 1916 that the population of Mecca was generally "almost completely pro-Turkish" [Karsh, Karsh, 2001, p. 376], i.e., six months after Hussein launched a rebellion against the Ottomans on June 8.

HASHEMITES UPRISE AGAINST THE OTTOMAN RULE

Attempts to completely debunk the myth of mass support by Arabs in Arabia for the anti-Ottoman uprising under the leadership of the unpopular Hussein failed as one of the sons of the Great Sharif, Faisal, in the opinion of both the aforementioned and some other researchers, managed to use the powerful financial resources of the British and bribe the Bedouin tribes who nevertheless came under the banner of the Sharif. However, even after this up to 300,000 Arabs [Karsh, Karsh, 2001, p. 374] allegedly remained in the Turkish army. As for the Sharif, he became interested in the idea of an uprising, and in fact decided to intercept it from the nationalists as this could help realize his dream of becoming the ruler of the pan-Arab state. In order to do that he needed to enlist the support of London. The British, who were waging a difficult war on the Middle Eastern fronts with the Ottomans decided to support the Sharif as the British High Commissioner in Egypt Sir Arthur McMahon[6] corresponded with him.

Russian intelligence officer and diplomat Moisey M. Axelrod (1898–1938), who was in disguise under the pseudonym Rafiq Musa, later wrote: "At the time of Hussein, he himself was the only source of power in Hijaz as well as the legislator, the action taker and the judge and his activity did not know any specific external manifestations. Even though the cabinet of ministers was organized in the first days after the uprising and functions were distributed between its members, all this remained on paper. In fact, there were no ministers or directorates attached to them. Only truly working institutions were quarantine and customs in Jeddah simply because their existence was associated with the most important incomes of the Hijaz kingdom. There were no election commissions from the population (the Majlis al-Shura that was organized in the days of the uprising soon ceased to exist). Courts (Sharia) existed but they worked very badly" [Musa, 1928, p. 44].

The diplomat also reported: "There was no solid revenue nor any system in the expenditure of funds in the time of Hussein. The Hashemites lived by 'grabbing', by virtue of what they were able to first snatch from England and then from the pilgrims and finally the population. There were no specific tax rates but there were illegal levies. There was no difference between the state treasury and the private property of King Hussein. The covetous King reached the end of his reign of fabulous proportions. Particularly famous was the King's speculation with the currency, which he was raising then lowering, profiting from every change of the rate. It is not surprising that during his (not entirely voluntary) departure from Jeddah, Hussein took with him a tidy sum of seven-and-a-half million pounds, leaving not a single piastre in the treasury.

Beginning in Hijaz on June 8, 1916 the uprising was a full-fledged military operation, the main force of which consisted of tribe militia and Arab volunteers. The uprising was supported by the English, who had initiated it, and their representative in the Sharif's troops, a man who would later become well known, Lawrence of Arabia, took direct part in the hostilities. Hussein managed to collect fifty-thousand Arabs armed with no more than 10,000 rifles, only a part of which were modern. Some British leaders were not at all impressed with the Bedouin army at first.

For example, Sir Reginald Wingate, the Governor-General of Sudan remarked: "His army is in fact just rabble, resembling a crowd of derwishes" [Lawrence, Liddel Garth, 2002, p. 301].

[6] McMahon, Arthur Henry, 1862–1949 – British officer, colonial administrator, high commissioner of Egypt (appointed in 1915), who had a reputation of "pro-Arabist" politician.

Nevertheless, despite the fierce resistance of Ottoman forces in the cities of Hijaz, whose total number reached fifteen thousand people and who had well-fortified positions and in general were able to defend the rebel detachments under the command of Hussein's four sons Ali, Abdullah, Faisal and Zeid already in the first weeks, managed to achieve partial success.

They quickly occupied Jeddah and before long new Arab tribes began to join them. The British, interested in supporting the Arabs' military operations against the Ottomans, supplied arms and provided troops to fight alongside the Arabs. For example, by order of the same Wingate on June 27, 1916 three ships sailed under the command of an Egyptian officer from Port Said to Jeddah, carrying two mountain batteries and one company with four machine guns as well as 3 000 rifles and a large supply of food and military equipment [Garth, 2002, p. 304]. The rebels in any case were no match for the Turks in armaments and equipment, who had at their disposal infrastructure that could be used for military purposes (ports, railway) and major cities with mobilization capabilities. However, as modern British historian John Chalcraft rightly points out, Arabian tribes could conduct military operations from the mountains, from the desert, and oases and semi-settled settlement [Chalcraft, 2016, p. 201–202]. As events in other countries have shown, for example, during the uprising in Sudan, these opportunities could play a key role in ensuring victory.

