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SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

From Paris to Ṭā'if: Sovereignty, Borders, and the Question of Minorities in the Arabian Peninsula

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Abstract

Before World War I, the Ottoman Empire ruled the southwestern region of the Arabian Peninsula. However, unlike other Ottoman territories in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, the fate of this region was not decided during the Paris Peace Conference. This created a vacuum of power that allowed the local elites of Arabia to engage in a lengthy process of conflict, negotiations, peace talks, and the exchange of ideas to resolve issues of legitimacy, sovereignty, borders, and cultural differences. This article argues that these local elites of Arabia developed an alternative model of statehood and sovereignty that persisted until the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1990. The immediate result of this new model was the separation of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī region and the transformation of the people of the Najrān region into a sectarian group.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia; Yemen; minority; Wahabism; Arabian Peninsula; Paris Peace Conference

In September 1933, the predominantly Ismaili region of Najrān, located in the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula[1], was occupied by Sayf al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Ḥamīd al-Dīn, the Crown Prince of the newly founded Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen. His troops destroyed the mosques and houses in the Najrāni town of Badr, the seat of the religious leaders of the global Sulaymānī Ismaili community (Daftary 2018, 63–91; Sharaf al-Din 1936, 140). The campaign on Najrān drove its religious and tribal leaders, such as the Ismaili Dā'ī 'Alī ibn Muḥsin, his deputy Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad al-Makramī, and the tribal leader Jābir ibn Ḥusayn Abūsāq, to seek refuge in the territories of the other newly founded Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Al-Madhi 1996, 156). Yemeni King Yaḥyá Ḥamīd al-Dīn did not conceal his intentions regarding Najrān. He considered it part of Yemen and planned to convert its population from Ismailism to Zaydism forcibly.

Since Najrān was not protected, or even included, in any of the international treaties and schemes developed during and after the Paris Peace Conference, its exiled leaders decided to seek protection and help from 'Abd al-'Azīz Āl Sa'ūd, the Saudi king in Riyadh. The Najrāni envoy, led by Jābir ibn Ḥusayn Abūsāq, arrived in Riyadh at a time when the Saudi king was busy negotiating a deal with Yemen to contain its expansion and demarcate the borders between the two kingdoms. Abūsāq spent the next four months hoping for the negotiations to fail and to convince King 'Abd al-'Azīz to send his troops to liberate Najrān. On March 22, 1934, the Saudi government launched a military attack against the Yemeni kingdom on two fronts and managed to drive the Yemeni forces out of Najrān. The war ended in May, with the two kings signing the peace treaty of Ṭā'if, which demarcated their kingdoms' borders. One of the main outcomes of the Ṭā'if treaty, along with another one signed between the Saudi king and Najrān's elite around the same time, was the

incorporation of Najrān into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the transformation of its population into a Saudi minority.

The impact of the Paris Peace Conference and its treaties on the Ottoman Arab lands in the Arabian Peninsula[2] was different from their impact on the Mashriq[3] and North Africa.[4] This was most evident in the Treaty of Sèvres, signed on August 10, 1920, between the Allied powers and the Ottoman representatives. The treaty effectively announced the official partition of the Ottoman Empire, and Section VII concluded that the lands of the *Mashriq* were to be incorporated into the new mandates system created by Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations (Martin 1924, 2: 789; "The Covenant of the League of Nations" 1924). Sections IX and XI stated that Turkey denounced its claims over Egypt and Libya; in effect, recognizing the British protectorate over the first and Italian rule over the second. With regard to Ottoman territories in the Arabian Peninsula, the treaty left out Najd, al-Ahsā', 'Asīr, and Yemen. The only Arabian territory mentioned in the Treaty was al-Ḥijāz, the western region of the Arabian Peninsula where the two holy mosques for Muslims in Mecca and Medina are located. In Section VIII, the treaty recognized the Ḥijāz Kingdom, which was declared in 1916 by the Ottoman Sharif of Mecca, al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī al-Hāshimī, as a "free and independent state"; and "His Majesty the King of the Hedjaz" was among its signatories (Martin 1924, 2:791, 817–18).

Consequently, many regions in the Arabian Peninsula entered the interwar period with an ambiguous status on the international stage. These regions were neither divided into independent states bound to minority protection treaties, as was the case for Ottoman territories in Eastern Europe, nor incorporated into the mandates system, as in the *Mashriq* territories, nor colonized and declared protectorates, as in North Africa. As is argued in this article, the ambiguity surrounding the status of these regions was a product of the imperial rivalries between Britain and Italy, the two countries with the most vested interests in the Arabian Peninsula after World War I. While both Allied powers abstained from recognizing any political entity in the Arabian Peninsula other than the Kingdom of the Hijāz, they both agreed to grant the region its independence from any direct European intervention. This created a condition where state formation, minority making, and border construction were relatively more influenced by the actions and reactions of Arabian elites and communities. By 1926, most of the post-Ottoman Arabian territories were part of either the Kingdom of Ḥijāz and Najd, which later became the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, or the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen. The period between 1927 and 1934 witnessed a long process of contestation between these two newly independent Arab states. A tense series of disputes and conferences culminated in a war and the subsequent Treaty of Ṭā'if in 1934. In addition to transforming the inhabitants of Najrān into a national minority in Saudi Arabia, the treaty led to the partition of the region of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī and the institutionalization of a new form of understanding of sovereignty and borders.

In studying these developments, this article contributes to our understanding of how the local elites negotiated and settled issues of borders, minority groups, and sovereignty in a region not directly influenced or governed by the Paris Peace Conference and its treaties. Since the publication of Margaret MacMillan's celebratory account of the Paris Peace Conference, scholars have attempted to engage with the event and its global impact through more sophisticated lenses that go beyond a Eurocentric framework (MacMillan 2003). This study critically builds on two works on the global impact of the Paris Peace Conference: Erez Manela (2007) and Eric Weitz (2008). By centering on actors from Egypt, India, China, and Korea, Manela shifts the spatial focus outside of Europe and concentrates on how what he termed the "Wilsonian Moment" was experienced in the colonial world. While upholding the macro-narrative that self-determination and national liberation emanated from Europe and spread to other parts of the world, Manela's work is critical in highlighting the importance of including non-European actors in understanding the moment. However, his selection of these specific countries is driven in part by the fact that in each one of them, "there had developed by 1914 influential groups of literates, socially mobile individuals, whose members were conversant in Western languages and ideas and had begun to develop and

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circulate notions of national identity articulated in modern idioms" (Manela 2007, 8). These groups are not only reactive in his narrative, but they are reactive precisely because they are already culturally and intellectually Westernized. In this article, I also focus on how the Paris Conference events were experienced outside Europe, but by the Arabian elites who, while educated, were not as "conversant in [W]estern languages and ideas" as their counterparts in Egypt, India, China, and Korea. This does not mean that they were completely detached from intellectual and political developments taking place in Europe and North America, but their exposure to them was mostly through indirect means. A primary means among these was their network of advisors, which included individuals from Europe and North America, as well as ex-Ottoman officers and anti-colonial intellectuals, among others.

This article also builds on Weitz's contribution to the tragic international political implications that resulted from the "tectonic shift in political conceptions and policies" from the "Vienna System" to the "Paris System" (Weitz 2008, 1314). By the former, Weitz means a system in which state sovereignty within clearly defined borders was justified by dynastic legitimacy. Starting in the late 19th century, this ideal of politics shifted to another, where state sovereignty stems from representing a nation or population defined in racial or national terms. The global and long-lasting impact of the Paris Peace Conference and its treaties was to sanctify this nation-state ideal and transform it into a global norm by partitioning territories across racial, national, and religious lines. It is only within the framework of this ideal, Weitz argues, that concepts such as majority, minority,[5] minority rights, genocide, forced deportation, and self-determination can be justified and have meaning. While Weitz adopts a unidirectional movement in how sovereignty is understood from Vienna to Paris, this article shows that in a region that was not directly impacted by Paris, a novel and hybrid form of sovereignty and legitimacy was developed and utilized by the elites of Arabia in their political contestations over territory and groups.[6]

On May 19, 1934, representatives from Saudi Arabia and Yemen signed the Ṭā'if Treaty, ending the war that had erupted on March 22, 1934. The war and the treaty it produced were the culmination of an eight-year dispute between two local rulers over three regions: 'Asīr, al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī, and Najrān. All these regions are located in the southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Over eight years of negotiations, each party in the dispute presented arguments to justify its claims that these regions belonged to them. While the most serious attempt to resolve these issues was the Abhā Conference, held between February 16, 1934, and March 22, 1934, the delegates had been negotiating them since 1927. These peaceful attempts to resolve the dispute may have failed, but the war was justified and concluded using the same discourses and arguments employed throughout the negotiations.

