

Listening to *The Voice of the Hijaz*: An Analysis of German Diplomacy with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Arabian Media's Response

In July 1939, Adolf Hitler welcomed a Saudi envoy to his personal residence. German officials met as a result of a coordinated effort by the German Foreign Office to portray the Third Reich as a natural friend of Saudi Arabia. With the prospect of war on the horizon, Hitler approved of this shift in German policy towards the Arab world in hopes that this would pressure the already extended British Empire. Werner Otto Von Hentig, one of the diplomats who coordinated this meeting noted that “a usual political conversation took place, to which Hitler, to my horror, promised the Arabs considerable and even military help.... Hitler...was extremely generous with his offers on this basis that we had common enemies.”¹ These promises are rather striking considering the reality that German leadership knew war was on the horizon for the German Reich. Moreover, Hitler and the Saudi diplomat, Khalid al-Hud, eventually came to an agreement that Germany would provide arms and ammunition to Saudi Arabia in the near future. This meeting and mutual agreement seem to demonstrate that a potential diplomatic shift in the Middle East was taking place in the lead up to the Second World War and I contend that this shift, and how it was presented in the media, is worthy of further study. By specifically looking at the international relationship between Saudi Arabia and Nazi Germany from 1936 to 1941, we can understand two important developments: First, that a factionalized German foreign office attempted to portray Nazi Germany as friends of Saudi Arabia; Second, that Saudi intellectuals and the Saudi Press, eager to free themselves from British hegemony in the region, were cautious to openly embrace these German overtures.

In order to demonstrate both of these claims, I will utilize primary source material in German, English, and Arabic. I will analyze the memoirs of German diplomats who worked in the Middle Eastern office, German Foreign office memos, as well as how the American State Department and media reported on German diplomacy with Saudi Arabia. Additionally, I will examine and present translated articles from the Arabic newspaper *Sawt al-Hijaz* (Voice of the Hijaz) to showcase a firsthand account of how one Saudi newspaper reported on British and German diplomacy in the region. Overall, I will conclude that despite the efforts of Nazi diplomats to portray themselves as friends of the Arab world, reading *Sawt al-Hijaz* (Voice of the Hijaz) demonstrates that many Saudi Arabian intellectuals and readers of the paper were not presented with a positive representation of Germany. Instead, they read a rather neutral representation of German and British diplomacy in the buildup of the war and the outbreak of the conflict. From this, we can conclude that the Saudi Arabian press in the Hijaz, while critical of the British in Palestine, was not openly supportive of Germany either. Despite this, the neutral language was strategic and gave the press flexibility to support either Germany or the UK in the event of whichever nation was able to consolidate its position in Middle Eastern affairs.

¹ Werner Von Hentig. *Mein Leben, Eine Dienstreise*. Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962. 346.