

Listening to *The Voice of the Hijaz*: German Diplomacy and the Saudi Arabian Media's Response

In July 1939, Adolf Hitler welcomed a Saudi envoy to his personal residence. This meeting was a coordinated effort by the German Foreign Office to woo Saudi Arabian leadership as a natural friend of the Third Reich. With the prospect of war on the horizon, Hitler approved a shift in German diplomatic policy towards Saudi Arabia in hopes that this would put pressure on the overly extended British Empire. *Time* magazine wrote, "Last week Adolf Hitler received at his Berchtesgaden retreat a tall, straight, bearded Arab dressed in a beautifully embroidered flowing robe. His name was Khalid al Hud, and his position is that of counselor and emissary of Ibn Saud, King of Saudi Arabia, 'Guardian of the Holy Places,' the most potent and most independent of the Near East's monarchs."¹ This meeting led to an international arms agreement between the two nations. More importantly, studying this relationship reveals that while Germany attempted to manipulate the anti-British sentiment in Saudi Arabia, the leadership in the Kingdom also sought to use this international relationship to their own advantage.

By specifically looking at the international relationship between Saudi Arabia and Nazi Germany from 1938 to 1941, we can understand two important developments: A factionalized German foreign office developed and pursued a policy of friendship between Nazi Germany and Saudi Arabia while Saudi leadership, eager to free themselves from British hegemony, flirted with the prospect of utilizing Nazi Germany as a means of attaining diplomatic and material independence from the United Kingdom. This effort by Saudi leadership and how it was presented in the media can be seen by studying the Saudi Arabian newspaper *Sawt al-Hijaz*.

I will first analyze the development of German policy from one that was limited in its interactions with the Arab world to one that actively sought to make ties and undermine British and French hegemony in the region. Moreover, German officials stressed that Nazi Germany was anti-Jewish, *not* anti-Semitic. To demonstrate this idea, I will utilize the memoirs of Otto Von Hentig and Fritz Grobba, the two major Middle Eastern specialists in the Third Reich's Middle Eastern policy office. It will become evident that while these two worked together, there was a rivalry between the two men, and they differed in what they envisioned the Reich's vision should be concerning interactions in the Middle East. In addition to these primary sources, I will look at how the American press portrayed the friendship between Nazi Germany and Saudi Arabia.

I will then shift my analysis to look at how the Saudi Arabian press and Saudi intellectuals from the Hijaz region depicted the Kingdom's international relations with Europe. The case can be made that those who were writing, printing, and reading newspapers in this region were predominantly members of the intelligentsia because of low literacy rates and a small printing culture in the newly established Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. For this study, the newspaper *Sawt al-Hijaz* (Voice of the Hijaz) will be utilized. *Sawt al-Hijaz* was a bi-weekly newspaper that tended to discuss cultural and economic issues but also tackled foreign policy. In the realm of foreign affairs, Saudi Arabia was eager to break free of complete reliance on the United Kingdom but was not confident enough to hedge all of its bets on the Third Reich. By analyzing *Sawt al-Hijaz*, one can see that Saudi intellectuals read a constant stream of articles that, while critical of British policy in the region, discussed German policy in a strategically

¹ "Semitic Friends," *Time*, July 3, 1939, 16.

neutral manner. To demonstrate this, I will break this section of the analysis into two parts: To better understand the constant critiques of British policy in the region, I will look at how *Sawt al-Hijaz* covered the revolt in Palestine with an emphasis on the summer of 1938. To demonstrate how the press covered Germany and Nazi leadership, I will look at the period leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War and the first few months of the conflict.

In much of the current historiography, historians such as Francis Nicosia, Jeffrey Herf, or David Motadel have focused on German efforts with Arab nationalists or Muslim leaders who claimed to speak for the whole of the Muslim community.² My hope with this paper is to address this historiography in two ways. I will focus on Germany's efforts to alter its racial policies to conduct diplomacy with a *sovereign* nation and in doing so, demonstrate that in certain cases, German foreign policy was flexible when dealing with race. It will closely examine the evolution of this diplomatic policy and reveal that it developed out of a factionalizing German Foreign Office.³ Moreover, it will also reveal how Saudi Arabian newspapers can be used as a mirror to interpret Saudi foreign policy. This effort is useful because access to Saudi diplomatic documents is limited but there are still ways to interpret their foreign efforts.