Specifically, this study makes two main arguments. First, the special treatment the Arabian Peninsula received from the Paris Peace Conference was intentional. This article will show that while the imagined tribal nature of the Arabian Peninsula was used at the beginning of the conference to justify the imposition of the mandates system on the entire Ottoman Arab territory, Arabia was granted independence a few weeks later. It will argue that, to a large degree, this shift was the result of Anglo-Italian rivalry. Italy pushed for Arabia's independence because it did not want Britain to threaten its African colonies in the southwestern Red Sea. Similarly, Britain was eager to protect Arabia's independence because of its geo-strategic importance as a node between Britain and India. The second argument is that the contemporary Saudi-Yemeni border is among the few political borders in the world shaped by non-European elites. In its construction, two Muslim and Arab leaders relied on a hybrid normative tradition composed of a mix of European and Islamic concepts to legitimize creating a line between their two countries in the name of, as the Ṭā'if treaty puts it, "Arab brotherhood and Islamic friendship" (*Al-Ahram Newspaper* 1934). This process complicates our understanding of the global impact of the Paris Peace Conference and its treaties.

The remainder of this article is organized into four sections. The first section provides a general background on the region of southwestern Arabia and the rise of local powers in the early 20th century when the region was under Ottoman rule. In introducing these local powers, this

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section highlights their political legitimization, strategies, and traditions. The second section concerns the immediate aftermath of World War I. It relies on American and British archival materials, in addition to secondary Italian sources, to show how the decision to recognize Arabia's independence at the Paris Peace Conference was influenced by Anglo-Italian competition. It will also trace the circumstances that paved the way for Saudi Arabia to expand territorially and to share a common border with the Kingdom of Yemen. The third section concerns the negotiations, disputes, and conferences that led to the war, the Abhá Conference, and the Ṭā'if treaty. It relies on Saudi and Yemeni primary and secondary sources. The final section deals with the aftermath of the Ṭā'if treaty and how the Saudi government approached the inhabitants of regions impacted by the construction of the border. To examine these developments, it draws heavily on Saudi primary and secondary materials.

Ottoman Southwestern Arabia and the Rise of Local Powers (1872-1919)

The southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, due to its climate and geography, was the most populated region in Arabia, to the degree that Roman cartographers used to call it Arabia Felix (or Happy Arabia) compared to the rest of Arabia, which they called Arabia Deserta (Carapico 2000). Bordered by the Red Sea from the west, the Arab Sea from the south, and the Empty Quarter desert from the east, this region, as shown in Map 1, is composed of a long coastal plain called Tihāmah, which extends south from Ḥijāz along the Red Sea with a width ranges between 40–70 kilometers. The rest of the region consists of highlands, with mountain ranges on their edges and high plateaus at the center. Tihāmah is customarily divided into three segments: the first from the north is Tihāmat ʿAsīr, the second is al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī, and the third is Tihāmat al-Yemen. The latter includes several port cities such as al-Mokhā and al-Ḥudaydah, whereas the al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī includes the towns of Abu ʿArīsh, Ṣabīā, Jāzān, Ṣāmitah, and the Fursan islands in the Red Sea. East of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī, and separated from it by a mountain range, is the region of Najrān. North of both al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī and Najrān is the region of ʿAsīr. South of ʿAsīr, the

Map 1. Southwestern Arabia[7]

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highlands are divided into two large regions separated by the Sumāra mountain. The first region is the Upper Yemen, where the towns of Ṣaʿdah, Ṣanʿā', and Dhamār are located. The second is Lower Yemen, which was the most prosperous and where the towns of Taʿizz and Ibb are located. In the late 1800s, there were three main religious affiliations in the region: Sunni Sufism in ʿAsīr, Tihāmah, and Lower Yemen; Shi'i Zaydism was predominant in the Upper Yemen; and Shi'i Ismailism in Najran (Kuehn 2011; al-ʿAqīlī 1989, 35).

Through its ports on the Red Sea and the Arab Sea, this region was economically linked to Ḥijāz, the Horn of Africa, Egypt, and the larger Indian Ocean market. The region served as an entrepôt for goods between India and Egypt, and since the 17th century, it had been the first and the major global exporter of coffee. The English word mocha comes from the al-Mokha port in Yemen, which was the major Yemeni port in the 17th and 18th centuries (Um 2009). The coffee economy provided the main source of income to the Qāsimī Imamate, which dominated the large territories of this region from 1598 to 1853. However, beginning in the 18th century, the region saw a decline in its monopoly over exporting coffee to European competitors, which began cultivating coffee in Asia, the Americas, and the Indian Ocean region (Tuchscherer 2003).

In the 19th century, the regional economy was disrupted and started to decline in correlation with internal political rivalries and external intervention. When the semi-autonomous Ottoman ruler of Egypt, Muḥammad ʿAlī, extended his influence to this region, the British East India Company responded by occupying the Port of Aden in 1839. When Muḥammad ʿAlī was forced to evacuate the region in 1840, the Ottomans slowly filled this gap in their regional influence. While their first attempts were unsuccessful, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 provided the Ottomans with an easy route to project power on the Arabian Peninsula. By 1872, the Ottomans occupied the southwestern region of Arabia. These developments accelerated the decline of the al-Mokha port, which had been slowly replaced by two nearby ports under British and Ottoman control. The first was the British-controlled Aden port in the Arab Sea, which became the most important port in the region, especially after the opening of the Suez Canal. The second was the Ottoman-controlled al-Ḥudaydah Port in the Red Sea (Farah 2002).

The division of the southwestern region of the Arabian Peninsula into administrative units was first introduced by the Ottomans in early 1872. Following the Tanzimat-era law of provincial administration of 1864, the Ottomans called the region the Yemen Vilayet, or the Province of Yemen. The new province was administratively divided into four sanjaks (sub-provinces): Ṣanʿāʾ, ʿAsīr, Taʿizz, and al-Ḥudaydah (Farah 2002, 276–77). Within this administrative division, the northern part of the al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī region was incorporated as a Kaza, or district, under the ʿAsīr sanjak, and the southern part was under the al-Ḥudaydah sanjak. Najrān was not directly incorporated, but its fighters were frequently hired by the Ottomans and their adversaries in the following decades.

Ottoman rule in the region was both challenged and facilitated, mainly by three local groups. The first of these local groups was the Zaydi Imams of Ḥamīd al-Dīn family in Upper Yemen. The founder of this family was al-Manṣūr Muḥammad Ḥamīd al-Dīn, who became the Zaydi Imam in 1890 following the death of the former Imam Sharaf al-Dīn (Al-Wasei 1927, 133–34; Al-Arshi and Al-Karmali 1939, 89–90). He was a descendant of the prophet and, more importantly, a descendant of the Qāsimī dynasty that dominated the region prior to Ottoman rule. Shortly after he became an Imam, al-Manṣūr relocated from Ṣanʿā' to Ṣaʿdah. From there, he sent letters to tribal leaders, religious scholars, and other members of the Yemeni elite of both Upper and Lower Yemen declaring himself an Imam and urging them to join his rebellion against the Ottomans (Sālim 1993, 34–35). Starting from 1891, he expanded his rule through a series of military campaigns. In 1904, al-Manṣūr died, and his son Yaḥyá became the Imam (Al-Wasei 1927, 194–98). Born in 1869, Yaḥyá spent the first three decades of his life in Yemen, between developing his religious studies and participating in his father's military campaigns. When he became an Imam, he launched a large new campaign against the Ottomans in November 1904, where he laid siege to the capital Ṣanʿā' for six months and successfully took control of it in March 1905 (Sālim 1993, 73–75; Farah 2002, 213–15).

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However, the Ottomans appointed the famously brutal governor Ahmed Fayzi Pasha and sent a large army from other parts of the empire to retake Ṣan'ā', which they did in August 1905 (Farah 2002, 225). Ottoman-Zaydi confrontations continued between 1905 to 1909, but with decreasing intensity. Both sides attempted twice to reach a settlement, but these attempts failed.

