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**Hejaz in the Mid-1920s:  
the First Soviet Peacemaking Initiative**

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**Abstract:** the article provides a fresh insight into the little known peacemaking initiative in the history of the Soviet diplomacy launched and planned by the head of the first Soviet diplomatic mission in the Arab world – in the Kingdom of Hejaz – Consul General Kerim Hakimov. As the troops commanded by Abdel Aziz bin Saud, the then ruler of Nejd, were rapidly approaching the Hejaz, and by the early 1925 had captured its capital Jeddah, Moscow, mindful of the future, gave its approval for Hakimov to get along with forging contacts with the Nejd representatives. The author reviews the motives underlying the decision to make an attempt at reconciliation between Ibn Saud and Sharif Hussein that would allow a possibility to establish a direct contact with the would-be founder of Saudi Arabia located in Mecca. Eventually, the Soviet Consul General managed to procure the vital information about the situation in Arabia and make a realistic assessment of Ibn Saud's chances to gain victory. The trip made by the Consul General had an impact on Moscow's determination to move forward along the way of supporting Ibn Saud in his efforts to unify the Arab lands, as a result, the USSR was the first nation to recognize the new state in Arabia.

**Keywords:** Abdel Aziz bin Saud; Jeddah; Kerim Hakimov, Kingdom of Hedjaz; Saudi Arabia; Sharif Hussein; USSR Consul General

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**Хиджаз в середине 1920-х годов:  
первая советская миротворческая инициатива**

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**Резюме:** статья открывает новую малоизвестную страницу из истории советской дипломатии: она повествует о миротворческой акции, запланированной и осуществ-



вленной Керимом Хакимовым, Генеральным консулом и руководителем первой советской дипломатической миссии в арабском мире – в Королевстве Хиджаз. По мере того как войска под командованием Абдель Азиза бин Сауда, тогдашнего правителя Неджда, стремительно приближались к Хиджазу и к началу 1925 года захватили его столицу Джидду, Москва, строя планы на будущее, дала согласие на то, чтобы Хакимов налажил контакты с тогдашними властями в Неджде. Автор рассматривает мотивы, на которых основывалось решение Хакимова способствовать примирению между Ибн Саудом и Шарифом Хусейном, что в будущем позволило установить прямой контакт с тем, кто станет основателем Саудовской Аравии. Советскому генеральному консулу тогда удалось получить ключевую информацию о ситуации в Аравии, на основании которой он смог реалистически оценить шансы Ибн Сауда на победу. Миссия генерального консула Керимова повлияла на решимость Москвы поддержать Ибн Сауда в его усилиях по объединению арабских земель. В результате деятельности Генерального Консульства СССР стал первой страной, признавшей новое государство в Аравии.

**Ключевые слова:** Абдел Азиз бин Сауд; Генеральный консул СССР; Джидда; Керим Хакимов; Королевство Хиджаз; Саудовская Аравия; Шариф Хусейн

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In 1924, the Soviet Union established the formal relations with the Kingdom of Hejaz governed by its Hashemite ruler Sharif Hussein. Kerim Hakimov came to Jeddah as the head of the first Soviet diplomatic mission in the Arab world. At that time, the victorious expansion of Saudi power was carried out in Arabia by Sultan Abdel Aziz bin Saud of Nejd. After the seizure of Taif already in the same year, the Ikhwan warriors and the regular troops of Abdul Aziz entered the sacred city of Mecca (the second most holy city to the Moslems – Medina – was captured later, in the early 1925).

## New Instructions

Having come to believe that Ibn Saud had undeniable chances of winning, after all the dynamic developments witnessed, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Georgy Chicherin officially entrusts Hakimov with the task of establishing a bond with the Wahhabites. In his turn, on November 4 Hakimov informs: «I was confronted with this question back in those days when the Wahhabites just occupied Taif, and when it was not known whether they had any serious intentions of going ahead and whether they had sufficient resources for that. I believed that the question of our contact with them might be on the agenda regardless of them gaining a victory or being defeated...»<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the People's Commissar sends the following descrip-

<sup>1</sup> Hakimov to Chicherin, *RF Foreign Policy Archive (RF FPA)*, fund 0127, inventory 1, folder 1, file 5, sheet 13.



tion of the turbulent events based on the assumption of London's involvement in the expansion of the ruler of Nejd in the Hejaz: Ibn Saud's incursion into the Hejaz was instigated by Britain, that wished to bring down Hussein to marrowbones, as he started to get out of control and tried to compel Britain to carry out its 1915 pledges. The most odious and dangerous for England was undoubtedly Hussein's craving for Palestine. In connection with the ongoing anti-British movements in Egypt, the prospect for an Arab government, that would be dependent on the Hejaz at that, to be formed in Palestine began to frighten Britain. The collapse of Zionism in Palestine could bring about the situation when the nationalists from Egypt and Palestine would shake hands with each other. That kind of political bridge across the Suez canal might put Britain in a most precarious position"<sup>2</sup>. This assessment was to some extent in contradiction with the one provided to Sharif by some orientalist and Comintern (Communist International) functionaries. In particular, Mukhail Pavlovich, a notable organizer of Orientalism of that time, referred to Hussein in 1924 as "Britain's henchman" [1]. Although, in his 1929 retrospective evaluation of Sharif and his war with Ibn Saud, Soviet Consul General in Jeddah Nazir Tyuryakulov wrote in an analytical paper submitted to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID) that «after being engaged in an unequal fight with the British imperialism for his interests, the ruler of Nejd could not tolerate the existence of a British agent Sharif Hussein, who would not stop short of backstabbing Nejd at any opportune moment, in close proximity with himself»<sup>3</sup>.

Meanwhile, Chicherin asked himself the question if the war in the Hejaz could be a direct offshoot of Hussein's decision to agree to the establishment of relations with the USSR. In this case, the British, as the People's Commissar was prone to believe, failed to achieve their purpose: "Ibn Saud's attack against the Hejaz instigated by the British with the aim of deposing Hussein produced, however, quite unexpected and undesirable effect even for the British themselves. Ibn Saud got out of Britain's control and made up his mind to put an end to the Hejaz independence by annexing it to his land or, if the worse comes to the worst, by turning it into a tributary principality"<sup>4</sup>. It is not too difficult to see a new version of the take on foreign policy orientation adopted by Ibn Saud: originally, he was dependent on Britain (it is most likely that the sweatshop agreement signed in 1915 is meant), and then he pulled out of its control. All the delicate shades pertinent to the positions held by the British government agencies in relation to Ibn Saud (the Foreign Office, Colonial Office and India Office) were either conscientiously disregarded under such an approach, or were totally concealed from the People's Commissar due to the lack of information made available to him.