Race, German Policy, and German Diplomats:

There is no doubt that Nazi leadership insisted on the importance of race in their foreign policy. For example, Nazi officials had strict instructions to pursue policies such as military alliances only with peoples that the Reich had deemed as racial equivalents. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler called for Germany's racial purification and he detailed a racial hierarchy with the Aryan race at its apex.⁴ Hitler also ranked other countries in this racial hierarchy and labeled the Arab world as inferior to Europeans, especially to Aryans.⁵ With his ascendance to Führer in 1934, Hitler immediately set out to implement this racial hierarchy into society.⁶ The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 strictly established who was Aryan and who was not. By stating who lacked "Des Deutschen Blutes und der Deutschen Ehre" (German blood and Honor) and outlining a domestic policy of racial purity, the Nazi party intertwined its ideology into all aspects of the German government. Moreover, this racial outlook also transferred into how the Reich viewed foreign policy. Nazi leadership believed that the Reich should only pursue alliances with nations who were deemed as racial equivalents and the first nation Germany sought to ally with was the United Kingdom. Despite these policies, the degree to which some diplomats operated with the Nazi racial beliefs varied. Depending on how closely Nazi officials followed racial beliefs, tensions developed in

² Other studies in Nazi policy in the Middle East include: Lukasz Hirsowics, *The Third Reich and the Arab East* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966); Heinz Tillmann, *Deutschlands Araberpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Wissenschaft, 1965); Joseph Schechtman, *The Mufti and the Führer: The Rise and Fall of Haj Amin el-Husseini* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff 1965); Francis R. Nicosia, *The Third Reich and the Palestine Question* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press and I.B. Tauris, 1985); Edgar Flacker, "Fritz Grobba and Nazi Germany's Middle East Policy, 1933-1942," Diss. London, 1998; Klaus Gensicke *Der Mufti von Jerusalem und die Nationalsozialisten: Eine politische Biographie Amin el-Husseinis* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007); and Wolfgang Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

³ It should be noted that Fritz Grobba's memoirs are questionable at times. Therefore, for this study, I intend to focus on efforts that Hentig and Grobba both commented on in order to corroborate Grobba's writings.

⁴ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939), 412.

⁵ Stefan Ihrig, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 186. Ihrig's study goes on to demonstrate that Hitler considered the Turks to be above Arabs in his racial hierarchy and further muddles an understanding of Hitler's racial hierarchy outside of Europe.

⁶ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 414.

various offices, such as the one devoted to Middle Eastern affairs. Specifically, the two diplomats that developed a rivalry surrounding policy formation were Dr. Fritz Grobba and Werner Otto Von Hentig.

The Development of German Policy towards the Middle East

Hitler did not clarify Germany's stance towards the Middle East until 1938 because he was still hoping to ally with the British. Reich officials were interested in the oil reserves in the area, but they recognized that the British position in the area prevented any German expansion.⁷ Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary from 1938-1940, also noted that Hitler articulated his indifference toward the return of German colonies.⁸ At this point, Hitler seemed dedicated to pursuing a European policy. Thus, Hitler kept Arab interests on the periphery to aid his alliance overtures toward the British. Reich leadership operated under the assumption that as long as Germany could acquire territory in Europe, they would resist undermining British authority in the Middle East.⁹

A major policy shift for Germany came in the fall of 1938 and the Munich Agreement. The year 1938 saw the first major territorial demands from Germany and resulted in the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland. More importantly, British criticism of these demands signaled to Nazi leadership that the purported military alliance between Britain and Germany was no longer possible. The British still pursued a policy of appeasement with Germany in 1938, but Parliament put plans into place to expand troop deployments across the British Empire and prepared for future German aggression. Moreover, British and French diplomats also promised to defend any future countries that the German Reich threatened. Due to this response, Hitler reasoned that Germany could either pursue its territorial agenda or relinquish them in hopes of achieving a military understanding with Britain and France. Reich leadership decided to continue on with territorial expansion and seek new ways of putting pressure on the British government. Consequentially, Hitler approved the shift from limited involvement into the area to openly seeking to establish close ties with the Arab world.