The second group was the Idrīsīs of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī. Similar to the Ḥamīd al-Dīns, the Idrīsīs were descendants of the prophet. The founder of the Idrīsī family was Aḥmad Idrīsī, who was born and grew up in a town near Fez in Morocco, where he finished his religious studies at al-Qarawīīn University. In 1799, he traveled from Morocco to perform Hajj in Mecca and stayed there (al-'Aqīlī 1989; Dalāl 1995). In 1827, he left Mecca and moved south to Yemen. Two years later, he settled in Ṣabyā (al-'Aqīlī 1989, 619). In Mecca and in his new home Ṣabyā, Aḥmad founded a new Sufi order called al-Aḥmadīah al-Idrīsīah, which spread to southwestern Arabia, East and North Africa, and southeast Asia. When he died in 1837, his grave became a sacred shrine. In 1876, Aḥmad's great-grandson, Muḥammad, was born and grew up in al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī, where he began his religious education before traveling to Egypt, Sudan, and Libya to complete his religious studies. In 1905, Muḥammad returned to al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī, where Ottoman rule was limited to Jizān, with ambitions to form his own political sphere of influence (al-'Aqīlī 1989).

The last group includes the religious and tribal elites of Najrān. Unlike other parts of southwestern Arabia, Najrān was not ruled directly by the Ottomans. It was, and still is, inhabited by a large tribal confederation called Yām. Yām is composed of three main tribes: Jashm, Āl Fātimah, and Umwājid. At the beginning of the 20th century, the tribal elites of these three branches were Sulṭān ibn Mīnīf (from Jashm), Jābir Abūsāq (Āl-Fātimah), and Jābir ibn Niṣīb (Umwājid). The dominant religion in Najrān was Shi'i Ismailism, and although most of its inhabitants belonged to Yām, most of the religious elite belonged to a different clan called al-Makramīs. Before the Ottoman occupation of southwestern Arabia, Ismailis were dominant in Najrān and other places in Upper and Lower Yemen, such as Ḥarāz in the west of Ṣan'ā'. When the Ottomans conquered the region in 1872, the Ismailis in Ḥarāz resisted, but they were ultimately defeated. The Ottomans arrested their leader at the time, al-Ḥasan ibn Shabām, and sent him to Istanbul. However, he died in al-Ḥudaydah Port (Al-Omari 1986, 171–74). After Imam Yaḥyá started his revolt in 1904, he attacked the Ismailis in Ṭībah near Ṣan'ā'. He destroyed their town and arrested their religious leader 'Abdallāh bin 'Ali al-Makramī. The leaders of Yām mobilized their tribes and joined the Ottomans against Yaḥyá to rescue their fellow Ismailis, but were defeated and some of their leaders were taken as hostages. Among the hostages were the three main leaders of Yām: Sulṭān Bin Mīnīf, Jābir abu-Sāq, and Jābir bin Nisīb. Yaḥyá only agreed to release them when their relatives replaced them as hostages. While in custody, the Ismaili leader died in December 1905 and was replaced by 'Ali bin Hibat Allāh al-Makrami (Al-Hamadani 2019, 212).

After the Young Turks Revolution in July 1908 in Istanbul and the restoration of constitutional monarchy, the new Ottoman government sought to stabilize its rule in Yemen and reach permanent settlements with its local powers. Indeed, the issue of Yemen became a hot topic among policy-makers in Istanbul and the Ottoman press (Farah 2002, 216). The government removed the brutal and corrupt governor of Yemen, Ahmed Fayzi, and instated a more conciliatory governor, Hasan Tahsīn. The Council of Ministers held several sessions on how to resolve the issues in Yemen, which featured competing policy suggestions. Chief among them was the then Prime Minister Hilmi Pasha's proposal to partition the Yemen province along geographical and sectarian lines and appoint Yaḥyá as governor over the perceived overwhelmingly Zaidi population in Yemen's highlands. This and similar proposals for decentralization were opposed by key figures in the new government, such as the Minister of Interior Talaat Pasha. This opposition interpreted past Ottoman experiences in Egypt and Bulgaria as policy lessons, where granting self-autonomy was the last stage before a territory gained full independence (Kuehn 2011, 237).

Throughout the Province of Yemen, the reactions of local elites and rulers to the restoration of constitutional monarchy and the new Ottoman government policies were mixed. For Yaḥyá, the potential for reaching a permanent treaty was high in the first two years of the new Ottoman

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government. In November 1908, an envoy composed of prominent Yemeni figures was sent from Istanbul to convince Yaḥyá to send his representatives to Istanbul to negotiate a deal—Yaḥyá selected three notables and sent them. There, they presented Yaḥyá's case and his demand for self-autonomy, but their visit did not lead to a deal. Although no official deal was reached in Istanbul, the situation in Yemen deescalated after its new governor, Hasan Tahsīn, reached an understanding with Yaḥyá that neither party would interfere in the territories of the other (Al-Wasei 1927, 219). However, in May 1910, the situation changed with the appointment of the hardliner Muhammed Ali Pasha as governor of Yemen (Al-Wasei 1927, 219). The new governor started his tenure by adopting highly repressive methods toward the people of Ṣanʿā'. This pushed Yaḥyá closer to the Idrīsī, and the two began coordinating their offences against the Ottomans.

As for the Idrīsī, the Young Turks revolution was a window of opportunity to assert himself politically and announce himself as an Imam. In late 1908, Idrīsī utilized his religious standing to resolve a seven-year-long conflict between two main tribes in Ṣabīā and its closest port town Gūz al-Jaʿāfirah. As a result, his influence extended to the sea and included main territories around Ṣabīā (al-ʿAqīlī 1989, 637–40; Bang 1996, 84–86). In January 1909, he started sending letters to the tribal leaders of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī to request their pledge of allegiance to him, which they granted. When one of the tribal leaders in the neighboring town of Dhamad refused to pledge allegiance to him, Idrīsī marched toward the town with a sizable army to force him to pledge his allegiance (al-ʿAqīlī 1989, 644). After this successful show of force, Idrīsī announced the establishment of a government composed of four ministers and a Sharia court composed of five Sharia scholars (al-ʿAqīlī 1989, 644–45). In October 1909, the Ottomans sent an envoy to meet Idrīsī and study his situation in the region. The meeting ended with a treaty, which stipulated that the Ottomans would appoint the Idrīsī as a *Kaymakam*, or district governor. In exchange for recognizing the authority of the Ottoman Empire, collecting taxes on its behalf, and extending telegraph networks between Ḥijāz and Yemen, the Ottomans would grant the Idrīsī semi-autonomous rule (al-ʿAqīlī 1989, 665–67; Bang 1996, 92–95). However, this arrangement did not last long. Almost a year later, the Idrīsī resumed hostilities against the Ottomans; the justification was that the latter broke the agreement they had with him when they refused to accept his Sharia-based court and punishments.

Over the months of November and December in 1910, both Idrīsī and Yaḥyá laid siege to Abhā, the capital of the ʿAsīr sanjak, and Ṣanʿā', the capital of the Yemen Province. In Abhā, Ḥasan bin ʿAlī al-ʿĀyedh joined the Idrīsīs. These developments, in addition to growing tensions in Libya with Italy, forced the Ottomans to drop the hardline approach and seek a deal. In October 1911, the commander-in-chief of Yemen, Aḥmed ʿIzzet Pasha, concluded the Daʿān Truce with Yaḥyá. The Daʿān Truce recognized the autonomous status of Yaḥyá as a Zaydi Imam and acknowledged his independence in appointing judges and collecting taxes. In return, Yaḥyá recognized the Ottoman state and its monopoly over dealing with foreign powers (The full text of the truce is in Al-Wasei 1927, 236–39; Sālim 1993, 516–18; Farah 2002, 297–98).

With regard to Idrīsī, his siege of Abhā continued for around eight months, and it only ended when the Sharif of Mecca, al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Hāshimī, marched with large forces toward Abhā (al-ʿAqīlī 1989). On September 29, 1911, the Italians declared war on the Ottomans over Libya. The Mutasseref of Abhá, Sulayman Shafiq, used the war as an opportunity for reconciliation, and Idrīsī was open to negotiating a settlement. The two agreed to meet in a place called Shaʿbīn, but the negotiation stalled when the Mutasseref refused to attend a meeting outside Abhā. Around the same time, Idrīsī's loose alliance with Yaḥyá ended when the latter signed the Daʿān Truce in October 1911. Then, Idrīsī turned to the Italians who were occupying Eritrea on the western coast of the Red Sea (al-ʿAqīlī 1989, 692–99; Sālim 1993, 516–18; Baldry 2015, 89–90).