Moving north, the Arabs helped the British advance on the Ottoman positions. A significant role in ensuring their success was played by famous Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888–1935), British army officer, diplomat and writer, a puny, short man (166 cm) who not only gained a reputation among the Arabs for being a fearless warrior, but also for his unconventional sexual orientation. On May 9, 1917 the rebels, under the leadership of Lawrence, took the last Ottoman port on the Red Sea, Aqaba, and in doing so the rebels had cleared Hijaz from the Turks. In mid-1918 they conquered another important city in the north, Maan, then entered Syria and on September 30 of the same year they occupied Damascus. Relying on tribes, Faisal bin Hussein, who had united them with the urban classes, began to create the same Arab state that his father had so much dreamed of.

As Lawrence later recalled: "Our task was to form the Arab governments with sufficiently broad powers and with predominantly from the native population to harness the enthusiasm and sacrificing nature of the Arab rebellion, switching them to a state of peace" [Lawrence, 1991, p. 270]. In 1920, Faisal was already proclaimed the King but the French who according to agreements with the British, had their plans for Syria and Lebanon, could not reconcile with this decision. After the conference of the Supreme Council of the Entente Powers and the states that joined them in San Remo, all British troops were withdrawn and their place was taken by the French under the command of General Henry Gouraud (1867–1946), who was appointed High Commissioner of France in Syria and Cilicia. The French occupied Damascus on July 25, 1925 and deposed the Sharif who had been on the throne for only a few months. On August 2, Faisal left the country. As a consoling gesture, the British made Faisal bin Hussein the King of Iraq in 1921 (and his brother Abdullah was to rule Transjordan).

Some very reputable researchers have sought to debunk the myth of the Hijazis' rebellion against Porta as the "Great Arabic Uprising". It was conducted under the slogans of Islam, and not Arabism or of some Arab nation. According to Aziz al-Azmeh, "It was an Islamic uprising undertaken not in the name of the Arabs, but rather the Meccan caliphate which was led by the Sharif Hussein" [Al-Azmeh, 2000, p. 69]. Not all historians agree with this statement, however. For example, John Chalcraft insists that the rebellion was raised precisely under the banner of secular nationalism and not Islam [Chalcraft, 2016, p. 202]. In any case, those who doubted that Hussein, who was first and foremost led by his personal ambitions, belonged to staunch supporters for Arab nationalism were probably right.

Hijaz's relations with Najd remained tense. According to Russian historian Alexey Vassilyev, they "have always been difficult. Both Ottoman Pashas in Jeddah and Medina and the Sharif of Mecca continued to claim the right to intervene in the affairs of Central Arabia" [Vassilyev, 1999, p. 203]. In the history of Hijaz–Najd relations there were even episodes of direct military confrontation.

Initially, not only were relations between the Hashemite Sharifs and the Saudids less than friendly, but also personally between the Sharif Hussein and Ibn Saud. Particularly Wahhabis were disgusted with how "the Great Sharif" ruled the pilgrimage. In 1918 the dispute over al-Khourma – an important transit point from Hijaz to Najd – escalated into a serious armed conflict. Its inhabitants joined the ranks of *Ikhwan* after which the Sharif sent his troops there to occupy the city, killing many of its inhabitants in the process. However, as a result of a counterattack, the Ikhwans from Gatgat together with the militia from Khourma defeated the Hijaz army. The object of the dispute between the Najdis and the Hijazis was also another settlement by the name of Tarba.

After World War I Abdul Aziz bin Saud continued his expansion on the peninsula, subordinating all the new cities and regions of Arabia to himself. In 1919 he sent his cousin Musa'ed b. Jaluwi to Abha, just to the south of Hijaz, to negotiate with Hassan b.'Aid, who had seized power in the north in the district of Asir, the handing over to Ibn Saud[7] the Arab lands the Ottomans had abandoned. After his offer was rejected, the warriors of Ibn Saud were sent to the emirate to force him to capitulate to the leader of Najd.

In the same year he achieved an important victory: after nearly a two-month siege of the capital of the emirate of Jabal-Shammar, the city of Ha'il finally joined Najd. The British could not stand in the way of the newly appointed Sultan, although they still planned to preserve the independence of the Jabal-Shammar emirate.