Hakimov readily got down to fulfilling the instructions communicated by the People's Commissar in his directive. However, under those conditions, communication could be maintained only in writing, and the contacts with the Saudi military leaders

<sup>2</sup> Chicherin to Hakimov. *RF FPA*, fund 0127, inv. 1, f. 1, file 5, sheet 31.

<sup>3</sup> The Kingdom of Hejaz and Nejd and Annexed Areas. *RF FPA*, fund 0127, inv. 1, f. 2, file 18, sheet 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, sheet 33.



were not forged immediately, as reported by the Consul General: «...I managed to send a letter, a copy of which is attached hereto, to Khalid, Commander of the Wahhabite troops, only after his seizure of Mecca»<sup>5</sup>. In a history overview detailing the establishment of relations with the Hejaz compiled by the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, it was later underscored that by sending a letter to Khalid, Hakimov thus treated the Sultanate of Nejd "as the same independent territorial unit as the Hejaz and Yemen". In a similar vein, "the letter was safely delivered and handed over to Khalid personally, who accepted the letter with great interest. The response was also provided, but Comr. Khakimov could not possibly receive the response in time (as due to the military operations the delivery man was delayed in Mecca)»<sup>6</sup>.

By that time, the support base for the Hashemites had increasingly dwindled. In order to secure the payroll for the Army headed by Sharif's son Ali, it was decided to raise the level of taxes imposed upon the merchants of Jeddah. Unsurprisingly, this powerful commercial stratum headed by Muhammad at-Tawil, acting on behalf of Mecca's and Jeddah's aristocracy representing the National Deputy Council (al-Majlis an-Niyabi al-Watani), began to demand Hussein's renunciation. On 3 October 1924, Hussein had to repudiate his powers, thereafter he transferred the high settle of King, but not the title of and powers vested on the Caliph, to his son Ali bin Hussein. He tried to seek refuge with another of his sons, Abdullah, in Amman, however, the British government did not allow him to do so over fears that in such case Ibn Saud might make an assault upon Transjordan which was governed under the British Mandate [2, p. 37]. While awaiting London's decision on board his yacht, Hussein anchored in the open roadstead of Aqaba, at some distance from the shore<sup>7</sup>. He was then transported to Cyprus by the British.

In the opinion of Russian researcher Alexandr Yakovlev, «the Hejaz merchants sought to achieve several goals with one sweep: to mollify the British, to fend off the threat of "the wild sons of the desert and to obtain real political rights... At their behest, Ali gave his consent to the adoption of the Constitution for the Hejaz, to the formation of a certain government and substantial reduction of his power authorization»<sup>8</sup>. Shortly before the seizure of Mecca, Ali moved his residence to Jeddah, but by early 1925, apart from Jeddah, only Medina and Yanbu had remained in his hands.

## The Siege of Jeddah

On 5 January 1925, the Wahhabite troops sturdily besieged Jeddah. The resolution to act in such a way, but not to attack the city, was made by Ibn Saud at a meeting with chieftains and other prominent tribal representatives who were in alliance with him on 1 January 1925. Sharif and former Emir of Khurma Khalid bin Luway and the

<sup>5</sup> Hakimov to Chicherin. 4 November 1924. *RF FPA*, fund 0127, inv. 1, f. 1, file 5, sheet 20.

<sup>6</sup> *RF FPA*, Chronological Review 1924, sheet 141.

<sup>7</sup> *CID Sub-Committee on Situation in Akaba*, 3 June 1925, Secret 613-B, CAB 16/60.

<sup>8</sup> Yakovlev A. Unpublished Manuscript.



leader of a tribe Ibn Humaid tried to persuade him into setting out on a frontal offensive, but the decision taken by Ibn Saud was hard and fast<sup>9</sup>.

Fortifications were being built around the city, mine fields were being laid, the districts were being raked with fire, the local residents experienced a shortage of food, and a sizeable number of them fled Jeddah. The siege continued for a whole year. «The events in Arabia have entered a very intriguing stage, – Chicherin wrote in his instruction to Hakimov. You should stay in Jeddah by all means, and should carefully monitor the paths of development of the British-French and British-Italian antagonism in Arabia»<sup>10</sup>. In this context, the links forged by the Consul General with the French and Italian representatives were viewed as useful.

Hakimov continues to be engaged in making up communication bridges with the Wahhabites also. In a decision document to the Consul General dated 18 June 1925, Chicherin assessed the relations forged by the Consul General with Ibn Saud in a favorable manner. The communication carried an explicit instruction to get along with the diversification of contacts pursued by the Soviet diplomats in Arabia. “As we do not place any stakes on this or that rival Arab prince, – the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs wrote, – but only strive to develop our relationships with the Arab world represented by the existing centers of the Arab life, we need to have a simultaneous parallel contact both with the Hejaz and with Nejd as well”<sup>11</sup>. Against the background of such dual-track diplomacy, the attitude of the People’s Commissar towards the Caliphatism became more accommodating. Nevertheless, Chicherin attached importance to the contacts with the Caliphate Committee not because Moscow was sympathetic to the mere idea of the Caliphate, but because the Caliphate movement had a critical role to play in the “struggle of Moslem peoples for their full liberation”. This is again followed in the document by the incessantly repetitive premise about the unity of all Arabs, yet not as an end in view by itself under this context, but as a weapon for the liberation.

Further, the People’s Commissar made a conclusive statement: “If one of the Moslem princes appeared to be strong enough to play the part of a unifier of Arabia, we, most certainly, would consider the unification of all Arab tribes into a single state a big step forward. This being not in place, we can only assume a sharply negative stance on the endless discords fueled by Britain among the Arab princes”<sup>12</sup>. Thus, the national unity was viewed here as an antipode of the division and fragmentation imposed by the British. The pivotal track to support the unification of Arabs (as this was precisely the point made, not just the self-determination of the Arab peoples) was in apparent contradiction with the Marxist tenet about the class-based, proletariat unity, which defined the assessments issued by the Communist International (Comintern), but was in line with the foreign policy interests of the Soviet state.

<sup>9</sup> *Colonial Secretary to high commissioner for Iraq*. 30 September 1924, L/P&S/10/1124.

<sup>10</sup> Chicherin to Hakimov. 22 January 1925, *RF FPA*, fund 0127, inv. 1, f. 2, file 14, sheet 6.