Italian support allowed the Idrīsī to step up his attacks and expand his territory. However, their anticipation of the eruption of the First Balkan War led both Italy and the Ottomans to begin negotiating an end to the war in September 1912. The Ottoman-Italian War formally ended in October 1912, a few days after the beginning of the war in the Balkans (Childs 1990). This development forced the Ottomans to move soldiers from Yemen to the Balkans and adopt a more

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conciliatory approach towards Idrīsī. To start, they granted him amnesty in December 1912 (Bang 1996, 101–2). Between February and May of 1913, there were several attempts to negotiate an agreement between the two parties, all of which were unsuccessful. When fighting resumed, the Ottomans imposed a blockade on the Idrīsī's territory. As a result, the Idrīsī sent a delegation to Istanbul to reach a deal, but nothing came of it because World War I had begun (Bang 1996, 103–4).

When World War I erupted, Ottoman rule in the Province of Yemen was already in decline. In order to secure its imperial route to India through the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf, Britain started expanding its influence and alliances from the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula to the inland. However, British attempts to convince Yaḥyá to break his agreement with the Ottomans failed (Baldry 2015). This did not mean that Yaḥyá sided with the Ottomans, rather, he sought a more neutral position. In contrast to Yaḥyá's approach, the Idrīsī opted to negotiate an alliance treaty with Britain and signed it in Aden on April 22, 1915 (Baldry 2015). With British naval power behind him, Idrīsī was able to expand his rule southward to the al-Ḥudaydah port. On 30 October 1918, the Ottomans lost the war and signed the Armistice of Mudros, which emphasized the "surrender of all garrisons in Hedjaz, Assir, Yemen, Syria, and Mesopotamia to the nearest Allied Commander or Arab representative" (Dyer 1972). By early 1919, the Ottomans evacuated the region. The ones in the south near Aden surrendered to the British governor of Aden, whereas some of those in Ṣan'ā' decided to stay and serve under Yaḥyá (Abāẓah 1986; Sālim 1993; Baldry 2015). The Ottoman Mutasseref in ʿAsir left the leadership of the town to his deputy, the ʿAsiri local leader Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī al-ʿĀyedh (al-ʿAqīlī 1989, 737).

Before moving to the post-war period in the following section, this section concludes with a discussion of the political and normative justifications that both Yaḥyá and Idrīsī used in their challenges to Ottoman rule. Ultimately, these justifications are noteworthy because they collectively point to novel and hybrid notions of sovereignty and legitimacy developed and utilized by Arabian elites in their local contestations over territory and groups during a critical global moment.

Generally, Yahyá and Idrīsī's justifications were similar in many respects but differed significantly in other ways. The first similarity was that both leaders asserted their claim to prophetic titles. "[U]nder Islamic law and tradition," says Al-Fahad, "claims to Prophetic descent 'enjoyed certain privileges'" (Al Fahad 2015). Among these privileges is the right to rule. This explains why, in the early 1900s, Yemen's Imam Yaḥyá, al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimanī's Idrīsī, and Hijaz's Hussayn were all of prophetic descent. However, Yahyá was more explicit about his lineage than Idrīsī. In his 1907 response to a formal call for an end to fighting, delivered to him by an Ottoman envoy of Meccan scholars, Yahyá started by emphasizing his dynasty's religious and historical claim to rule:

> Yemeni lands were under the rule of our noble ancestors of the prophetic lineage from the third [Hijri] century until the present. During this time, these lands were continuously ruled by their righteous leaders, either fully or partially, as is well documented in our history. The battles between our ancestors and their enemies never ceased due to the Yemeni people's desire to be ruled by their masters, the sons of their prophet, and their belief that they were obligated to remain loyal to and assist them.… (Quoted in Abāẓah 1986, 476–77)

As this excerpt suggests, Yaḥyá combined two additional elements into his prophetic claim to rule. The first added element was historical. According to his narrative, his ancestors continuously ruled Yemen for the last ten centuries and were, therefore, entitled to continue doing so. The second addition was the proto-nationalist normative use of the concept of "the people of Yemen," and the related claim that their desire and belief mattered politically.

The second similarity between Yaḥyá and Idrīsī's justifications for their legitimacy and sovereignty is that both leaders revolted, not because they were separatists but because they rejected aspects of the Ottoman governance structure that they deemed weak and corrupt, and because of the new codified court system and the taxation regime imposed by the Ottomans. This is clear from

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a letter that Idrīsī published in 1907 to justify his movement against the Ottomans to the wider Arab and Muslim public (al-ʿAqīlī 1989, 769–79). The main complaint that Idrīsī repeated throughout the letter was the Ottomans' insistence on separating civil affairs from criminal affairs. In particular, he pointed to the Ottomans' insistence that criminal affairs remain subject to codified Ottoman laws in return for the Ottomans' willingness to allow the people under Idrīsī's authority to be ruled by the uncodified courts in matters related to civil affairs.

> O, this betrayal! When could Sharia be applied without criminal punishment? Why is this prohibited in Arab lands where there are no foreigners of other religions? If we assume that the [Ottoman] state finds it difficult to apply Sharia in non-Arab lands, then what is the difficulty in doing so here? Especially when the people are satisfied and happy about it, the benefits of doing so are evident to them, and they are eager to demand it? (al-ʿAqīlī 1989, 775)

Later, when the Ottomans sent Idrīsī an envoy to negotiate an end to these hostilities, his condition was a return to the terms of an earlier agreement he had with the Ottomans. In this agreement, the Ottomans would allow a type of autonomy in which they would officially recognize Idrīsī's authority and where the application of Sharia would be left to him. In return, he would cease his fighting and help the Ottomans collect their taxes from the locals and stabilize their governance of the region (al-ʿAqīlī 1989, 776).

In the case of Yaḥyá, a look at the terms he sent to the Ottomans to end his rebellion shows that what Yaḥyá prioritized was primarily his claim to legal autonomy (Sālim 1993, 78–79). Among the fifteen terms, five were about legal matters, three were about taxation, two were about governance, and the rest covered jurisdiction, relations with foreign powers, and so on. Among the five terms related to legal matters, there was a term that stated that "the laws should be applied in accordance with the noble Sharia," another that "the Imam should have the right to appoint and dismiss judges," and a third that "Sharia criminal punishments that the Turk governors suspended as if it were nothing should be applied to criminals from Muslims and Isra[e]lites according to what Allah has decided and the prophet has executed" (Sālim 1993, 78).

The third similarity between Yahyá and Idrīsī's justifications for their legitimacy and sovereignty is the manner in which each leader used identity. While Yaḥyá belonged to the Shawakāni interpretation of the Zaydi Shi'i religious tradition and Idrīsī belonged to the Sufi Sunni tradition, as formulated by his grandfather, this did not necessarily mean that these rulers' justifications and movement against the Ottomans were sectarian.[8] Indeed, both rulers were able to appeal to people from different sects within their regions, and in the period of 1909–1911, they joined forces and collaborated against the Ottomans, despite their different religious lineages and traditions. Yet, this sectarian difference did influence how the Ottomans reacted to each ruler's rebellion (Kuehn 2011, 226–39).

Moreover, although both Yahyá and Idrīsī utilized religious and territorial justifications in their demands and discourses on legitimacy and sovereignty, both leaders also utilized Arab identity and Arabism as a further legitimization method. In the first decade of the 20th century, Arabism was on the rise among Ottoman Arab elites, and while it was not a homogeneous movement, its dominant demand in this period was to recognize Arab autonomy *within* the Ottoman Empire (Ṭa'uber 1993; Kayalı 1997). This demand was utilized by both Idrīsī and Yaḥyá and presented as the basis for their movements in letters and published articles appearing in Egyptian newspapers.[9]

The Aftermath of the Ottoman Withdrawal from Southwestern Arabia (1919-1926)

In October 1926, the Idrīsī leadership signed the Mecca Agreement with the newly founded Saudi Arabia, which transformed the Idrīsī emirate into an autonomous Saudi protectorate and marked the beginning of the Saudi-Yemeni seven years of territorial dispute (A copy of the agreement is in Al-Mukhtar 1957, 2: 393–95). Turning to the immediate aftermath of World War I and the

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Ottoman withdrawal from southwestern Arabia, this section traces how two interconnected rivalries played an important role in pressuring the Idrīsī into seeking Saudi protection. The first was the Anglo-Italian rivalry, which started with Italy joining the war and continued until 1927. This same Anglo-Italian rivalry was an important factor behind the decision to recognize Arabia's independence at the Paris Peace Conference. The second rivalry that played a role in Idrīsīs decision to seek Saudi protection was the regional territorial competition between themsleves and Yaḥyá.