Otto Von Hentig and Fritz Grobba's Diplomatic Efforts

In the fall of 1938, Palestine was in the midst of an armed Arab revolt. The Arab revolt resulted after high volumes of Jewish emigres came to Palestine, igniting tensions between the influx of Jews and Arabs who had previously lived there. Until 1938, German leadership hesitated to get involved as to not upset the British balance of power in the region. After it became clear that a military understanding between the British and Germans was no longer possible, the Foreign Office looked for ways to utilize the crisis in Palestine to build their reputation with Arab leaders in the region. The Foreign office dispatched Otto Von Hentig to the region in order to assess the attitude towards Nazi Germany to learn what policy the Reich should pursue. In his memoirs, Hentig recounts, "it was quite restless in Palestine at the time. The hostility of the Arabs was directed chiefly against the English, and so I was able to visit the whole country under the protection of the German flag."¹⁰

During his visit to Palestine, Hentig surmised that the Arabs in the region had a broad knowledge of what was happening around them in terms of Europeans attempting to further colonize the region and take advantage of the conflict. Moreover, he concluded that, "The Arabs regarded the English as tyrants, the French as exploiters, and the Italian settlers as industrious but they had taken from them the land and

⁷ Wolfgang Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 97.

⁸ Edward Frederick Lindley Wood Halifax, *Fullness of Days* (London: Collins, 1957), 187-188.

⁹ Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 32.

¹⁰ Otto Von Hentig, *Mein Leben, Eine Dienstreise* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 329.

thus the livelihood.”¹¹ Hentig argued that despite the massive Jewish emigration to the region, it was unlikely that a Jewish state would be constructed.¹² Moreover, Hentig argued that “In Palestine, the Jews live among themselves. There they face difficult political and economic problems...They find themselves in a small corner of the Mediterranean where they do not in any way cross paths with vital German interests.”¹³ In addition to this position, Hentig had adopted a position that Germany should develop economic ties with Middle Eastern countries but refrain from selling weapons to these nations for fear of disrupting relations with Britain.¹⁴

In contrast to Hentig’s proposal, Grobba argued that the conflict in Palestine could be utilized in a diplomatic as well as lucrative manner. Grobba was stationed in Baghdad until 1938, and established contacts in the Iraqi government as well as the newly created Saudi Arabian Kingdom. Grobba had also used this time to observe the anti-British and anti-Jewish sentiment and claimed that Arabs in the Middle East looked at Hitler in a positive manner. One example of Grobba doing so was the report he submitted, which recorded pro-German sentiment among Arab leaders to Hitler’s speech during the Munich Crisis. In one of his speeches, Hitler made an overt mention to the situation in Palestine, declaring, “I am not inclined to permit the establishment of a second Palestine here in the heart of Germany through the cleverness of other statesmen.”¹⁵ Grobba reported that the speech had been broadcasted in the Arab world and that Iraqi journalists spoke of “the great Hitler.”¹⁶ Therefore, Grobba believed there was strong pro-German sentiment that the Reich could work with.

Grobba’s proposal, unlike Hentig’s that focused on limiting Jewish immigration in the region, wanted the Reich to supply arms to the Middle Eastern nations. Grobba argued that both Iraq and Saudi Arabia would be receptive to this notion and that these nations could also funnel arms into Palestine to support the Arabs in their revolt. Moreover, working with these nations would allow Germany to present itself as friends of the Arab world on the international stage without having any colonial territory or ambitions in the process. Furthermore, Grobba wrote, “that war against the western democracies in the near future was probably unavoidable...friendlier relations with the Arab world, rather than continuing passivity and blind support for Italian imperialism in North Africa and the Middle East, would be to Germany’s advantage.”¹⁷ Hitler chose Grobba’s plan.

Despite Hitler’s approval to sell weapons and ammunition to Arab nations, the German Foreign office struggled with how to portray the Reich as friends of the Arabs amidst their heavy the Nazi regime’s anti-Semitic racism. The Nazi’s pursued a racially guided policy and their antisemitism was well known. The Arabs would fall into the classification for Semites, so German leadership struggled with how to justify engaging in diplomacy in the Middle East despite this. The solution the Foreign office arrived at was to be rather specific with their language and imply that Nazi Germany was not anti-Semitic, but instead anti-Jewish.¹⁸ This was communicated through the German press when discussing how to frame German involvement in the Arab world. The German propaganda ministry there decided

¹¹ Ibid., 335.