<sup>11</sup> Chicherin to Hakimov. 18 June 1925, *RF FPA*, fund 0127, inv. 1, f. 2, file 14, sheet 49.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



Under the prevailing conditions of uncertainty, the Soviet Consul General advanced, as might be assumed – on his own initiative, the idea of acting in the capacity of a mediator among the warring parties, which, of course, could facilitate the enhancement of the Soviet Union reputation, the strengthening of its ties with each of the parties involved and also could serve as a testament of neutrality that had been negotiated between all of the Consuls deployed in Jeddah. This could bring dividends whatever the outcome of the struggle was in place. Having supported the initiative, Chicherin forwarded to Hakimov an instruction regarding the mediation, however, the Consul General was supposed to take action only in the event that a favorable attitude towards this mission was displayed by Ali himself (however, ultimately, it does not seem perfectly obvious that Khakimov had conceived the idea of a conciliatory mission himself).

Chicherin instructed Hakimov to exercise caution in the upcoming conversations with Ibn Saud as regards his utterances about Britain, because it might be the case that Ibn Saud was a British placeman: “Indeed, no definitive aspects of those eventual talks can be predicted now, as the concrete circumstances underlying those talks are unknown to us. However, roughly speaking, it can be asserted that, on the one hand, it is needed to underscore in every possible way our common friendship with the peoples of the East and the principle of self-determination of nations that is the cornerstone of our policy, but, on the other hand, to be extremely cautious in relation to Britain. No fodder should be provided for yet another British ultimatum. Ibn Saud is on a British payroll, and if today he is at loggerheads with it, there is no guarantee whatsoever that he will patch up friendship with it tomorrow and will be just a British agent. Under such conditions, excessive sincerity is not admissible. The talk can be maintained in a most general mode to the effect that our sympathy is with the nations, who are struggling for their self-determination and independence, it means that we are averse to any invasions, intrusions, conquests and oppression of the weaker nations by the great powers. However, it is recommended not to conduct such talks specifically with a focus spearheaded against Britain to avoid a diplomatic row. It is recommended to exemplify our tenet about the friendly relations with the peoples of the East by dwelling on our friendship with Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan etc., however, you should be extremely careful in all your comments concerning Britain. Any striving towards independence in the Oriental peoples can be expected to be met with our sympathy. Having embarked on the path of relationships with the Hejaz, we want to build up contacts with the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula, moreover, we want to preserve such contacts for a long time to come. The military feats accomplished by Ibn Saud do not mean that he has already achieved independence – no, he still faces a hard struggle ahead with the states that would not like to see in Arabia a strong, independent state uniting all Arabs in their struggle against foreign demands and solicitations, but would like to see a European colony there or a lot of small princes having feuds with each other”<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Chicherin to Hakimov. 27 March 1925. *RF FPA*, fund 0127, inv. 1, f. 2, file 14, sheets 35–36.



While getting familiarized with those conclusions, one cannot help but recall the directives issued by Leo Trotsky in 1920 to the curators in charge of providing active support to the revolutionary movement in Persia, whereby it was dictated to seek the expulsion of the British from that country, and at the same time to convince them of the fact that the Soviet Russia had no intention of waging a war against Britain in the East. Within this context, it does not seem reasonable to share the opinion of those Russian researchers, who claim that the cautiousness exercised by Sharif Hussein, who did not wish to aggravate the relationships with Britain, caused Moscow's disapproval. First, if such an approach can be a topic for discussion, then it can be applicable only to the radically-minded Comintern officials, but under no circumstances to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, who pursued the official pragmatic strategy. Second, the Soviet leaders themselves, as follows from the above, refrained from getting into any confrontation with the British, acting with the utmost care and attention. Additionally, the issue of excessive cautiousness in relation to Britain was brought up in Moscow later, when Ibn Saud's policy was placed under the evaluation spotlight, however, the prevailing attitude towards it had always a trace of understanding.

As far as Chicherin's instructions to Hakimov are concerned, even when they were presented in a most general outline, they never left any room for doubt to the Consul General as to how he should proceed with his mission. «What is meant hereunder, – Chicherin wrote to Hakimov – is that the main enemy of the Arabs in the past – Ottoman Turkey – is no longer in existence. Now, the main enemy of the Arabs is Britain»<sup>14</sup>. Naturally, the Consul General acted in compliance with the instructions received by him.

## Mediation Plans

The mediation activities contemplated by the Soviet diplomats were prompted by the fact that the British were going to make an attempt at reconciling Ibn Saud and Hussein. Chicherin advised Konstantin Yurenev, the Soviet Ambassador in Teheran, as follows: “Britain has decided to repudiate its neutrality in Arab matters and intends to act as a mediator in the negotiations between the Hejaz and Nejd on the issue of ceasing the military operations” [3, p. 547]. Yet, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs decision makers could hardly believe that the Soviet Consul General would indeed succeed in reconciling the Ikhwan with the Hashemites. Hakimov wrote to the People's Commisar:

«You asked me about our possible connection with the Wahhabites.

This question arose before me back in the days when the Wahhabites had just taken Taif and when it was unknown yet whether they had serious intentions of advancing further and whether they possessed sufficient resources for that.

I believed that the question of our connection with them could remain irrespective of their victory or defeat, considering the Sultanate of Nejd, as independent an

<sup>14</sup> Chicherin to Khakimov. *RF FPA*, fund 0127, inv. 1, f. 2, file 14, sheet 30.



entity as the Hejaz, Yemen, Assir, etc. Proceeding from this understanding and, moreover, admitting the possibility of their defeat and retreat, I found it necessary to seize the opportunity and to get in touch with them in one way or another.

As I saw it, it remained, therefore, only to decide on the form and methods of such a connection. Connection could be established in a written form alone, for consulate members could not have personal interviews with them while oral communication through reliable local people could achieve nothing and there was a danger of the messenger blurting out too much.

I was thus able to send to Khalid, commander of the Wahhabite troops, a letter, whose copy is enclosed only after his capture of Mecca.

I sent the letter to the Wahhabites' most authoritative and fashionable quarters and therefore when writing it, it was necessary to avoid any possible negative consequences that could arise.

Firstly, I had to see to it that Khalid should not interpret our desire to get in touch with him because of his victory and the growing prestige of his sovereign, that is, I had to stress that I was addressing him while performing my duties in the Hejaz, as a person accredited at the Hejaz government and regarding him, too, as a representative of the Sultanate of Nejd, and not as the conqueror of the Hejaz.

Secondly, it was necessary to evoke in him certain interest and to show the sincerity of our intentions. I feared here one thing: that he, like the American envoy in Peking, will interpret my letter as the recognition de jure of his sovereign.

Thirdly, I was not sure of the safety of the letter, although the messenger was reliable, since I was sending him to travel 80 kilometers across the desert on a donkey.