The first impact of the Anglo-Italian rivalry over the Red Sea on the local political configurations of the Arabian Peninsula was the prevention of its incorporation into the mandates system.[10] When Britain launched the Gallipoli Campaign against Istanbul on February 19, 1915, expectations among the Allies for a quick victory were exacerbated. In part, this led the Italian Prime Minister Antonio Salandra to end Italy's neutrality and entering World War I on the side of Britain, France, and Russia. He instructed his foreign minister to issue Italy's list of conditions (Marcuzzi 2020, 61). On March 4, 1915, the Italian ambassador in London, Guglielmo Imperiali, delivered a list with a total of sixteen demands to the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Edward Grey. The twelfth demand was formulated as follows:

> England and Italy mutually undertake to guarantee the independence of the Yemen. Leaving the Holy Places free, they undertake not to proceed to the annexation of any part of Western Arabia and not to impose upon it any form of dominion. They do not renounce the right to oppose the acquisition by any Power of rights over [the] territory of Arabia proper (Albrecht-Carrié 1966, 330).

At the same time, the Russian foreign minister informed his British and French allies of Russia's desire to incorporate Istanbul and the straits of Dardanelles and Bosporus (Hurewitz 1979, 17; Woodward and Butler 1946, 4: 635). This initiated a series of correspondences that constituted what was later known as the Constantinople Agreement. In one of these correspondence, the British ambassador in Russia emphasized the following about the Arabian Peninsula:

> Sir E. Grey will wish to state that … His Majesty's Government have stipulated that the Mussulman Holy Places and Arabia shall under all circumstances remain under independent Mussulman dominion (Woodward and Butler 1946, 4:637).

To this, the Russians replied with the following on March 20, 1915:

> The Imperial Government completely shares the view of the British Government on the maintenance of the Muslim Holy Places under an independent Muslim government. It is necessary to elucidate at once whether [those places] will remain under the suzerainty of Turkey, the Sultan retaining the title of Caliph, or [whether] it is contemplated to create new independent states, in order to permit the Imperial Government to formulate its views in full knowledge of the case. For its part the Imperial Government desires that the Caliphate should be separated from Turkey. In any case, the freedom of pilgrimage must be completely secured (Hurewitz 1979, 20).

These initial positions show that, from the earliest years of the war, both Italy and Britain shared similar stated views about non-interference in Arabia. It seems that the motivation for this special treatment of Arabia has to do with their shared notion of the "susceptibility of Moslem opinion towards any intervention of Christian powers in the Hedjaz" ("Britain Foreign Office to the Italian Ambassador Imperiali" 1917). The negotiations over Italy's entry to the war resulted in a secret treaty between the four parties, known as the Treaty of London, signed on April 27, 1915. In Article 12 of the treaty, Italy committed itself to the Triple Entente's declaration that "Arabia and the Moslem Holy Places in Arabia shall be left under the authority of an independent Moslem Power"

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(UK Parliament 1920). The guarantee of Arabian independence was later reaffirmed in Article 10 of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which stipulated that both Britain and France

> will not acquire and will not consent to a third Power acquiring territorial possessions in the Arabian Peninsula, nor consent to a third Power installing a naval base either on the east coast, or on the islands of the Red Sea (Hurewitz 1979, 63).

While these agreements prevented European powers from directly intervening in the Arabian Peninsula, they did not deter them from attempting to establish their influence indirectly by supporting one of the rival Arabian powers. In April 1915, the British signed a treaty with Idrīsī. A few months later, it occupied several islands in the Red Sea in fear of the Italians extending their rule over them (Baldry 1976). In January 1917, an internal British memorandum titled *British Interests in Arabia* was produced (Hirtzel 1917). The purpose of the memorandum was "explaining why the exclusion of Italy from Western and Southern Arabia and the Red Sea littoral is important in British interests" (Hirtzel 1917). Near the war's end in late 1918, British Prime Minister Lloyd George suggested to the United States in private that "Great Britain would have to assume a protectorate over Mesopotamia and perhaps Palestine. Arabia he thought should become autonomous" (United States and Department of State 2018a, I:1734). Similarly, and around the same time, Italy requested that "no Power shall occupy Arabia, that commerce and commercial penetration be free, that the Holy Places of Islam in Higiaz be in Mussulman hands, and that the Farasan islands upon the coast of the Asir be occupied by Italy" (United States and Department of State 2018a, I: 1832).

When Lloyd George first introduced the three-class mandates system at the Paris Peace Conference as a compromise between those who demanded annexing the territories belonging to Germany and the Ottoman Empire and those who demanded placing them under an international arrangement, Arabia was the example he used for the first class in this system. According to his proposal, this class included:

> countries where the population was civilized but not yet organized—where a century might elapse before the people could be properly organized. For example, Arabia. In such cases it would be impossible to give full self-government and at the same time prevent the various tribes or units from fighting each other. It was obvious that the system to be applied to these territories must be different from that which would have to be applied to cannibal colonies, where people were eating each other (United States and Department of State 2018b, III: 2149).

However, although Arabia was used to justify the mandates system, a few months later, it was removed from the countries listed to be incorporated within this system. This occurred after the Italians pushed their claims over the Farasan islands in the Red Sea. In May 1919, Lloyd George suggested, unlike the rest of the Ottoman Arab territories, "Arabia to be… independent" (United States and Department of State 2018c, V: 2299). The term "independence" here did not imply recognizing the independence of political entities that were active and competing at the time. Moreover, Britain's understanding of Arabian independence differed from that of Italy. In a letter to Lloyd George, while the latter was in Paris, the Secretary of State for the Colonies provided a succinct explanation of this difference:

> The independence of Arabia has always been a fundamental principle of our [E]astern policy, but what we mean by it is that Arabia while being independent herself should be kept out of the sphere of European political intrigue and within the British sphere of influence: in other words, that her independent native rulers should have no foreign treatises except with us. But what the Italians evidently mean by it is that those rulers should be able to enter into any relations they please with any foreign country, which is the exact opposite of our policy … (George 1938, 2: 900).

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While the Anglo-Italian interests in Arabia's independence kept southwestern Arabia out of the mandates system, their difference over the meaning of its independence fueled their competition over Arabian territory. This competition gained momentum in October 1922 when Benito Mussolini became prime minister of Italy. In 1924, Mussolini announced his plan to expand eastward, which implied taking control of the Arabian shore of the Red Sea. The rationale was that control over this strategic node that linked India to Britain through the Suez Canal would help weaken British supremacy in the Red Sea (Fiore 2010). To achieve this goal, the Italians, represented by the Governor of Eritrea, Jacopo Gasparini, provided their support and arms to Yaḥyá, who declared himself a king after the Ottoman withdrawal from the region, against Britain in Aden and Idrīsī in the North. In 1924, Britain informed Italy that it would adopt a policy of non-interference in the rivalry between Yaḥyá and Idrīsī, asking them to do the same. While the Italians denied that they were intervening by taking Yaḥyá's side, they continued to support the king. In May 1926, the British company Eastern and General Syndicate secured oil and salt concessions on the island of Farasan and the al-Ṣalīf coast from the Idrīsī emirate. Afraid that the Italians were conspiring with King Yaḥyá to capture the Farasan islands, Britain decided in July 1926 to end their non-interference policy and offered their support to the Idrīsīs. Two months later, Italy concluded the Treaty of Commerce with King Yaḥyá on September 2, 1926, which in effect made them the first European country to officially recognize King Yaḥyá. Britain interpreted the treaty as implying that Italy also recognized King Yaḥyá's territorial claims in Aden, Tihāmah, and ʿAsir (Baldry 1976; Fiore 2010; Leatherdale 1981).

To prevent the escalation of tension between Britain and Italy in the region, the British Secretary of State, Austen Chamberlain, agreed to hold a meeting with Mussolini in Rome to resolve their issues peacefully. The Italians entered the Rome Conference with a plan to partition the Arabian Peninsula into two zones of influence: the Hijāz-Najd for London and ʿAsir-Yemen for Rome. However, Britain planned to reach an agreement that ensured no European country would establish itself on the western coast of the Arabian Peninsula and that maritime navigation would not be disrupted. The two parties met in Rome in January 1927, and their meeting concluded with a mutual understanding that both powers would not intervene in local disputes in the Arabian Peninsula and that they would work together to prevent the western shores of the Arabian Peninsula from falling into the influence of any other foreign powers. It took almost a year for this understanding to be fully implemented. In June 1928, Jacopo Gasparini's tenure as governor of Eritrea ended, and King Yaḥyá, who was then frustrated with the decline of Italian support, signed the Treaty of Commerce with the Soviet Union in November 1928 (Baldry 1976; Fiore 2010; Leatherdale 1981).