As for Hijaz, the methods of Hussein bin Ali's rule, the growing extortion of the pilgrims, the terrible sanitary conditions of the Hajj sites, which were the cause of a large number of deaths of pilgrims, and the mass spread of disease among them, and the large-scale corruption all greatly upset the local population. The Sharif took steps to win the sympathy of the population of Arab countries, playing upon, in particular, the widespread dissatisfaction with British plans to create a "Jewish national homeland in Palestine", a plan which began to be developed in the summer of 1917. Hussein not only declared his rejection of the Balfour Declaration, but also refused in 1919 for this reason to sign the Treaty of Versailles, a personal grudge being the main reason. He did not take part in the Versailles Conference, where his son, Faisal, represented Hijaz [Howarth, 1964, p. 106]. Ibn Saud took an even more adamant position against Jewish immigration to Palestine, trying to pull out the national-patriotic rug from under the Sharif's feet.

WHAT MCMAHON PROMISED THE GREAT SHARIF HUSSEIN

In scientific literature and journalism of the Soviet era, with the exception of certain individual special works, it is often possible to come across the idea that behind any initiative of British colonial officials almost always there stood some unified political will of the British establishment. In fact, in all matters concerning how the colonies, protectorates and dependent territories were managed, as well as the redrawing of the world map in the interests of the British Empire, most

[7] Since 1906, South Asir was ruled by Imam, theologian Muhammad b. Ali al-Idrisi (1876–1920), a follower of the Sanussi tarikat, who professed one of the forms of Salafism (the majority of the inhabitants of Libya belong to the Sanussis, in 1909 proclaimed himself Emir of Asir. In part of the territory of Northern Asir, the leaders of the 'A'id clan that was dominating there tried to form their own emirate, but without success. In 1917, the Asir Emirate of al-Idrisi was recognized as an independent state, which lasted until 1934. In 1919, al-Idrisi briefly annexed Yemen's Tihama.

of the acute problems Great Britain faced involved very bitter struggles between the ministries, agencies and high-ranking officials were engaged in solving these issues. Often the motives for the confrontations between collective and/or individual actors (including within the same ministry) were the result of personal ambition and career rivalry. Initiatives, as can been seen in archival materials, were often put forward by colonial administrators who had acquired a great deal of local authority without having coordinated with their superiors, or with any of the other relevant ministries.

Great Britain during the World War I had already in one form or another established its colonial domination over a huge part of the Middle East and, at the same time, constantly modified its rather complex system of governance over the countries of the region, including the component of checks and balances.[8] It was at this time that the Ministry of Defence had for the first time become involved in the affairs of the Arab world.[9] In Mesopotamia, the military administration, which had been formed by the colonial government of India, gradually became an autonomous structure accountable to London, and as a result of which the role of the Indian government in the war was significantly reduced. But the role of Cairo, acting as a base for the British actions in the region, sharply increased, especially after in 1915 a new structure was established there – the Arab Bureau. It was formally subordinate to the Foreign Office, but was funded by the Ministry of Defense and at the same time "effectively controlled by the Admiralty". The Bureau's task was to harmonize British politics in the Arab world, in addition to participating in military intelligence operations [Petrie, 1940, p. 31].

During the war, questions of the future division of the territories of the Ottoman Empire, in whose defeat London had little doubt, were discussed at meetings of the so-called Interdepartmental Commission. Competition between the three ministries – the Foreign Office, Colonial Office, and the India Office,[10] not to mention intelligence services that were present everywhere – affected the process of adopting important foreign policy measures.

It is not surprising that between the aforementioned British agencies and individual officials there was a troubling polemic at that time over the correspondence between the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Arthur Henry McMahon and Sharif Hussein. This correspondence, covering the period from July 14, 1915, to January 30, 1916, included ten letters in which the High Commissioner reported that Great Britain was ready to recognize the independence of the Arab vilayets of the Ottoman Empire located in Mashriq – the eastern part of the Arab world (with some exceptions – Mersin[11] and Alexandretta[12]), under the auspices of the Meccan Sharif, if the latter were to raise and lead an armed uprising against the Turks to help the British forces fighting against the Ottomans. Usually, a letter of October 24, 1915 is quoted in this context, in which, inter alia, it was written: "...Great Britain is prepared to recognise and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sharif of Mecca" [*CAB* 24/282, CP 19 (39)].[13] After losing in Gallipoli,[14] this would help London to tilt the balance of power in its favor.

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[8] For example, even in relation to India, where a great deal of management experience had already been accumulated, the powers of the Viceroy and the Secretary of State of India were not very clearly demarcated, and in case of serious disagreements, the viceroy usually gave in to the secretary or resigned.

[9] Hereinafter, the British system of governance of the Arab countries by: [Leatherdale, 1983, p. 20–23].