¹² Francis Nicosia, *The Third Reich and the Palestine Question* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers), 133.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 183.

¹⁵ Max Domarus, *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations 1935-1938. The Chronicle of Dictatorship. Vol 2* (Mundelein IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers 1992) 793-804.

¹⁶ Fritz Grobba, “Irakische Sympathien für Deutschland während der europäische Krisem” in *Auswärtiges Amt*, 16 September 1938.

¹⁷ Francis Nicosia, *Nazi Germany and the Arab World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 127.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 165.

that it would change its language when referring to the region. Instead of using the term “anti-Semitism” when describing German policy, the German press was instructed to use “anti-Jewish”. This would permit the Reich to articulate its policies and not offend Arabs.¹⁹ Moreover, this specificity in language also allowed for Hitler and other Nazi leaders to claim the revolt in Palestine was an armed conflict started by the Jews.²⁰ Consequentially, this belief in a conflict started by the Jews and the necessity to combat it could be an easy message for propaganda reels to focus on. The Reich’s language shows how it chose to take Grobba’s recommendations seriously and change their approach so that they could justify carrying out diplomacy with a nation that they had previously deemed racially inferior. Consequentially, by 1939, the Foreign Office turned to organizing meetings with Saudi leadership to pursue closer ties in the Arab world.

From the perspective of Saudi Arabia, negotiations with Germany provided an ideal diplomatic possibility for King Ibn Saud. Saudi Arabian leadership had tried to secure an arms deal with Germany since 1936 and with the development of German policy in the Middle East, eagerly approached the possibility of an arms deal. After the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1936, Saudi Arabian leadership feared that Italy would seek to extend control into the Arabian Peninsula. After receiving a lukewarm response from the British in terms of promises towards Saudi sovereignty, the Kingdom needed to secure modern arms in order to defend itself.²¹ This recent eagerness that Germany displayed to engage in increased arms deals could provide Ibn Saud with the ideal opportunity to break free of British hegemony in the Middle East.²² Grobba wrote in his memoirs, “in order to liberate himself more and more from English influence, he [King Ibn Saud] seeks friends in the world. In view of the similarity of the political situation for Saudi Arabia and for Germany and the commonality of the interests of both countries he was ready to work closely with Germany. He promised that in the event of a European war he would adopt a benevolent neutral attitude towards Germany.”²³

In 1939, at the insistence of Fritz Grobba, Germany and Saudi Arabia established official diplomatic ties and continued negotiations for an arms deal. For his efforts, the German Foreign Office promoted Grobba to be the official German diplomat to Saudi Arabia but gave explicit instructions to limit what could be promised from Germany.²⁴ Grobba immediately set out to expand the current relationship and met with King Ibn Saud on multiple occasions to express Germany’s goodwill towards the Kingdom. Grobba also noted how the Saudi King recognized the potential for this friendship between the two nations and reported:

He [Ibn Saud] feels himself to be encircled and oppressed by England and has the desire to free himself from this encirclement if possible. Out of prudence he assumes a friendly attitude towards the British, but in the depths of his heart he hates them and complies with their demands only reluctantly.²⁵

Despite Grobba’s belief that the Saudi Arabian leadership was sincere in its negotiations, Hentig continued to disagree with him and believed that Saudi Arabian promises were limited at best.²⁶ Hentig suggested that the geopolitical position of Saudi Arabia meant that it could do very little to resist British

¹⁹ Ibid., 77.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Clive Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia 1925-1939: The Imperial Oasis* (New York: Cass Publishing, 1983), 300.

²² Ibid.

²³ Grobba, *Manner und Macht*, 112.

²⁴ Ibid., 250.

²⁵ Ibid., 260.

²⁶ Nicosia, *The Third Reich & the Palestine Question*, 187.

forces and that providing arms to the Kingdom would do little to change this notion. Nevertheless, the Reich continued with its diplomatic gestures towards the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The possibility for arms trade was visited and finally a meeting was organized for July 1939. Thus, Germany moved closer to trading arms and taking a prominent diplomatic role in the Middle East in contrast to its stance prior to 1938.