Whereas Anglo-Italian rivalry led to an understanding that limited external intervention in southwestern Arabia, the regional competition between local powers led to the intervention of a rising power from Najd, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Āl Saʿūd. Born on January 15, 1875, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was a descendant of Muḥammad ibn Saʿūd who, in 1744, supported the religious reformer Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (Ibn Bishr 1982). The two established the Dirʿiah imamate (1744–1818), which expanded to most of the Arabian Peninsula and challenged the Ottoman Empire. However, the Imamate was crushed in 1818, and its capital, Dirʿiah, was destroyed by a military campaign sent from Egypt's Muḥammad ʿAlī (Fahmy 2009). When Muḥammad ʿAlī was forced by the European powers to sign the Convention of London and withdraw from the Arabian Peninsula in 1840, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's grandfather, Fayṣal, regained control over the central and eastern regions of the Arabian Peninsula under nominal Ottoman authority (Abu Aliah 1991; Qurshun 2005, 118). When Fayṣal died in 1865, a civil war erupted between two of his sons. The civil war allowed the Ottomans to occupy eastern Arabia in 1871 and the al-Rashīd to lead a campaign to gradually replace Āl Saʿūd in central Arabia. These developments did not last long; however, as ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was able to capture Riyadh in 1902, most of central Arabia in 1908, and eastern Arabia in 1913. During World War I, the British recognized him in a treaty in 1915, and when the war ended, he declared himself the sultan of Najd (Vassiliev 2000).

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Like Yaḥyá and Idrīsī, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, before the beginning of World War I, was not a separatist. Instead, he sought autonomy under nominal Ottoman rule, and he was more successful than his counterparts in achieving this goal. In 1914, two months before the beginning of the war, he concluded a treaty with the Ottomans, where they recognized him as the autonomous governor of central and eastern Arabia (an English translation of the treaty is found here—Goldberg 1984; an Arabic copy is here—Qurshun 2005). Unlike Yaḥyá and Idrīsī, however, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz did not have a prophetic title. His religious legitimacy did not stem from his genealogy but from his claimed support of the Wahhābī religious tradition (Vassiliev 2000). Echoing Yaḥyá's justification through historical and territorial claims, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz claimed dynastic legitimacy due to his family's intermittent rule over central and eastern Arabia from 1744 to 1871. On several occasions, he used this legacy to justify his territorial claim over the region. Finally, like Yaḥyá and Idrīsī, he used discourses rooted in Arabism and reformist Islamic intellectual traditions to support his expansion and justify the unification of the territories he conquered (*Umm Al-Qurā Newspaper* 1932a; *Umm Al-Qurā Newspaper* 1932b).

In early 1920, Idrīsī, whose unsuccessful campaign against ʿAsīr had backfired on his rule, sent a letter to ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz urging him to occupy ʿAsīr on his behalf (al-ʿAqīlī 1989, 740–41). By July, the Saudi forces succeeded in occupying ʿAsīr. A month later, the Saudis sent an envoy to the Idrīsī to conclude a treaty in which they divided the tribes and territories of ʿAsīr between the two polities (The agreement text is in Al-Mukhtar 1957, 2: 389). As part of this treaty, the Idrīsī recognized that the inhabitants and tribes of Najrān were under the authority of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. A few months later, Britain withdrew from al-Ḥudaydah, leaving it for Idrīsī to include almost all al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimanī under his rule.

In March 1923, the founder of the Idrīsī Imamate died, and his young and weak son, ʿAlī, became the new Imam (Bang 1996, 114–15). This provided a window of opportunity for King Yaḥyá to expand his rule. Benefitting from Italy's support and internal conflicts within the Idrīsī Imamate, he launched a campaign where he captured the port of al-Ḥudaydah in March 1925 and then continued his campaign northward (al-ʿAqīlī 1989). Faced with this impending threat, ʿAlī was overthrown by his uncle al-Ḥassan in December 1923. In 1926, King Yaḥyá captured more territory and drew closer to the Idrīsī capital. In September 1926, Yaḥyá also concluded a treaty with Italy. At the time, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz had just finished conquering Hijāz and became the King of Hijāz and Sultan of Najd and its Dependencies (Leatherdale 1981; Vassiliev 2000; Baldry 2015; Sālim 1993; al-Maddaḥ 1985).

To save his territory from being overtaken by King Yaḥyá, al-Ḥassan Idrīsī sought ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's protection. In October 1926, both ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and al-Ḥassan Idrīsī concluded the Mecca Agreement, in which ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz became responsible for the foreign, military, and security affairs of the Idrīsī Imamate, while domestic affairs were the responsibility of the Idrīsī. The agreement did not recognize King Yaḥyá's sovereignty over the territories he had captured since the first Saudi-Idrīsī treaty of 1920 (Dalāl 1995; Leatherdale 1981; al-ʿAqīlī 1989; al-Maddaḥ 1985; Sālim 1993).

The Saudi-Yemeni Negotiations about al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī and Najrān (1926-1934)

The Saudi-Yemeni negotiations regarding the territories of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī and Najrān were conducted across three phases, spanning from the Mecca Agreement in October 1926 to the outbreak of the war between the two countries in late March 1934. The first phase lasted for nearly a year and it began in June 1927, when the Saudis sent a delegation to Ṣanʿā' to inform King Yaḥyá about the Mecca Agreement and to negotiate a settlement regarding the disputed territories. This first phase encompassed three rounds of talks and the exchange of several letters between the two kings. Their discussions during this phase primarily revolved around al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī and other Idrīsī territories. This first phase concluded without the two parties reaching an agreement, yet both sides honored the status quo.

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The second phase of negotiations began in August 1931 in response to the Yemeni occupation of the al-ʿArū mountain within the Idrīsī district and lasted a few months. Between the two phases, King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz dispatched a commission to assess governance conditions in the Idrīsī district and to make recommendations for its improvement. Based on a recommendation from the commission, al-Ḥassan Idrīsī sent a letter to the king agreeing to "entrust the administration and finance of our country to Your Majesty" (Baldry 2015). In response, King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz appointed al-Ḥassan as governor and created an advisory council composed of elected representatives from the district's population. This development meant that ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz became more involved in the domestic affairs of the Idrīsī district. In November 1930, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz notified King Yaḥyá of these developments. Meanwhile, while King Yaḥyá was preoccupied with quelling domestic revolts against him in the early months of 1930, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz finished constructing a road between Ḥijāz and the Idrīsī district. Within this context, Yemeni troops attacked the Idrīsī territory in August 1931. The two leaders exchanged letters about the incident and several rounds of negotiations were undertaken afterwards. This second phase of negotiations concluded by the end of 1931 when the two sides reached an agreement composed of eight articles, which is discussed below.

The third phase lasted from May 1933 to March 1934 and involved the exchange of many letters between the two leaders, a round of negotiations in Ṣanʿā', and a conference in Abhā. This phase took place in the aftermath of the failed revolt that al-Ḥassan Idrīsī led against King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. It took the Saudis around three months to drive Idrīsī outside his district towards Yemen. Meanwhile, King Yaḥyá's troops advanced into al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimanī, Najrān, and ʿAsīr. In this third phase of negotiations, the Saudi party insisted on resolving three matters: demarcation of borders, handing over Idrīsī, and the status of Najrān (Baldry 2015; Sālim 1993; al-Maddaḥ 1985).

While many arguments were made during these three phases, I will focus on the following discussion on three notable aspects of these negotiations. The first key aspect is the common understanding between Yaḥyá and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz about the relationship between the state and the nation. Both presented themselves as primarily Arabs and Muslims, and their populations were part of the same Arab nation. Neither of them referred to themselves as the leader of a Yemeni nation or a Saudi nation. While both used the language of Arabism and Islam to legitimize their state, they also used the same language of common nationalism and references to "the people" to justify constructing a border between their two states. While these leaders were nationalist, they were not interested in the nationalist goal of achieving congruence between the state and the nation. Instead, they seemed to find no contradiction in having multiple states co-representing the same nation. This can be shown by the letter that King Yaḥyá sent to King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz when they signed the agreement after the second phase of negotiations. "You and us," Yaḥyá wrote, "are in a full agreement… even [if] our agreement is not in the conventional form of international treaties and its modern ways…" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, 24). ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz replied by explaining the kind of ties the two rulers shared in common:

> You have acknowledged that this treaty is different from modern international treaties. Thank God; the ties between us are much more superior and stronger than any other tie. They are three: first, the Islamic tie; second, the Arab tie; third, this growing affinity between you and us (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, 25).