[10] British agencies that govern dependent territories.

[11] A city on the southeast coast of Turkey.

[12] Alexandretta, now Iskenderun – a city with its surrounding territory in the province of Hatay in modern Turkey. It was Sanjak of the Ottoman Empire, after the World War I, by decision of the conference in San Remo, became part of the French mandated territory; then the French made this area one of the quasi-states (more precisely, autonomous administrative units) created by them in Syria and Lebanon, which was annexed by Turkey in 1939.

[13] For more details about the correspondence between McMahon and Hussein, see: [Antonius, 1938].

[14] A large-scale operation of the Anglo-French troops in Gallipoli in 1915–1916 in the Dardanelles area.

When making key decisions on the Middle East, one of the ministries, namely the India Office, has always taken a position dictated largely by the task of preventing rising anti-English sentiments among Indian Muslims, which could threaten the security of all those territories dependent on London. For this reason, the colonial government of India, as some English authors have emphasized, reacted with concern even to London's declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire, fearing that Indian Muslims would feel threatened that a political war might turn into a religious one [Troeller, 1976, p. 74]. And such charges of interfering in the religious affairs of Muslims caused the Indian authorities the greatest concern of all.

THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING MCMAHON'S PROMISE

Contrary to popular belief, the assurances McMahon gave to the Meccan Sharif were not in any shape or form a deceitful trick undertaken on the basis of a consolidated decision taken by London. This is evidenced by the flood of criticism that was poured on the British High Commissioner in Egypt, which naturally, was not made public, but rather was captured in secret diplomatic correspondence. It is worth noting that McMahon perhaps not by accident served only for a short time in the prestigious post of High Commissioner: from January 9, 1915 until the end of 1916 – less than two years. From the time of his resignation on January 1, 1917, up until his death in 1949, i.e. more than 30 years, he appeared to be unemployed.

In this connection, one example is indicative. When the India Office became fully aware of the detailed contents of Sir McMahon's letters to Sharif Hussein, the Office's Secretary of the Political section, Sir Arthur Hirtzel, categorically opposed the idea of creating a "large Arab state" because the British annexation of Basra was an integral part of the future plans for the division of the Ottoman Empire, which was being carefully considered by the interdepartmental commission. The Viceroy of India also expressed his dissatisfaction with imprudent promises to include Basra and Baghdad vilayets in the future Arab state given to the Sharif by the British High Commissioner. "Special measures of administrative control" over these vilayets, as he wrote, should have been left to the government of His Majesty or the colonial government of India:"...We always meant at a minimum the final annexation of the Basra vilayet (in any form?) and local management of the Baghdad vilayet under our tight political control. McMahon clearly guarantees that annexation will be impossible" [*FO* 371/2486, 1915].

And the Commander of the British troops in Mesopotamia, General John Nixon, having heard about the promises McMahon had made to Hussein, advanced one of his own – as many have thought – a weighty argument against it. He wrote that besides the fact that such a commitment seemed premature and detrimental to important British interests in Basra and Bagdad and the future of this great country, this, as he thought, represented a complete understanding of the mood among the vilayet population. It didn't take into account the important fundamental fact that four fifths of the residents of the Basra vilayet and two thirds of the Bagdad vilayet are Shiites" [*FO* 371/2486, 1915].

It is impossible not to notice how the British in the implementation of their colonial plans had already taken into account these Sunni-Shiite contradictions, although at that time they were not nearly as pronounced as they would be in the Islamic world a hundred years later – at the beginning of the 21st century.

Some colonial officials stood by the Sharif and to some extent supported McMahon's promise. In particular, Kinahan Cornwallis[15], Director of the Britain's Arab Bureau, was a supporter of the

[15] Cornwallis, Kinahan (1883–1959) – British colonial administrator, intelligence officer, diplomat, son of the famous British writer, poet and traveler Kinahan Cornwallis, headed the Arab Bureau in 1916–20, later the British ambassador to Iraq.