The growing relations between Germany and Saudi Arabia did not go unnoticed and Britain's awareness caused some changes in the buildup to the July meeting. Perhaps the biggest indicator of this was that Fritz Grobba did not take part in the meetings between the Saudi Envoy and Hitler. This was a strategic calculation by the German Foreign Office for fear of further provoking Britain. In the Fall of 1938, a British oil pipeline was attacked by anti-British Iraqi mercenaries. After investigating, the men involved claimed to have been close contacts of Fritz Grobba.²⁷ The British immediately demanded that Grobba be removed from any position in Iraq and that his efforts to undermine British authority in the region be addressed by the German Reich. The German Foreign Office recognized that if an envoy from Saudi Arabia and Fritz Grobba were together in Berlin with Hitler, there would be severe retaliation from Britain. The Reich assigned Werner Otto von Hentig to welcome the diplomats and escort them to Hitler's personal residence. Hentig recalled escorting the Saudi diplomat, Khalid al-Hud, as well as his efforts to downplay the support that Germany could provide. Hentig wrote of the episode:

Khalid al-Hud delivered his appointment speech, which I was able to translate because of our lack of an Arabic interpreter.... After Hitler's reply, a usual political conversation took place, to which Hitler, to my horror, promised the Arabs considerable and even military help. They had not expected that and could not expect them in all circumstances. Hitler, however, was extremely generous with his offers on this basis that we had common enemies...

Nazi Leadership not only welcomed the Saudi envoys, but Hitler felt compelled to provide them aid. Moreover, Hitler and other officials felt confident enough in a diplomatic conversation to share that the Germans and Saudis shared common adversaries and were devoted to combating them.

Despite the statements made by Hitler, Hentig attempted to walk back the promises and wrote, "On our journey back home I had plenty of time and opportunity to explain to the very reasonable Arabs that Hitler's words had spoken of his friendship with the Arab world, but that he naturally had overlooked the situation when he made completely unrealistic pledges for us. Above all, he had not understood... that the Arab world led a struggle for existence against militant Zionism."²⁸ Hentig believed that this was so improbable that he had to make a point to suggest that the assistance that Hitler had promised was simply an overlooked situation on the drive back. The meeting and conversation, however, demonstrates that German officials had developed a policy to actively engage in the Middle East and the meeting in July shows that the desire to engage was reciprocated by Saudi Arabian officials. Moreover, this meeting and arms agreement validates that the Reich had completely reoriented its Middle Eastern policies towards active engagement with Middle Eastern nations. Prior to 1938, the Reich had actively avoided interfering with British policy in the region but by the summer of 1939, the Third Reich had pursued Grobba's plan to actively undermine British hegemony in the region and provide arms to Saudi Arabia.

Non-German news outlets also reported on this growing relationship. One nation that openly reported on the Nazi efforts to brand themselves as anti-Jewish, not anti-Semitic, was the United States.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Von Hentig, *Mein Leben, Eine Dienstreise*. 306.

On July 3, 1939, just one week after the meeting between Hitler and the Khalid al Hud, *Time* magazine printed an article titled "Semitic Friends." *Time* addressed the rhetoric problem that Germany faced but also noted other German diplomatic practices to demonstrate that Germany's policy was flexible. The article reads, "Although Nazis preach Nordic racial superiority, they have little hesitation in stringing along with a Mediterranean people like the Italians or an Oriental one like the Japanese. Moreover, they strenuously try to cultivate friendship with the Arabs, who are not only non-Aryan but Semitic."²⁹ Friendship between Germany and the Arabs was not just in propaganda reels. It was apparent and other nations were reporting on it.

The *Time* article recognized that there was tension between Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom. *Time* also noticed how the Germans capitalized on failure of British policy in the region. Additionally, the *Time* reporter speculates just how dangerous a friendship between Germany and Saudi Arabia would be for British policy:

Nazi rumor had it last week that stubborn Ibn Saud, most listened-to of Arab nationalist leaders, and Great Britain, most respected of Western powers in the Near East, were on the outs. The Nazis, in fact, wanted it believed that His Majesty was so exasperated by British "broken promises" in the-Near East that hereafter Arab nationalists in general and Ibn Saud in particular would come to Rome and Berlin for help and guidance...Herr Hitler promised Khalid al Hud and vice versa, it was news simply that they had talked.