Moreover, during the third phase of negotiations, King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz evoked these nationalist ties to rationalize the establishment of a border between the two states. He started his argument for creating the border by informing Yaḥyá that "Islamic Arab duty" compels him to continue their discussions about unity in a way that "makes Islam and Arabs happy" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, 31). He then reminded Yaḥyá that "there is no independent state in the lands of Arabs and Islam except the ones that we and you have" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, 31). Instead of requesting unification between the two states as one would expect from a nationalist of the early post-WWI period, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz suggested an agreement covering several key points. The most

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important ones included a clear demarcation of borders between their states, mutual defense agreements against both external and domestic threats, and mechanisms for managing common borders (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934). These suggestions, if implemented, would have led to a situation similar to a union or confederation, and less like a unity where the two states dissolve into one.

While this shared understanding of common national ties and the relationship between the state and nation did not lead to demands for unification, it prevented both parties from utilizing them to justify territorial expansion. When King Yaḥyá attacked the al-ʿArū mountain, for instance, he justified his action by stating that "its inhabitants did not know the pillars of Islam or its norms. They do not pray, fast, or perform Hajj, and their tongues do not know the two declarations of faith." As a result, Yaḥyá's governor decided to "save them" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, 18). This example showcases how Yemeni territorial expansion was not justified on the basis of nationalist principles. This is because such an argument wouldn't hold any merit between two states that shared membership in the same nation. Hence, Yaḥyá shifted to more hybrid justifications that drew on both the language of Islam and "civilizing mission" arguments. Another example is how the Saudi delegates claimed that the Idrīsī district should remain part of Saudi Arabia, even after they expelled the Idrīsīs from it. These Saudi delegates justified their position by pointing out that the Idrīsīs' district "is now under an Arab government that commands right and forbids wrong…. It is not under a foreign government that is different from it in tongue, origin, religion…" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, 45).

The second notable aspect of the Saudi-Yemeni negotiations relates to how each party employed history and geography to make territorial claims. The Yemeni position was straightforward: al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī and ʿAsīr were historically and geographically part of the geographic region of Yemen. As to Idrīsī, the Yemeni representatives called him *Mughtasib*, which in Arabic means several things, ranging from 'rapist' to 'one who unlawfully and forcefully takes what belongs to others.' Since Idrīsī was an Arab and Muslim, this term would be appropriate to differentiate his illegitimate claim to rule from that of foreign occupiers or colonizers. The Yemeni delegations also emphasized that he was a "stranger," referring to his North African origins. By this term, they did not mean that he was not a co-national, since the Idrīsī was, like Yaḥyá, a descendant of the Prophet. What they meant was that he lacked the necessary roots to qualify him for rule.

The Saudis provided several counterarguments to the Yemeni claim that al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī and ʿAsīr were Yemeni regions. The Saudis published a research memorandum *On the Truth of ʿAsīr and Yemen Borders from [an] Historical and Geographic Perspective* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, F). It starts by claiming that the Arabian Peninsula as a whole constitutes a "geographical unity," and that there are no geographical barriers between its communities. It then highlights that all the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula are Arabs and that "the linguistic differences between them are not similar to those between Anglo-Saxon and Latin"(Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, F). It also asserts that "the dominant religion in the Arabian Peninsula is Islam" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, F). While there is a diversity of Islamic sects in the region, "this does not negate its Islamic nature" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, F). After emphasizing all the characteristics that unite the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, the memo moves to question the meaning of the word Yemen.

> The commonly agreed-upon terminology in the Arabian Peninsula is to refer to all the regions located to the south of the Grand Mosque in Mecca as 'Yemen,' signifying the fact that these areas are to the right of the Kaaba. Similarly, the regions located to the north of the Grand Mosque are referred to as 'Sham.' According to this terminology, all the territories located very close to Mecca as well as those distant from it are collectively referred to as 'Yemen' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, H).

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The final key aspect of these negotiations relates to how both parties argued about Najrān. Unlike other parts of southwestern Arabia, Najrān sought isolation when the Ottomans withdrew from the region. In 1920, after his agreement with the Idrīsī, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz tried to occupy Najrān but his forces were defeated. When ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz reached an agreement with King Yaḥyá after the second phase of negotiations, the notables of Najrān sent an envoy to ʿAsīr's Saudi governor ʿAbdul-ʿAzīz al-ʿAskar to negotiate a friendship treaty in December 1931 (Al-Hamadani 2019, 248; The treaty text is in Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, 23). At the same time, a group of bandits belonging to the Yām tribe, led by a tribal leader called Ibrāhīm al-ʿUslūmī, raided a group of King ʿAbdul-ʿAzīz's subjects in ʿAsīr (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, 179). Concerned by how both the agreement and the raid would affect their territory, Najrāni notables sent an envoy to ʿAsīr. Their envoy arrived in Abhā on December 29, 1931, and relayed the Najrāni notables' message of reassurance to ʿAsīr's governor. A few days later, the two parties concluded a treaty of good neighborship in which the Najrāni notables vowed to prevent Ibrāhīm al-ʿUslūmī from further attacks on the territories of King ʿAbdul-ʿAzīz (The treaty text is in Al-Hamadani 2019, 248–52; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, 179–81). This treaty implied that Najrān was recognized as a separate entity and not as a territory belonging to ʿAbdul-ʿAzīz's kingdom. A little more than a year later, on March 1, 1933, a similar treaty was signed again between Najrān's notables and ʿAbdul-ʿAzīz bin Musāʿad, the commander of the Saudi troops in the anti-Idrīsī revolt campaign. The motivation behind their signing a new treaty was likely to counter the military campaign that the Yemeni Crown Prince Sayf al-Islām Aḥmad led in the northeast regions of Yemen near Najrān. The military campaign started in October 1932 and reached near Najrān in February 1933. In the same month, Yām tribes were defeated after participating in a battle between Yemeni troops and their allies from the Al Ḥusayn tribe (Sharaf al-Din 1936). The new treaty was signed just days before the battle, and it included the same terms of good neighborship, preventing enemies from crossing Najrān against Saudi Arabia, and controlling their people, especially Ibrāhīm al-ʿUslūmī. The treaty was signed by the main notables of each of the three branches of Yām (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, 181–83).

When the news of these developments reached King Yaḥyá, he sent a letter to King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz expressing his fears that the Saudis planned to incorporate Najrān. "As you know," Yaḥyá told ʿAbdul-ʿAzīz', "Yām's men were part of Yemen in the past and the future" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, 148). In his reply, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz stressed that he had no interest in Najrān: "Yām has neither money for a king to gain nor a mind for a devil to sway. I love being far from them more than getting closer because there is no benefit from them" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, 184). Then, the two parties agreed to hold a new round of negotiation about the fate of Al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī and Najrān. The Saudi envoy arrived in Ṣanʿā' in June 1933 and stayed there until August without achieving any progress. While the correspondences and negotiations were taking place, the Yemeni troops under the leadership of Crown Prince Sayf al-Islām Aḥmad succeeded in occupying most of the major towns of Najran. It was during this campaign that the town of Badr was occupied in September 1933 (Sharaf al-Din 1936, 140).

The Yemeni occupation of Najrān drove its leaders closer to Saudi Arabia and, as a result, they began to ask King ʿAbdul-ʿAzīz for support and military aid. In August 1933, King Yaḥyá sent a letter to ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz emphasizing that Najrān was part of Yemen and asked the Saudis not to intervene. "There is no harm to you if we reform Yām," Yaḥyá said, "or [if] we decide to leave them in their corrupt and savage condition" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934). In response to this, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz reiterated his lack of interest in Najrān: "As with regard to Najrān, we are not interested in ruling them. There is nothing [that] links us to them—neither religion nor material gains" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934). These correspondences about the status of Yām showcase how King Yaḥyá justified his role in Najrān through its need for his "civilizing" efforts to teach them religion and that they belong tribally to larger Yemeni tribes. Repeatedly, King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz expressed that he was not enthusiastic about maintaining Najrān. Instead, he made it clear that his limited interest in Najrān related to national security and previous treaties between him and his ancestors. In some correspondence, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz even suggested keeping it isolated

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between the two kingdoms without being part of either of them (Farīd 2007; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1934, 172–85).