Sharifs. Cornwallis (not without the approval of his superiors, as evidenced by his correspondence) during his visit to Jeddah confirmed to the representative of the Hashemite clan of Sharifs, Muhammad al-Faruqi,[16] that the Sharif was preparing to bestow on himself the titles of "King of the Arabs" and "Caliph of the Muslims", as well as to return to Syria [*FO* 88 2/4, 1916]. But the immense ambitions of the Meccan Sharif seemed to a number of colonial officials so unrealistic that they even doubted that such ambitions really existed. For example, Sudanese Governor-General Reginald Wingate[17] was among those who did not believe in such plans of Hussein. Yet it was clear that the scheming surrounding the replacement of the Ottoman Sultan, acting as a Caliph, with a person loyal to London had been set in motion by the English for some time. And by the way, the same Wingate belonged to the ranks of those British figures who did not understand the essence and goals of the Ikhwan movement and later "found traces of Bolshevism in Central Arabia, of which the genesis belongs to Hussein" [Leatherdale, 1983, p. 347]. Opponents of the ambitious plans of the Hashemite Sharif, who believed in the seriousness of the intentions of the British, as if clearly stated in McMahon's letter, demanded to disavow the project, which implied the emergence of a kind of "Supreme Arab Ruler" in the person of Hussein.

By the way, the British understood perfectly well: entering into an agreement with London, the Sharif, despite the fact that he was counting on the help of the British to bring independence to the Arabs, explicitly risked his reputation in the Islamic world, where anti-British sentiment was growing.

Nevertheless, on July 12, 1916, Hussein declared Hijaz independent from the Ottoman Empire, which became the launching pad for the beginning of the Britain-supported "Arab Revolution" [Daghir, 1916, p. 228, 234–235]. And on November 2, 1916, the Sharif was proclaimed "King of all Arab countries." He informed all the foreign ministries of the outside world and demanded recognition. Russia was the first state to recognize his proclamation, support of which, according to Arab researcher al-Subey'i, was not surprising, since the Hussein's move was directed against the Ottoman Empire: Russian Foreign Minister Boris Vladimirovich Stürmer,[18] on the 3rd of Muharram 1335 A.H./ November 4, 1916, sent an official telegram to the King about Russia's official recognition of Hussein as the "King of the Arab countries," after which Hussein notified all the main foreign countries about this recognition, urging them to follow Russia's example [Al-Subei'i, 2016, p. 50–51; Musa, 1992, p. 158–162].

FUTURE VICTORS AGREE ON THE DIVISION OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

In fact, in parallel with the correspondence between McMahon and Hussein, London and Paris over the period of 1915–1916 secretly agreed on the future sectioning of the Asian part of the Ottoman state that was beginning to suffer defeat in the war. According to these agreements, the Arab vilayets of the Ottoman Empire were to be transformed into the mandated territories of the two European powers after its defeat. Their representatives have gone down in history as the authors of the first, very hastily-tailored version of the colonial section of the Asian part of Ottoman Turkey, while the British politician Sir Mark Sykes and the French diplomat Francois Georges-Picaud had been not famous for anything.

[16] Al-Faruqi, Muhammad (born in 1891 in Mosul) – an officer who deserted from the ground forces of the Ottoman army, went over to the British and made an indelible impression on them with his involvement in the activities of the secret nationalist society of Syrian officers (see: [Kedouri, 2014, p. 73]).

[17] Wingate, Sir Reginald (1861–1953) – at the time Governor-General of Sudan.

[18] Boris Vladimirovich Stürmer (1848–1917) – Russian statesman, Chief Chamberlain of the Court of His Imperial Majesty (November 10, 1916), Chairman of the Council of Ministers (January 20 – November 10, 1916), at the same time Minister of Internal Affairs (March 3 – July 7, 1916), then the Minister of Foreign Affairs (July 7 – November 10, 1916).

Sykes began traveling the Middle East at the age of 11 with his parents – first, the eccentric Sir Tatton, who, as British author James Barr writes, was fully occupied with church architecture, maintaining a constant body temperature and consuming milk puddings, and second, a certain alcoholic Lady Jessica. Mark remained an amateur traveler, the author of a small book "The Last Legacy of the Caliphs," although he served as an attaché in the English Embassy in Constantinople. He looked like being very knowledgeable in the Arabic and Turkish languages, although he didn't speak either of them. However young, ambitious baronet managed to build a good career as an expert in the region [Barr, 2011, p. 8].

According to the aforementioned Barr, Georges Picaud's faith in the French "mission to civilize" in Asia was caked in blood. Even before the World War I he served as a French consul in Beirut and maintained active contacts with Arab nationalists. However, both he and Sykes argued with relative intrinsic arrogance that the Arabs were not yet mature enough to manage their lands on their own [Barr, 2011, p. 20].