Americans were the target audience of this article, but we can assume that British and German readers were well aware of this meeting as well. Moreover, the article closed with an ominous warning for how the Arabs received the news of this meeting stating that "The soft, sweet words that Aggrandizer Hitler undoubtedly whispered to Khalid al Hud at Berchtesgaden, the inflammable anti-British and anti-French propaganda that goes over the ether nightly from Italian and German radio stations, will probably fall on more receptive Arab ears hereafter."³⁰

The German foreign office dealing with Middle Eastern policy, which was factionalized between Grobba and Hentig, had developed an active policy for German relations with Saudi Arabia. The policy had gone from limited involvement in the region to open diplomatic relations and receptions with both nations' rulers. Moreover, an arms agreement was made in July between the two nations. This conclusion led many in the German Foreign Office to believe that their rhetorical efforts had succeeded. If Germany identified itself as anti-Jewish, not anti-Semitic, then it could openly support Arab efforts against the Jews in the Middle East. Grobba appeared correct in his assessment that there were many pro-German Arabs in nations like Saudi Arabia. Even American media outlets seemed to suggest that Saudi Arabia was pro-Nazi. A review of Saudi reactions will reveal that the Saudi representation was more nuanced because Saudi leadership proceeded with caution.

Sawt al-Hijaz: The Saudi Arabian Media's Perspective

By looking at the newspaper *Sawt al-Hijaz* (Voice of the Hijaz) a confident assessment can be made about how Saudi elites in the Hijaz region reported and read about the German Reich's diplomatic efforts. The Saudi Arabian press in the Hijaz, while critical of the British in Palestine, did not criticize

²⁹ "Semitic Friends," 16.

³⁰ Ibid, 18.

the Germans despite their increasingly aggressive diplomacy. *Sawt al-Hijaz* was actively reporting on the Arab revolt in Palestine, and was critical of the British for failing to establish a peaceful environment in the region. Moreover, readers of *Sawt al-Hijaz* would have been aware of German diplomacy in major events like the Munich Conference, but Germany was normally portrayed in a neutral manner.

Cities like Baghdad, Cairo, Mecca, and many others sought to produce newspapers that would be widely circulated in the Arab world following the fall of the Ottoman Empire. According to the historian Ami Ayalon, the significant advantage that the Saudi press had over others was that it “was not subject to European control. Independent states emerged there: Imam Yahya’s Yemen, Sharif Husayn’s Hashemite kingdom in the Hejaz, and the Saudi Kingdom.”³¹ From this, we can conclude that the Saudi press would have had the freedom to present events, leaders, and nations in an independent manner in comparison to its Egyptian, Iraqi, or Syrian counterparts.

In 1932, Ibn Saud proclaimed the unification of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and set out to consolidate control over the press in his new Kingdom. In doing so, the Royal family appointed Muhammad Surur as-Sabban as the editor of *Sawt al-Hijaz*. Sabban was from Saudi Arabia and because of his appointment, it is easy to deduce that he was a major proponent of the royal Saudi family. As a result, much of what was published would have been in line with what the Saudi family wanted communicated. In addition to being an editor, Sabban was a poet, an economist, and active in debates surrounding the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia.³² Consequentially, these elements are what formed the basis of much of what the paper discussed in its weekly or biweekly issues.

Despite the funding of various newspapers, the literacy in Saudi Arabia remained relatively low. Ayalon writes, “such good intentions were hardly sufficient to advance these incipient journalistic efforts beyond the most elementary stage. By mid-century, according to a reasonable assessment, only 7,500 copies of daily newspapers circulated in the kingdom, a meager rate of 1 to 2 copies per 1,000 habitants.”³³ Despite the low literacy rate, we can conclude that those who were reading and writing *Sawt al-Hijaz* belonged to the Saudi political, economic, religious, journalistic, and academic elites and could understand and interact with the articles.