The Abhā conference was the last attempt by the two parties to resolve the following three issues: Najrān, borders, and concluding a twenty-year peace treaty. It started in February 1934 and lasted for several days. Prior to the start of the conference, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz changed his position toward Najrān. Previously, he sought to maintain it as a neutral region between himself and Yemen. By early 1934, however, he aimed to incorporate Najrān into his kingdom. This change was due in part to the lobbying efforts of its leaders, which culminated in a written pledge that ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz issued to Najrāni leaders in October 1933. It guaranteed that ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz would not interfere in "your towns, your affairs, and your old way of life" and that he would protect them from anyone who planned to do so (Al-Hamadani 2019, 263–64). At the Abhā conference, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz negotiated with Yemeni delegates who presented three arguments in support of their claim over Najrān. First, the Yemeni delegates pointed to ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's earlier statements about his lack of interest in Najrān to legitimize their claims. Second, they emphasized the sectarian differences between Najrān and Najd, as they argued, "Najrānis are Ismailis and thus have no religious connection with Najd" (*Umm Al-Qurā Newspaper* 1934). For their third argument, the Yemeni delegates asserted that Najrān is tribally part of Yemen. The Saudi counterargument was composed of two parts. First, the Saudi delegation claimed there were several historical agreements between Najrān's leaders and previous Saudi rulers. Second, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz had already taken the taxes of the Najrāni tribes. "As with regard to religion," the Saudi delegates further argued, "Najdis do not inquire into people's hearts as long as they publicly appear as Muslims. And God is the only one who could know what is hidden within their hearts" (*Umm Al-Qurā Newspaper* 1934).

The Treaty of Ṭā'if and Sovereignty, Borders, and the Question of Minorities in the Arabian Peninsula

The Saudi-Yemeni negotiations at the Abhā conference failed to resolve their competing claims over Najrān. Consequently, war broke out between the two parties on March 22, 1934. Lasting around two months, the Saudi-Yemeni war formally ended when the warring sides signed the Treaty of Ṭā'if on May 19, 1934. This treaty and its preceding war represented the culmination of an eight-year dispute and negotiations between local rulers over three regions in southwestern Arabia: ʿAsīr, al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī, and Najrān, and their broader issues related to sovereignty, borders, and the question of minorities in the Arabian Peninsula. As outlined in prior sections, throughout these negotiations, each party presented arguments to justify their claims that these regions belonged to them.

While these years of negotiations—the earliest of which occurred in 1927—ultimately failed to prevent the Saudi-Yemeni war of 1934, the same discourses and arguments employed during these negotiations were used to justify the war and its resolution within Ṭā'if. The Treaty of Ṭā'if, which concluded the Saudi-Yemeni war in 1934, was rooted in the concepts and principles formulated during eight years of negotiations. In this concluding section, I will focus on three main results of the Treaty and show how they were influenced by the concepts and principles developed over the prior eight years of local negotiations.

The first result of the Ṭā'if treaty was the demarcation of the Saudi-Yemeni border, the implications of which were slightly different from the Westphalian model sanctioned by the Paris Peace Conference. In addition to controlling the movement of people and goods, Westphalian borders in their ideal forms are also sovereignty boundaries. They constitute the ultimate jurisdiction of the sovereignty of the state's ruling elite. The Saudi-Yemeni border was neither a legal boundary nor was it meant to control the movement of people. The Ṭā'if borders controlled the cross-border movement of three types of people: tribal raiders (Article 7), political dissidents (Article 9), and criminals (Article 10). This means that other types of people, such as workers, students, pilgrims, family members, and friends were free to cross the border. Moreover, the Ṭā'if

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borders were not legal boundaries. This is because both countries adopted uncodified forms of Sharia law as their legal systems. Each region and town in both countries had its own Sharia judge, whose rulings were deemed acceptable by other judges regardless of political borders. The only legal category that the Ṭā'if treaty entrusted to political authorities was the category of subjecthood. With the creation of the Saudi-Yemeni border, Article 12 transformed each group of people into subjects of the political authority they found themselves in. In general terms, the Ṭā'if border is more of a regime security border. In this way, the Ṭā'if border drew on notions related to regime security from the Westphalian border, while also incorporating a universal understanding of Sharia and co-membership of one larger Arab nation.

The second result of the Ṭā'if Treaty was the partition of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaimānī and its subsequent Wahhābization. The treaty stipulated that "His Majesty the Imam King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz hereby relinquishes," as outlined in Article 2, "through this treaty, any claim he might have regarding protection, occupation, or any other right in the territories which, according to this treaty, belong to Yemen, from the lands that were under the control of the Idrīsīs." To naturalize this partition of the Idrīsī district after the war and the Idrīsī revolt, King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz requested Wahhābī scholars in Najd to dispatch a religious mission to convert the people of the Idrīsī district to Wahhābism (Al-Abdulmuhsin 2007, 4: 48–49). One of these Wahhābī scholars was Abdullāh al-Qarʿāwī; he led the most successful conversion campaign in the Idrīsī district. The movement was successful to the degree that it virtually eliminated all traces of pre-war religious traditions. This use of a sectarian marker of identity as a means to legitimize arbitrary borders can be seen as the paradoxical outcome of delineating a border between two states that collectively represent the same Arab nation.

The final main result of the Ṭā'if Treaty was the transformation of the Najrāni population into a minority group of Saudi Arabia. As outlined above, the Saudi-Yemeni war was in part a result of the clash between two state-building projects in the territory of a community that lacked any international protection of its independence. Thus, its second-best option was to conclude a form of religious autonomy within the Saudi state. While this process allowed the leaders of the Najrānī community to preserve the cultural autonomy of the community from Yemen, it pushed Najrānī leaders to sacrifice any claim to political autonomy. As a result, the Najrānī community transformed into a minority. Until today, Najrān is a predominantly Ismaili community and the headquarters of the global Ismaili Daʿī.

If the Paris Peace Conference failed to prevent the reemergence of war in Europe, the Ṭā'if Treaty survived the fall of the monarchy in Yemen in 1962 and remained in effect until the Gulf War in 1990. Indeed, throughout the period between 1934 and 1990, Yemenis and Saudis freely crossed their shared border, which was first demarcated in the Ṭā'if treaty. It was only when Yemen was perceived by the Saudi government as siding with Iraq during the Gulf War in 1990 that this changed. Then, the Saudi government decided to require work visas from Yemenis, which resulted in expelling hundreds of thousands of people beyond its border (Okruhlik and Conge 1997).

Disclosure. None.

Notes

1 In this article, the Arabian Peninsula and Arabia refer to the post-Ottoman territories in the Arabian Peninsula.
2 Before the eruption of World War One, the Ottoman authority covered the areas occupied by contemporary Saudi Arabia and the northern part of Yemen.
3 I use the *Mashriq* in this article to refer to the territories occupied by contemporary Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine/Israel, and Jordan.
4 While Ottoman authority in North Africa varied over time, before the eruption of the war it was restricted to contemporary Egypt and Libya.

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5 For a critical bottom-up analysis of the concept of minority, see (Rao 2009); for a global intellectual history of the concept see (Bar Sadeh and Houwink ten Cate 2021).

6 This paper is in conversation with other works as well. Smith argues that the Paris Peace Conference was not just a balancing act in a system of states with uneven distribution of material power. Rather, he sees it as a destroyer of structures and systems and a creator of others. By historicizing and concentrating on the concept of sovereignty, Smith shows the variety of potentials that the war and the subsequent conference unleashed (Smith 2018). Tapping into this understanding of the conference, this paper shows how the Arabian elites through their engagement with each other in this global critical moment produced novel and hybrid forms of sovereignty. Also, while many works on World War I and the Paris Peace Conference have a limited temporal scope, this paper utilized the "Long Great War" that Wyrtzen developed to study the impact of WWI on the Middle East. For him, the Great War in the Middle East ended with the Saudi-Yemeni War in 1934. However, the cost of adopting wide spatial analysis, made him sacrifice some in-depth analysis especially when it comes to the Arabian Peninsula. This paper aspires to provide an in-depth analysis of the Arabian elites during this long war (Wyrtzen 2022).

7 "The Southwestern Region of The Arabian Peninsula," Google Maps, 2024.

8 For more on the reforms of the Yemeni scholar al-Shawkāni in the issue of political legitimacy of Zaydi Imams, see (Haykel 2003; Willis 2007).

9 These letters were published by the al-Ahrām newspaper, the al-Manār magazine, the al-Mu'ayyad magazine, and others. (For examples see: Abāẓah 1986, 249–61)

10 The Italian presence in the Red Sea started in 1869, when the Italian company Rubattino Shipping purchased the Bay of Assab on the western coast of the Red Sea. A decade later, the Italian government bought the company's possessions in 1880. In February 1885, Italian troops occupied Assab and Massawa, and in January 1890, a colony of Eritrea was officially proclaimed. Between 1890 and 1911, Italians, through the Red Sea trade networks, cultivated contacts and knowledge about the eastern Arabian coast. As I mentioned earlier, when they went into war with the Ottomans over Libya between 1911 and 1912, Italy provided support to Idrīsī in his attacks on the Ottomans. (For more details, see Fiore 2010).

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