I should have asked your advice on such matters and started fulfilling the tasks only after receiving your instructions.

But I continue strictly following your instructions as to the character of telegrams I am sending; in a telegram, moreover, you can say nothing and explain nothing, for a telegram of a hundred words costs 130 gold roubles, and a hundred words is too little to describe such matters.

The letter was delivered safely and handed over to Khalid personally, who received the messenger with much interest. The answer was also given, but the messenger, having no opportunity to return, did not venture to send it with anyone. Then the communication between Mecca and Jidda was interrupted, and the reply still remains with our messenger.

I was able to receive from the messenger only two letters, where he informed me, in part, of the above»<sup>15</sup>.

Contemporaneous Saudi researchers tend to pay attention to Hakimov's trip to Mecca. According to their data, the Consul General personally got in touch with Ibn Saud and asked for a permission for himself and some consuls, allegedly, from a number of Moslem states accredited in Jeddah to visit Mecca and accomplish the Umrah without any interference in the political affairs of the feuding parties [4]. In reality,

<sup>15</sup> Organization of the trip. *RF FPA*, fund 0127, inv. 1, f. 1, file 13, sheet 37.





the reference was made not only to the Moslem states (the author must have been misled by the fact that the Consuls of a number of Western countries, including, for example, Italy, the Netherlands, as well as the Soviet Union, were Moslems).

## Trip to Mecca

Here is what Hakimov reported to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs in his letter dated 23 June 1925 (at the Commissariat, the responsibility to deal with the letter was assigned to Yevgeny Ludshuveit<sup>16</sup>):

«Note of the Trip to Mecca

### 1. Organization of the Trip

We had a number of questions concerning Ibn Saud, which were not, and could not be, sufficiently elucidated without personal observation, i.e., without a personal visit to the areas of the Hejaz he has occupied. It was impossible to rely on the press of the neighboring Arab countries or on the press of the belligerents themselves as regards their reports on such serious questions as the objectives Saud had in view when attacking the Hejaz, his contacts with the Entente countries and the neighboring Arab emirates, his position in the occupied areas of the Hejaz, the purposes of Sanussi's<sup>17</sup> tour, etc.

Moreover, the fate of the letter I had sent to Ibn Saud as far back as last year, which was to start our contacts with him, remained unclear. Taking all this into account, I long cherished the idea of a visit to Mecca. For this purpose, I needed a plausible pretext, and also companions, whose presence would facilitate obtaining permits from both Ibn Saud and Ali and would guard me from excessive suspicion on their part and on the part of my colleagues in Jidda.

As a "faithful" I could make use for these purposes of the forthcoming Ramadan, when every Moslem performs some special service bringing him to the summit which permits him to do all this as though together with Muhammed.

Considering this occasion quite opportune, I started talks with the Persian consul, who readily agreed and, at my request, undertook negotiation with the Dutch Vice Consul, who, in turn, also readily agreed to make a visit during that sacred month "The House of God".

Having gathered after all this, the three of us discussed how we would travel and decided to use our car. Mentioning, in part, our behaviour during possible talks with

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<sup>16</sup> Ludshuveit, Yevgeny Fedorovich (1899–1966) – Russian turkologist, diplomat, WWII participant, author of the book entitled "Turkey over the WWI Years, 1914–1918". During my years of studying at the Institute of Oriental Languages under the Moscow State University (currently, the Institute of Asian and African Countries under the Moscow State University named after M. Lomonosov), in the 1960-s, he taught students as assistant professor.

<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Idris bin Muhammad al-Mahdi as-Sanussi (1890–1983) – the grandson of the founder of the Moslem Sanussi order Muhammad bin Ali as-Sanussi. In 1916, he was proclaimed Emir of Cyrenaica, from 1921 – Emir of all Libya. In 1923, in connection with the fascist regime in Italy, he was forced to immigrate to Egypt, in 1947 he returned to his homeland, and in 1951, when Libya was officially a sovereign independent state, he was proclaimed to be King.



Saud on political subjects, we distributed them as follows. The Persian Consul was to inform Saud of the situation in the Hejaz; the Dutch Consul – of Ali's military power; and I – of the international situation in the Arabian Peninsula. Such assignment suited me because I had a rewarding subject to deal with and also because each one of us, having an independent subject for conversation, could claim a separate interview with Ibn Saud. Early in April, I talked with Ali, who gave his permission for the trip and expressed his desire that I should help to contract peace. His permission, however, was not made conditional on this request<sup>18</sup>.

On April 7 and 8, we twice exchanged letters with Ibn Saud and, as is seen from the supplements Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4, we were to visit him on the way (he was eight versts<sup>19</sup> away from Jeddah) as his guests.

This ended the organization of the trip.

On April 9, as going "abroad", we paid farewell visits to Ali, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the consuls.

Ali familiarized us with the materials concerning Raihani's<sup>20</sup> peace with Ibn Saud, although they are well known to all of us. When taking leave of us; he asked us to pray on his behalf as well, and we agreed, of course, with great willingness.

As to the consuls, none of them doubted that even the most fervently devoted Moslem (to say nothing of a Bolshevik) would not risk setting out on such a really dangerous journey solely "to soothe his sinful soul"; therefore, each one of them must be interpreting this trip in his own way, attaching to it, on the whole, political significance.

The French Consul asked me point blank what political purposes I pursued in undertaking this journey.

The British agent, to whom the Persian consul paid a visit to ask whether he had any requests we could fulfill, answered that he intended sending his employee and therefore» did not need our services, Clearly neither the one nor the other were able to conceal their embarrassment The Italian Consul, however, played his part artistically. He gave a lot of various commissions and even expressed his wish that God might hear our prayer».

Furthermore, the Consul General provided a detailed narration of the diplomats' trip, describing their adventures in a most vivid manner.

«2. Some Surprises on the Way

Since the very manner of our travel from Jeddah to Mecca is of certain interest, I shall describe it, too, in brief.

At 7 a.m. on April 10, we crossed in our car the front line, and 15 or 20 minutes later a shell flew over our heads and bullets began whistling now and then. We hoisted a white flag, and the fire ceased. As it turned out, we reached Ibn Saud's camp, and the outposts, having mistaken us for an enemy armored car, opened fire.

<sup>18</sup> Organization of the Trip. June 17, 1925. *RF FPA*, fund 0127, inv. 1, f. 2, file 13, sheet 37.

<sup>19</sup> Versta – 1066,8 m.

<sup>20</sup> Raihani, Amin (1876–1940) – famous Lebanese writer who visited Saudi Arabia and wrote about it.



We were met by a cavalry unit, which escorted us to Ibn Saud, who met us at the door of his tent.