Sawt al-Hijaz wrote about the Arab revolt in Palestine in 1938. Writers criticized British involvement. Perhaps the most overt instance can be seen in two articles that were published on July 26, 1938. The first article “The British Mandate for Palestine” was on the front page and is the center article and headline. The article states, “Since the end of the World War, Britain has spent money and lives in a failed attempt to reconcile two peoples that cannot be reconciled and in an attempt to restore order to a chaotic country.”³⁴ This article is perhaps the most charged as it discusses the British failure to maintain peace in the region, but also the mismanagement claims go further and suggest that British citizens share this view as well. This excerpt makes it quite clear that the writers at *Sawt al-Hijaz* viewed the British efforts as a failure. Readers of *Sawt al-Hijaz* would have been led to believe that British newspapers believed that “The latest news shows that the hostility between the Arabs and the Jews has not faded.”³⁵

³¹ Ami Ayalon. *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 74.

³² “Faisal’s Supporters Push His Claims,” in *Middle East Record Vol. 2* ed. Yitzhak Oron (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1961), 421.

³³ Ayalon. *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History*, 103.

³⁴ “Al-āntidāb al-brīṭānā ‘alā Filastīn [British Mandate for Palestine]” *Sawt al-Hijaz*, July 26, 1938.

³⁵ Ibid.

Moreover, *Sawt al-Hijaz* also emphasized the economic concerns that British newspapers reported on. The article continued with:

Heavy barbed wire was erected on Syria's borders and on the Jordan River. In the area around Jordan, barracks were set up to accommodate additional soldiers and forced labor centers were established. We [The British People] have been obliged to take responsibility for ourselves as long as we are in Palestine, but all of us are hastening to get rid of this mandate, which we should not have accepted. This has caused a great loss of money and lives, which has been an international disaster.³⁶

Sawt al-Hijaz portrayed the British as being displeased with the situation in Palestine and how Palestine was becoming an economic burden to the British economy. Furthermore, the image that this evoked for a Saudi Arabian reader was one of British failure when it came to peacekeeping in the region. It portrayed a country relying on an increased military presence to maintain peace. The inclusion of barbed wires, barracks, soldiers, and forced labor areas signaled that the British could not bring the two peoples to coexist and had to use force to deter violence. Simply put, this was an obvious critique of the British mismanagement in Palestine and frustration with British presence in the region.

In addition to this critique of the British, *Sawt al-Hijaz* presented its readers with rhetoric that condemned the Jews and praised the Germans for their anti-Semitic policies. A little more than a month after the publication of "The British Mandate for Palestine" article, *Sawt al-Hijaz* published a front page article titled "Palestine, the Muslim Sister!!" The article stated that "We do not know – and how can we know- what the outcome to the catastrophe that has become the question of Palestine will be. The wellness of our brotherly nation, to our amazement, has failed to be maintained. This is because the policy and the ideas that have been followed in this country have been tempered by the evil of Zionism and its dangers."³⁷ By writing about the revolt in Palestine and making the claim that Zionism represented a major danger for the Arab world, the writers of *Sawt al-Hijaz* reflected Saudi Arabian foreign policy. According to Grobba, the Saudi leadership had expressed its concerns surrounding the establishment of a Jewish state. Therefore, we can understand that the newspaper can be used as a mirror to understand how the Saudi leadership wanted its policies to be communicated. Additionally, the article goes on to give praise to Germany for their policies towards the Jews when it proclaims, "The nations of the world have known for themselves the amount of wickedness that these people [Jews] have in their souls...these people, chased by Germany, a country that cleansed its neighborhoods of their excess..."³⁸ While this line is praise for Germany and its policies, the fact that it is even included suggests that the Saudi writers were aware of German policy and felt it was worthy of praise with this subject matter. Moreover, the fact that this line was on a front page article suggests that the writers and editors included it to frame Germany as a positive example to contrast Britain and its policies in Palestine.

Open criticism of British policy in the region was not the only manner in which *Sawt al-Hijaz* panned the British handling of the revolt in Palestine. One can also see that in the way the newspaper portrayed the constant chaos in the region as a subtle criticism of the British policy in the Middle East. This becomes quite apparent in the article "Althawratu fi Filastin" (The Revolution in Palestine). This article was printed in the same issue as "The British Mandate of Palestine". The article shifts its focus to look at the actual fighting and death as a result of the revolt in Palestine. It states, "Early in the morning,

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Filastīn al-muslimat al-shaqīqat!! [Palestine, the Muslim Sister!!], *Sawt al-Hijaz* August 23, 1938.