In 1915, when the British and French architects of the colonial seizure of the Arab provinces of the Ottomans were ordered to delineate the spheres of influence of the two powers, in November of that year they simply ran a straight line on the sand between the Palestinian city of Akko near Haifa on the Mediterranean coast and Kirkuk in the north of Iraq, and called the line "E–K" (E – after the last letter of the English name of the first city, Acre, before the first letter in the name of Kirkuk), to the south of which the sphere of domination of Britain was supposed to be situated and to the north – France's. Thus, London did not keep its promise to Sharif Hussein to create an Arab state under his auspices in return for his participation in the war against the Turks. Although the draft of the future post-war structure of the Arab East, developed by two authors, was purely preliminary and despite the fact that a fierce struggle for the mandated territories continued between London and Paris for several years, this plan went down in history as the Sykes-Picot secret agreement and become a symbol of the colonial enslavement of Arabs. This agreement was concluded on May 16, 1916.

It should not be forgotten that the arrangements developed in 1915–1916 between England and France in fact have not yet firmly established boundaries between future mandated territories/states that were formed in Mashriq. This was done later – with the participation of Hijaz – at the Paris Peace Conference (January 18, 1919 – January 21, 1920), at which the Sevres Peace Treaty was prepared, then agreed upon at a conference of the Supreme Council of the Entente Powers and the associated states in San Remo (from April 19to April 26, 1920) and signed on August 10, 1920 again with participation of Hijaz. Finally, the Lauzanne Peace Treaty at the conference in Lauzanne that was conducted with a break from November 20, 1922 to July 24, 1923, was accordingly signed thus de jure putting an end to the Sevres Peace Treaty.

In accordance with the decisions taken, the United Kingdom received a mandate to govern Palestine and Iraq, while France was to govern Syria and Lebanon. In addition, the so-called Balfour Declaration became a part of the Anglo-French management plan of Mashriq – in a letter of November 2, 1917 British Minister of Foreign Affairs Sir Arthur James Balfour to Lord Rothschild for presentation to the Zionist Federation, in which London expressed its approval of the project, which was viewed as "the creation in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people."

The issue of the Black Sea Straits, of strategic importance for Russia, was also discussed at these conferences. Since the 19th century the problem of the passage of Russian ships through these straits – the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles was acute for Russia as the United Kingdom constantly went to great pains to block Russia's interests. Occasionally, and against the backdrop of Russia's rivalry with the Ottomans beginning with the reign of Alexander I (1801–1825) continuing on to Nicholas II (1894–1917), the idea would arise to resort to military force. Thus,

at the beginning of the war of 1806–1812, the Minister of the Navy, Pavel Chichagov, developed a plan for conducting a landing operation on the Bosphorus with the assault of Constantinople. And now at the end of the 19th century, Russia had once again decided to revisit this plan.

Upon entering the World War I, Russia did not set itself the task of any territorial acquisitions; it only wanted to weaken Germany and to eliminate a number of threats to German domination in Europe and to strengthen the positions of Austria-Hungary in the Balkans. The question of the occupation of the Black Sea Straits was not part of the war agenda. However, Russia's position on the straits would soon become somewhat different: the Minister of Foreign Affairs, an Anglophile and Germanophobe, S.D. Sazonov[19] (he was dismissed in July 1917 and replaced by B.V. Stürmer) declared to the British and French ambassadors that when a peace agreement was to be reached, Russia would ensure itself free passage through the straits once and for all. However, in this case there was no any discussion whatsoever of territorial conquests.

The situation has radically changed around the straits with the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the war. This time Nicholas II himself proclaimed that the "reckless intervention" of the Ottomans "would open the way for Russia to resolve the historical tasks bequeathed to it by the ancestors of the Black Sea". Difficult negotiations ensued with partners in the Entente – Britain and France. If these powers, counting on the defeat of the Ottoman state, were primarily concerned about the upcoming division of its Arab vilayets, the Russian authorities were inspired by the prospect of gaining control of the straights by annexing Constantinople, the long-held dream of several Russian emperors. On February 19, 1915, Sazonov handed a message to the ambassadors of the United Kingdom and France demanding that Constantinople, the western coast of the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara and the Dardanelles and Southern Thrace up to the Enos-Medea line, as well as parts of the Asian coast between the Bosphorus, the Sakaria River and a to-be-determined point on the coast of the Gulf of Izmit, the islands of the Sea of Marmara, the islands of Imbros and Tenedos (a draft resolution on the straits issue was prepared at the Foreign Ministry of Russia by B.E. Nolde and K.N. Gulkevich) be considered Russian territory.