Having exchanged greetings and talked about the international situation, we withdrew to the tents specially assigned for us. It should be mentioned in passing that the sultan apparently decided to emphasize the guests' importance, for four enormous tents were set up for us and a European cook was invited from Mecca with knives, forks, plates, etc., which you can never see, of course, in the palace of Ibn Saud himself.

After two or three hours' rest, we again went to Ibn Saud to discuss with him our further movement. Here he laid down two unexpected conditions. Firstly, he strenuously persuaded us to be his "guests" in Mecca, where a special house had long been prepared for us and, secondly, he considered it impossible that we should continue traveling in the car, since his units were dispersed all along the route in groups of ten to fifteen men and they could take our car for the enemy's armored car and it was quite impossible to notify them; he therefore asked us to leave the car with him.

We agreed to his second condition and decided to cover the remaining distance riding camels. As to his hospitality, we thanked him but said that his efforts to persuade us, being too persistent, a sort of show his mistrust of us. If he mistrusted us to such an extent that we could not stay in Mecca untrammelled, we were ready to return to Jeddah. He swore and appealed to God as a witness that he trusted us, and we swore and appealed to God that our trip had nothing to do with politics, but nevertheless left without having agreed on anything.

In the evening each of us had a separate meeting with him, our time being unlimited.

Early in the morning on April 11, accompanied by a cavalry detachment, the three of us went to the car stuck in the sand so as to move it nearer to the tents, where we intended to leave it when departing to Mecca. The accompanying detachment was showing us the way and we followed it. Suddenly a little more than 200 meters from Ibn Saud's own tent, when we threaded our way across a hollow, we were heavily fusilladed from the mountains. The accompanying detachment galloped into the midst of the shooters, and the latter, leaving us alone, started a scuffle among themselves.

As was found out later, a total of 35 bullets were fired at us, one of them hit the radiator, and the car was put out of action. Thus the only casualty being the radiator, we returned to our tent, where the Minister of Foreign Affairs was waiting for us with apologies on behalf of the Sultan.

Some time later, Ibn Saud sent a written apology, attaching a genuine report of the commander of the Sultan's troops Ibn Bejad (supplements Nos. 5–6).

We made a sort of investigation and conducted interrogation of those who had shot at us and were convinced that the occurrence was the result of a misunderstanding, that the unit that had just returned from the trenches took our car for the enemy's armored car and were thus misled.



We therefore decided not to make too much fuss over it but not to hurry to put an end to the incident either. In reply to his written statement we sent an inquiry to him whether there was any danger in our continuing further journey. To that he replied in the negative (supplements Nos. 7 and 8). Subsequently, after another discussion with him regarding his “hospitality” and his consent to some degree of our freedom, we set off on camel’s back. Ibn Saud long insisted that the car broken through his fault was to be paid for, that he, as an Arab, could not act in any other way with regard to his guest, etc. It took me a lot of time to assure him that it was not the car that mattered but the fact that his own soldiers shot at his guests, and finally I had to declare that the sultan had very much money, we knew it, but the Soviet government, too, was not so poor as to make him liable to compensate such an insignificant loss. I did not have the least doubt that he was extremely distressed over the incident and wanted to make amends at least concerning the car.

At 6 a.m. on April 12, we arrived in Mecca, we were welcomed by Saud’s governor-general, the mayor of the city, a number of public figures and a curious crowd and put up at the house, where King Ali had lived before his evacuation of Mecca.

## Reaching Jeddah

Our return journey was fraught with no incidents. Returning from Mecca, we again visited Saud and, after two days’ stay, on April 20 we reached Jeddah.

### 3. Stay in Mecca

Our stay in Mecca showed that Ibn Saud, while giving us some freedom as regards communication with the subjects and population of Mecca, had taken a number of other measures, which in a way achieved their objectives. Firstly, sending us on camel-back, he gained whole two days (April 12 and 13) lost for us, for, physically quite broken, we had to waste these days on rest alone.

Secondly, to guarantee our “security”, we were escorted by armed people, who slept, walked and ate together with us. For instance, my own body-guard was the very same Wahhabite, who had spent four years with the well-known Englishman, Philby<sup>21</sup>. As could only be expected, I was under Saud’s special “care”. Thirdly, as pilgrims we were surrounded by a whole’ crowd of clergy always at our service to perform a great variety of rituals. To tell the truth, owing to the last circumstance my position was not an enviable one and, no matter how much I tried to escape, I still had to race around “God’s house” covered with a white sheet and bare-headed, as any true Moslem, we were also kept busy a great deal receiving all sort of delegations organized and directed, of course, by the Wahhabites themselves. We were visited by the Representative Assembly, a delegation of the high clergy and a delegation of clergy at the sacred place. Significantly, the subject of all these delegations’ talks were, firstly, the hajj that was to take place this year and, secondly, the All-Moslem Congress. The

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<sup>21</sup> Philby, Harry St. John Bridger (1885–1960) – famous British colonial administrator, traveler, writer, researcher, who lived in Saudi Arabia and served as King’s advisor.



delegations tried to prove the need for the Moslems of the countries we represented to take part both in the forthcoming hajj and the Congress.

Despite all these obstacles, I managed to explore internally Saud's position, to the extent, of course, provided by Mecca»<sup>22</sup>.

One cannot fail to be amazed with Hakimov, who, despite the shortness of his trip to Mecca, really managed to gain an insight into the multiple aspects of the internal situation in the city, overall, on a perfectly adequate basis, and to make a conclusion that Ibn Saud's positions were quite solid, inter alia militarily, although the organizational system of his Army was primitive. It is amazing that the Soviet diplomat also managed to converse with many of the opponents of Nejd's leader.

#### «4. Internally, Ibn Saud's Position Is Satisfactory

In the first days of occupation of Mecca by the Wahhabites, it experienced an enormous food crisis, prices on basic necessities rose from 500% to 1,000%, and the future of the invaders, then comparatively small in numbers, largely depended on how soon they could cope with this problem. On the other hand, a no less difficult task facing them was the subjugation of the Hejazi tribes, in other words, the security of the rear and the security of communications, which played quite an important role in the solution of the food problem as well.

Investigation through personal observation of life of the local population, but mostly by questioning large numbers of our citizens, has shown that the Wahhabites resolved brilliantly both the problem of food shortages and the problems of law and order and security of the communications and the war. With the opening of the eastern borders of the Hejaz and the occupation of the three ports in the Red Sea, i.e. Gunfud, Lit and Rabug, Mecca began regularly receiving both farm produce and European finished products.

By the time of our arrival in Mecca, despite of the shortage of foodstuffs, their prices were from 50% to 150% lower than in Jeddah. European finished products were only four to five per cent more expensive than in Jidda, which was the same as the old correlations.

Mecca has permanent communication with the three above-mentioned ports, Taif and Nejd, where caravans travel in foil security. The old residents believe that Ibn Saud's most important achievement is this long unknown security of communications.

Religious constraints, which were expected on the part of the Wahhabites, proved insignificant, at least they applied exclusively to the caste of priests and high clergy, leaving alone the great mass of believers.

The administration is simple in its form and accessible.

Judicial institutions are likewise simple and remarkable in the sense that there is no bribery or delay in the investigation.

Such is the picture of Saud's position in the part of the Hejaz he has occupied.

I more than once conversed with the more bitter opponents of the Wahhabites and tried to discover the negative consequences that resulted from the Wahhabites' occu-

<sup>22</sup> Organization of the Trip. June 17, 1925. *RF FPA*, fund 0127, inv. 1, f. 2, file 13, sheets 38–40.



pation of the country. Each time I heard complaints of general nature, for instance, the destruction by the Wahhabites of some sacred graves, the growing unemployment among the urban population, the distortion of Islam, etc. Weightier objections than those of religious and ritual nature were not named. As to unemployment, it has indeed assumed a large scale, but it is not due to the bad Wahhabite regime, but to the military events in general, depriving not only the working people but the entire Hejaz population of such a profitable fair as hajj. It is significant that the Wahhabites are trying to combat unemployment by organizing some public works.

Thus Ibn Saud's behaviour, winning the approval of the majority of the population of the Hejaz, coupled with the general weakness of Ali, makes his position strong. It must be admitted that in the struggle against the Wahhabites the internal forces of the Hejaz cannot be counted upon.

#### 5. The Military Position of Ibn Saud

Ibn Saud's military position has one major defect, which could lead to his defeat, if his enemy were at least a little stronger and more active.

The fact is that Ibn Saud heads a morally very strong, but technically good-for-nothing Army. His hordes are armed with rifles of up to ten different systems, including fuses, many of them have no cartridges. The artillery, concocted from what remained from Hussein, is also worthless, owing to the absence of suitable shells and the crew. Generally speaking, Ibn Saud's Army is armed with sabers and rifles and lacks any other technical equipment.

The system of organization in the Army is very primitive. Combat units are based on the united components of one tribe or another. Such units are called "bairak" and number from 50 to 1,000 men. It should be pointed out that the most characteristic feature of the Wahhabites military organization is that during the battles the general guidance of the units' actions is not available. Each unit, irrespective of its numerical strength, receives one assignment or another and acts at its own risk».

### Talks with Ibn Saud

#### «My Discussion of Political Subjects

I had two lengthy talks with Ibn Saud himself and a number of talks with his Governor General in Mecca. Many questions were mentioned in these talks, but, on the whole, they all came down to two main topics, namely, the appraisal of the current war and the relations between Nejd and the rest of the world, including its possible relations with us.

#### Appraisal of the Current War

When appraising the current events, Ibn Saud could approach them, of course, only from the point of view of the objectives he set himself in connection with the victory over the Hejaz. The official reasons and purposes of his campaign against the Hejaz were repeatedly announced by Ibn Saud in the press, and a detailed account of it is contained in our press review (No 2, January-May). This is why I shall not dwell on them, but will touch upon the aspect of the matter, which is usually not reported



by the press, in formulating his tasks in this respect, Saud revealed a great deal of frankness. He said: “Hussein’s policy throughout all his reign excluded any parallel existence of the Hejaz and Nejd, to say nothing of the impossibility of establishing good-neighbourly relations that could help to develop the internal forces of the two countries. At the same time, Nejd, owing to its isolation created by Hussein, found itself exclusively under the dominion of the Persian Gulf; which badly hinders the country’s normal development. Such a situation could no longer persist, – he said, – and we decided to expel the Hashemites from the Hejaz and thereby to break open a window to the Red Sea for ourselves”.

To obtain a more specific definition of the notion “window”, I pointed out to him that many of his friends, including the Caliphate Committee’s delegation, are greatly interested in whether Ibn Saud guaranteed the integrity and independence of the Hejaz in case of the expulsion of the Hashemites, and that such interest is due to the existence of some disputed areas in the North and therefore possible complications there.

To this Ibn Saud replied with the same frankness that the disputed areas had existed long before the beginning of the current war, that the independence and integrity of the Hejaz had long been turned by Hussein himself into a mere geographical notion and, if it is possible to defend these disputed areas at all, he is more capable of doing this than the present Hejaz itself; but he undertook the accomplishment of only such tasks that are in the interest of his people.

Thus, Ibn Saud’s goal in his campaign against the Hejaz consisted in obtaining for himself free access to the Red Sea, in no way limiting this “access” by the former territorial bounds of the Hejaz. Viewing the question from this angle, Ibn Saud allows, and would be ready to assist, a recarving of the map not only of the Hejaz, but also of Arabia, as a whole, if it does not run counter to his own purposes.

Presumably, the possible transfer of Aqaba, Tabuk and Maan to Transjordan will not introduce substantial changes in Saud’s plans and he will make a deal with the British, if it can accomplish his main task».

Hakimov reported to Moscow all he had managed to know about different aspects of Ibn Saud’s position.

## **Foreign Relations**

### «Anglo-Nejd Relations

Ibn Saud likes to repeat the well-known proverb: “cut the coat according to your cloth”, and it is easy to see why. In fully dissociating himself from Hussein, he draws the boundary precisely with the moral of this proverb, reproaching Hussein for his inability “to cut the coat according to his cloth” in his fantastic plans of conquering all Arab emirates, which brought about, in the final count, the sad end of Hussein’s career. Whether he is right in Hussein’s appraisal or not, in his own appraisal he is undoubtedly right and sincere. Describing Anglo-Nejd relations, he stressed that from a military standpoint, he is quite invulnerable to the British; nevertheless, having the Persian Gulf as the only outlet to the sea, he cannot compete with the British, and his seemingly



good-neighbourly relations with the British are not based on friendship at all, but on the British being needed by Saud and on Iraq's fear of Saud. He makes a further plan to form his relations with Britain, dependent on the outcome of the war, picturing his full dependence on the British, as in the past, in case it does not end in his favour.