As a result of the exchange of messages between the three powers, Britain and France accepted Russia's conditions, and Russia agreed with the requirements to take into account the interests of Britain and France in Asian Turkey and even to revise the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907, recognizing the zone, which designated it as neutral, to now acknowledge it as British. It is legitimate to assume that one of the reasons for the "malleability" of the partners in the Entente was the successes of the Russian army, which in February 1916 occupied Erzurum and Bitlis. At the end of November 1916, after the conclusion of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, Russia again planned to conduct its operation on the Bosphorus, the main force in which now was to be the Black Sea Separate Division under the command of General A.A. Svechin,[20] and the day-to-day management was entrusted to Vice-Admiral A.V. Kolchak.[21] But the operation was at first

[19] Sazonov, Sergey Dmitrievich (1860–1927) – prominent Russian statesman, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire (1910–1916), died in Nice. His brother, Nikolai Dmitrievich (1858–1913), was a member of the State Duma, the chamberlain of the Emperor.

[20] Svechin, Alexander Andreevich (1878–1938) – a prominent Russian and Soviet military theorist and military leader, teacher, writer, born in the family of a general, who served in the Russian Imperial Army, whose last rank was Major General, serving from 1918 in the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, Division Commander, taught at the Military Academy of the Red Army, author of the classic work "Strategy." Alexander Andreevich, after two arrests returned to the army, served in the Intelligence Directorate, then in the Academy of the General Staff, was then re-arrested in 1937, and executed in 1938. His elder brother Mikhail (1876–1969) – a hero of the Russo-Japanese War, Lieutenant-General, member of the White movement, emigrated in 1920, died in Nice.

[21] Kolchak, Alexander Vasilyevich (1874–1920) – Russian military leader, polar explorer, Naval Commander, Admiral. Born in the family of a general. Member of a Russian polar expedition between 1900–1902, fought in the Russo-Japanese and World War I, Commander of the Black Sea Fleet. During the Civil War, he led the White movement, from November 1918 to January 1920, the Supreme Ruler of Russia and the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army,

postponed until April 1917 due to the dispatching of a part of the Russian army to Romania, and later, after the February Revolution, it was discarded altogether.

Returning to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, it should be noted that Saint Petersburg could not but understand the query-like nature of the Russia's draft solution on the issue of the straits. First, Russia's Western European allies and regional powers stipulated in their agreement, in addition to their primary agreement, that Russia would accept the division of the Arab vilayets of the Ottoman Empire between Britain and France, preserve free trade through the straits and the accept the establishment of a "free port regime" in Constantinople, one more condition: in the war against the Ottomans, absolute victory must be achieved ("if the war will be brought to a successful end"). London and Paris, who had experienced the bitterness of defeat in battles with the Ottomans, and not sure that they would be able to defeat them without the Russians, bestowed upon Russia the decisive role in the war. Secondly, the official decisions regarding their agreement had to be determined in a future peace treaty, and it was completely unknown how London and Paris would behave after Turkey was defeated. Third, to defend its position, Russia would need very powerful levers of influence on its partners in the Entente, which, unfortunately, it did not fully possess. It was not by chance that the majority of domestic historians of diplomacy viewed the agreement between Saint Petersburg, London and Paris as a kind of "bill" that still needed to be paid in full.

In other words, Russia's agreement with the countries of the Entente did not at all signify that Russia would join the endeavor of colonial seizures in the Middle East. In essence, the planned expansion into the regions of the straits was a reaction to the attempts of the Ottoman Empire, which also entered the war with Russia in alliance with Germany, to deprive Russia of an existentially important exit to the Mediterranean. We must not forget that Russia has never harbored annexationist designs in the Middle East, which is always remembered in the states of the Arab-Muslim world. Even the fact that the Russian medieval principalities did not take part in the Crusades was always highly valued and continues to be valued today among the inhabitants of these states.

One does not need, as some Russian authors do today, to indict the "Bolsheviks, responsible for emaciating the army" with treason – their concerns about the war fell on fertile ground. Exhausted Russian soldiers were not heavily motivated to risk their lives in order to capture the Ottoman capital, like, for example, later Soviet soldiers who in 1945 heroically took the capital of their hated aggressor – Berlin. After all, the operation to occupy the straits and Constantinople also would not be a cake walk.

That is precisely why the Russian Empire could not actually be considered a full-fledged participant in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, even if the October Revolution of 1917 had not intervened. And this is precisely the reason why in any of these agreements, the names of which have become so widely used, Russia hasn't been mentioned.

After the war, the British concluded that the method of direct control over the dependent territories, as it was in India, is no longer suitable for new acquisitions in the Middle East. The colonial model has been replaced by a trusteeship model for territory with a much softer form of governance. According to British researcher J. Morris, new "Anglo-Arab Imperialist" has emerged to effectively manage the dependent territories [Morris, 1978, p. 248].