#### The Anglo-Nejd Treaty

The Anglo-Nejd treaty of 1916, as Ibn Saud himself declares, has existed up to this day as a document not yet formally annulled, but it has actually long been inoperative as a document regulating relations between the two countries. The British, who have made repeated attempts to keep within the limits of this treaty, were unsuccessful and have so far tacitly agreed to the actual state of affairs. Our appraisal of this treaty given in our political surveys Nos. 1 and 2 is that it should be considered appropriate, on the whole. Analyzing the Anglo-Nejd relations, however, it should be admitted that such a fate of the Anglo-Nejd treaty by far does not represent a characteristic feature of Anglo-Nejd relations in general, that it is rather an exception. As to the Anglo-Nejd relations in general, they can be reestablished to a full extent, but along different principles and in a different form. Time will show how these relations will shape, so far one thing is clear: whether they want to restrain Ibn Saud or to adapt themselves to the developments in Arabia, the British are approaching him themselves, using all means, possibly the Indians and the Egyptians.

#### Franco-Nejd Relations

We do not have at our disposal any materials that would allow us to speak of Franco-Nejd relations. When I was in Mecca, the Wahhabites themselves told me that they had been receiving support in arms from Syria. The conditions of transportation of canoes from Syria to Mecca testify that the reinforcements received by Saud can hardly be serious and pursue any material purposes. Whatever it might be, these relations allow the green flag to flutter over the making of the Nejd legation in Damascus.

#### The Question of our Relations with Ibn Saud

During our first interview, when I was leaving for Mecca, I asked Ibn Saud of his attitude to the question raised in my letter last year. It should be mentioned in passing that in connection with this question he showered me with questions about the relations of the USSR with Japan, Britain, France and Italy, about the Georgian uprising, our achievements in the rehabilitation of industry and agriculture, etc. I had, in fact, to deliver a sort of a brief "report" on the current situation, dwelling especially on our Eastern policy and on the nationalities strategy, demonstrating before him our achievements in this field.

Passing on to the question I asked, he declared that he considered this question, in principle, had been decided positively, but its practical realization was heavily in conflict with the favorable outcome of the current war, for otherwise he would not be able to receive not only the Bolsheviks, who were a scarecrow to many countries, but anyone else over the head of the British. Returning again to his strained circumstances, he stressed that extension of his external relations was possible only in the event that he obtained an outlet to the open sea.





The Meccan Governor-General of Ibn Saud, during my stay in Mecca, started discussing with me my assistance in our Moslems' participation in the hajj to be held in the current year.

While conducting talks with me, he corresponded with Ibn Saud himself, informing him and receiving, of course, the required directions. It is hard to say whether Ibn Saud wanted simply to make use of having our Moslems in order to carry out the hajj more successfully, or it was a step towards imparting thereby a practical nature to his connection with us. But his desire that our Moslems should take part in the hajj was obvious, and I decided to formulate the question in such a way so as to make Ibn Saud reveal his attitude towards the subject as regards the second version. I therefore stated that our Moslems' massive and organized participation would be possible only with the establishment of such relations between the USSR and Nejd, under which officials of the USSR could perform the functions of defending our citizens' interests.

Regarding this view of the matter, Ibn Saud wrote a letter to his Governor General (I saw that letter), saying that he, too, had his suggestions and therefore intended to have a conversation with me personally. Personal talks with him showed that he was most of all interested in our pilgrims, having nothing against, however, establishing on this ground contacts with us in the part of the Hejaz occupied by him. His proposal was that he would receive from us an official, who would occupy himself with the function of protecting of our pilgrims' interests during the hajj.

In formulating the question as above, I never had, and could never have in view any agreements with Ibn Saud, especially such as those that might directly or indirectly lead us to the recognition of Ibn Saud's power over Mecca. Therefore, in reply to his proposal, I pointed out that it was my deep conviction that the reception by him of our official could be followed by the establishment of normal diplomatic relations between the USSR and Nejd in general, and not of such a particular and temporary nature as he proposed. This statement of mine could not be received sympathetically for the reasons he had already given, and again returning to them, and again describing his straits brought about by the British, he declared that until the end of the Hejaz events favorable for him, no mention could be made of the forms of relations I proposed. But he provided me with his official appeal to all Moslems concerning the hajj (press review No. 4 of February 5, 1925), where he assumed responsibility for the haps before the entire Moslem world, and on this ground our Moslems could expect the Wahhabite authorities to display a thoughtful attitude to them.

On the basis of the above ingredients of my conversations with Ibn Sand, it must be admitted that the establishment (while it has not conquered Hejaz) of diplomatic relations with Nejd is a target of a more or less remote future. Besides this reason, which seems to me perfectly sound, put forward by Ibn Saud himself, there is still another quite weighty reason, which none the less postpones the extension of the range of our relations in the Arab East, as a whole. The fact is that, pursuing no active policy in the Arab countries, consequently, meeting no requirements of the present-day Arab life, we evoke little interest, or none at all. Ibn Saud knows that



“many countries fear Bolshevism”, whereas, as he sees it, those “many countries” have behind them the very same Britain, which so far has bound him hand and foot. Agreeing to have relations with the Bolsheviks, i.e., losing something in the eyes of “many countries”, Ibn Saud has the right to claim compensation for the loss incurred through forging these relations.

It will be quite different if Ibn Saud takes possession of the Hejaz, and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina find themselves under his rule. In such case the very range of Ibn Saud’s foreign relations will be extended so much that Ibn Saud or the British will hardly be able to advance a formal objection to our presence in the Hejaz».

And, finally, the most important thing about Hakimov’s report: an attempt to reconcile the Arabic rivals.

## **Peace Talks and Their Results**

### «Peace Negotiations

My last interview with Ibn Saud was concluded by conversations about peace. Referring to Sanussi’s message, which allegedly said that I had nothing against discussing with him the issue of peace between him and Ali, Ibn Saud announced that he would not object to meeting Ali’s envoy for peace talks to try to end the conflict peacefully, that he was against bloodshed, etc. Such a turn of affairs, besides being unexpected, did not agree with the general bellicose mood reigning in Ibn Saud’s camp. It must be said, moreover, that the internal position of Ibn Saud was so strong that it did not at all require such urgent measures as the proposal of peace, which he had so far stubbornly rejected. Taking all this into consideration, I had to receive his proposal with a grain of salt and to tell him that I welcomed the cessation of bloodshed and the resolution of conflicts by peaceful means, but since we had in our midst the Persian Consul, representative of a Moslem country, I considered him more deserving to inform King Ali of this happy news and that if I could be of some use in the future, I was always at his service. Ibn Saud agreed with my arguments and, when bidding me farewell, remarked significantly that the proposed peace was to provide him with the tools that would connect him both with us and with the other European countries. Apparently he thus hinted that peace was possible only if an exit to the Red Sea was ensured to him.