In 1920, when it was finally decided that Great Britain, having received mandates for Palestine and Iraq, was permanently established in the Middle East, the question arose to whom the management of all dependent territories of the Arab world should be entrusted. In addition to the main ministries, each of which in one way or another participated in the formation of colonial policy, the Arab Bureau in Cairo continued to operate. The Committee of the Mesopotamian Administration in London was transformed into the Middle East Committee, then into the Eastern

on February 7, 1920, was shot by the Irkutsk Military Revolutionary Committee.

Committee under the office of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Curzon, and in June 1918 Robert Cecil, the Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs was appointed his deputy for Eastern Affairs. All ministries and departments took different positions with respect to the players in the Arab region. As Clive Leatherdale writes: "Indian sources had championed of Ibn Saud, the Arab Bureau had backed Hussein, while the Foreign Office had signed agreements with France and given undertakings to the Jews" [Leatherdale, 1983, p. 21].

For obvious reasons, the India Office objected to the concept of concentrating control over the region in one set of hands [Busch, 1967, p. 264; Leatherdale, 1983, p. 21], especially when it came to the Foreign Office, which allegedly "did not possess enough administrative experience". Lord Curzon, in turn, advocated the transfer of management functions exclusively to the Foreign Office, since London was responsible for the mandates from the League of Nations, with which the Foreign Office interacted. He also considered it necessary to transfer to it all relations with the independent Hijaz [Busch, 1971, p. 432]. However, in accordance with the recommendations of the report of J. Masterton Smith,[22] in 1921, control over Middle Eastern affairs is the administration of Iraq, Palestine and Aden – was transferred to the Colonial Office, which was headed by Winston Churchill.[23] At the same time, as Leatherdale notes, once this ministry did not have any experience in the Middle East its nearest responsibility was Cyprus. In Arabia, the management system has become mixed – the performance of various functions was assigned to different ministries and offices. Responsibility for relations with Hijaz, for example, as an independent state left with the Foreign Office, which, if necessary, was to coordinate its decisions with the Colonial Office.

London's duplicity in its Middle Eastern policy caused an acutely negative reaction not only among Arabs. It is worth mentioning that, speaking in Oxford on the anniversary of the death of Lawrence, Churchill recalled: "He was very tormented, seeing that our government openly uses its Arab friends and allies, and he gave them the word on behalf of Britain and his own word, the word of Lawrence. This man was capable of exceptional experiences". This, Churchill testified, was the reason why Lawrence decided to relinquish all powers and refused to participate further in social and political life [*Never Give In,* 2014, p. 199–200]. But struggle for power in the Middle East and Arabia in particular continued.

Summing up the above said, it can be concluded that as early as within the initial months following the October Revolution, World War I and the Civil War, foreign intervention, the Soviet state managed to achieve success in extending its influence upon the nations of the would-be Global South. A significant part in this endeavor was played by the anti-colonial agenda of the Bolsheviks, who supported the nascent national liberation movements and publicly disclosed the wordings of the inequitable treaties concluded by the Tsarist regime with the Western powers, including the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The Soviet government began to effectively forge relationships with the key Muslim nations (Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan and others), including the Kingdom of Hijaz, while confronting the UK in this arena, whose attempts to counteract Moscow

[22] Masterton Smith, James Edward (1878–1938) – in 1910–1917 the personal secretary of the First Lord of the Admiralty (First Lord – the main person in the Administrative Council of the Lords of the Admiralty, as the Ministry of the Navy of Great Britain was called), in 1921–1924.

[23] Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill (1874–1965) – a prominent British politician and statesman, writer and journalist. The son of a member of the House of Commons, the Chancellor of the Treasury, served in the army in Cuba, India, in Sudan as a war correspondent, in 1899–1900 participated in the Second Boer War, was in captivity, on his return he was elected to the House of Commons, from 1905 Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, from 1908 the President of the Board of Trade, from 1910 Home Secretary, from 1911, First Lord of the Admiralty, in 1921, Secretary of State for the Colonies since 1924, Chancellor of the Exchequer in the government of conservative of Stanley Baldwin. In 1940, George VI appointed him Prime Minister, he established the Ministry of defense, of which he himself became Minister, after 1945 he occupied himself with literary activities, and was again Prime Minister in 1951–1955, in 1953 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Resigned in 1955.

reached their climax in 1927. Nevertheless, these relationships, despite all difficulties, continued to be sustained also as a result of the pragmatic policies with regard to Islam pursued by Russia's Boshevik leadership during the initial period.

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