Returning to our tent, I informed the Persian Consul that, to my mind, Ibn Saud would agree to peace talks with Ali, but seemingly he could not propose it himself, and waited for Ali to take the initiative and that he, as the Consul of a Moslem country, must discuss it with Ibn Saud, that such an honorable role should be played precisely by Persia.

The Persian Consul was quick to respond and at once went to Ibn Saud and after a thirty minutes talk with him returned to the tent and announced, for all to hear, his “great mission” of ending the fratricidal war.

After Ibn Saud’s correspondence with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hejaz, they had a meeting, which showed that my suspicions proved well grounded.



Ibn Saud's target, judging both by the material published in the press (our survey No.7) and by what Fuad told us, consisted in concluding peace not with Ali, but with the public figures, who supported Ali, and in the form of the latter entering the service of Ibn Saud»<sup>23</sup>.

On June 18 Chicherin answered Hakimov:

«An extremely important achievement in your work has of late been the development of relations with Ibn Saud you have established. Owing to his undoubtedly outstanding role in the life of Arabia, we must have a formalized contact with him and develop our general ties with the Arab people also in this prominent center of Arab life. As we do not rely on one of the quarreling Arab princes or another, but only want to extend our contacts with Arab life as represented by the existing political centers, we need to have a simultaneous parallel contact both with the Hejaz and Nejd. Getting in touch with the other Arab principalities would be likewise very desirable. In your first reports this prospect was indicated by you. Further, it is also necessary to develop relations with those representatives of Moslem collective thought and Moslem trends, which play a role in the Arab events. Of great importance is contact with the Caliphate Committee not because we sympathize with the idea of Caliphate, for we always declare clearly enough that we, as a government, do not interfere in these forms of religious organization, and our Moslems support the complete abolition of Caliphate, but because we see the important role the Indian Caliphate movement plays in the process of struggle of the Moslem peoples for complete liberation. If anyone of the Moslem princes proved to be strong enough to play the part of the gatherer of Arabia, we would certainly regard the unification of all Arab tribes in one state as a very great step forward. But this does not happen, and we can but indignantly disapprove of the endless strife between the Arab princes supported by Britain. Reconciliation between Ali and Ibn Saud would be certainly seen by us as a positive occurrence, just as everything that puts an end to civil war. Should you be able to take part in their reconciliation, that would be a good piece of work, but this is possible, of course, only in case Ali himself favors such a development. All in all, our general policy of sympathy with the liberation, unification and progressive development of the Arab people should find its manifestation in your actions and should serve as the source for your particular decisions and steps»<sup>24</sup>.

So, the Umrah was accomplished by Hakimov together with the Vice Consuls of the Netherlands and Persia exactly at the time when Jeddah was besieged, in the month of Ramadan 1343 (in April 1925), but the report on his trip was sent to the Center only on 17 June 1925), which allowed him to get familiarized with the military situation on the ground beyond the boundaries of the besieged city. Not only did Hakimov have a meeting with Abdel Aziz bin Saud, but he contrived to reach an agreement that the Foreign Minister of Hejaz Fuad al-Khatib would be permitted to arrive in Mecca to conduct talks with Abdel Aziz [4, p. 36]. On 26 of the month of

<sup>23</sup> Organization of the Trip. June 17, 1925. *RF FPA*, fund 0127, inv. 1, f. 2, file 13, sheets 42–48.

<sup>24</sup> Chicherin to Hakimov. June 18, 1925. *RF FPA*, fund 0127, inv. 1, f. 1, file 5, sheet 31.



Ramadan, al-Khatib sent a letter to Abdel Aziz with a request to allow him to come. As a result of Hakimov's mediation, King Abdel Aziz and Fuad al-Khatib were engaged in correspondence that eventually led to them meeting each other on the last day of Ramadan<sup>25</sup>.

During his conversations in Mecca, Hakimov managed to use Ibn Saud's interest in the pilgrimage of the Soviet Moslems to the sacred places of Islam very expertly with a view to forging bilateral ties. The Consul General, in particular, stated to the Meccan ruler appointed by Ibn Saud that «the massive and organized participation of our Moslems would be possible only in the event of establishment of such relations between the USSR and Nejd, that provided for the USSR officials to perform the functions related to the protection of interests of our citizens»<sup>26</sup>.

Strange as it might seem, but British Consul in Jeddah Reader Bullard, who was carefully monitoring all Hakimov's moves, conveyed a wrong message in his report to the Foreign Office about Hakimov's trip to Mecca for the purpose of meeting Ibn Saud. In a secret cable from Jeddah dated 27 April, he reported to Austen Chamberlain<sup>27</sup>: «Mr. Hakimov, the Soviet agent in Jeddah, sets out on a visit to Mecca, nominally in a private capacity of a Moslem, who wants to accomplish a small pilgrimage. As he openly laughs over the Moslem religion, it can be assumed that his visit is necessitated not only by his piety. He takes with him a young Persian guy, the son of a merchant, who is currently representing the Persian interests. The boy is fully in Hakimov's pocket, he constantly repeats the Bolshevik song about Persia rescued by the noble Soviet government from Britain's imperialist claws. They had certain difficulty with obtaining a permit from the Hejaz government...»<sup>28</sup>. How could it be that the British diplomat who maintained good relations with the Consuls of other European nations was not aware of the details associated with the trip of the Soviet Consul General or the Dutch Consul had concealed all such information from the British colleague?

The trip to Mecca made by a remarkable Soviet diplomat Kerim Hakimov did not lead to the reconciliation of Ibn Saud and the Hashemite rulers of the Hejaz, however, it brought weighty political dividends to Moscow. Most importantly, it was the first peacemaking mission in the history of the Soviet/Russian diplomacy.

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<sup>25</sup> Umm al-Qura. *Mecca*, 15 Shawwal 1343 AD, No. 20, pp. 1–4.

<sup>26</sup> Hakimov's Note to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs on his trip to Mecca, 17 June 1925, *RF FPA*, no inventory, sheet 48.

<sup>27</sup> Chamberlain, Austen (1863–1937) – British statesman and politician, in 1900 – Financial Secretary to the Treasury, in 1902 – Postmaster General, in 1903 – Chancellor of the Exchequer. In 1915 he became Secretary of State for India, but in two years resigned his post. In 1919 he was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer once more, from 1924 to 1929 – Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the Baldwin government. In 1927, he sent a memorandum to the Soviet government accusing it of the “anti-British propaganda”, followed by the breach of diplomatic relations between the two powers.

<sup>28</sup> *Consul Bullard to Mr. Austen Chamberlain*, 27 March 1925, FO 371, E 2484/10/91, p. 121.



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