³⁸ Ibid.

a Jewish man was walking the streets of a Jewish settlement near Haifa. Suddenly, unknown men fired shots at him and killed him. The men who were responsible for this were Jewish officers.”³⁹ The insinuation of *Sawt al-Hijaz* writers was that the Jews in Palestine were carrying out false flag operations in an effort to garner sympathy on the world stage. This theme is repeated later in the article when the newspaper reported, “Additionally, at 8:30 am yesterday, there was a bus full of Jews from Nazareth on its way to Haifa. When it arrived near the school building where the students were standing outside, a Jewish criminal, wearing Arab clothes, looking out the window of a car threw three bombs at the students and two exploded. Three students were injured, some of the injuries were serious and some of them were minor.”⁴⁰ This article portrays constant violence in Palestine, and it suggested that the Jews were worsening the conflict and framing Arabs by killing other Jews. From this, we can gather that there was a concerted effort to report on the violence in Palestine to demonstrate to readers that in many instances Jews in the area were fooling the British.

Another style of reporting that *Sawt al-Hijaz* used as an indirect commentary on the British in the region was how they reported on how other nations responded to the events in Palestine. “Yawm Filastin fa al-Iraq!” (Palestine Day held in Iraq!), printed on August 16, 1938, states “Iraqis are increasingly interested in Palestine’s cause day after day. The bloody incidents in Palestine have seen bombs kill large number of Arabs.... The Association for the Defense of Palestine met in Baghdad and decided to declare a day as a special day for Palestine and called on all of her ethnic brothers to observe the day. This day of observance will also encourage large scale fundraising for Palestinian refugees.”⁴¹ The reader would have been called upon to recognize the revolt in Palestine as a catastrophe for their Arab brothers and encourage an image of Arab unity concerning Palestine. Moreover, the fact that the newspaper was covering the efforts to raise funds for Palestinian refugees suggests that Palestine’s Arab brothers had to respond to British mismanagement in Palestine. The newspaper made efforts to portray its opinions clearly. Whether it was open or subtle criticism, *Sawt al-Hijaz* and its writers had no problem with reflecting on what they viewed as British failure in the region and their language was often charged when they reported.

How *Sawt al-Hijaz* reported on Germany and German leadership

Germany presented itself as a friend of the Arab world and claimed that the relationship was reciprocated, but a close analysis of *Sawt al-Hijaz* demonstrates that the relationship was a bit more nuanced. When analyzing how *Sawt al-Hijaz* reported on Germany and German leadership after September 1938, when German diplomats began pursuing closer relations with the Kingdom, the reader can see the language in *Sawt al-Hijaz* was mainly neutral towards Germany in contrast to the negative portrayal of Britain. Moreover, readers of *Sawt al-Hijaz* would have been actively informed of German diplomacy in both the Middle East and Europe.

One of the first major issues in which the newspaper discussed German leadership was in reporting on the Munich Agreement, which avoided war and saw the Germans receive their territorial demands in Czechoslovakia. In an issue dated October 11, 1938, *Sawt al-Hijaz* reported Hitler as saying:

³⁹ “Al-thawrat fi Filastin [Revolution in Palestine]” *Sawt al-Hijaz*, July 26, 1938.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “Yawm Filastin fa al-‘araq [Palestine Day held in Iraq!]” *Sawt al-Hijaz*, August 16, 1938.

We, the Fuhrer and German Chancellor, and the British Prime Minister met again today and spent the meeting on recognizing that the primary concerns of the two countries and Europe is the issue of English-German relations. We are preparing the agreement that was signed last night into a treaty between England and Germany, which shows our people's desires to not fight each other. We are determined to resume our efforts to remove the source of disagreement between our two countries and to help maintain peace in the world.⁴²

The language of the article is rather neutral and appears to just report the events that transpired between Britain and Germany. It is possible that the editors decided to leave out Germany's aggressive rhetoric and threats of war if their demands were not met, however, it does not critique Germany either. This language and manner of reporting was rather neutral and did not necessarily portray Germany as the "friends of the Arab people" that they often claimed.

A different instance of *Sawt al-Hijaz* portraying Germany in a neutral light to its audience can be seen in how it reported a speech that Hitler gave in front of a session of the German Reichstag on April 29, 1939. This speech received major coverage because in it, Hitler refused to acknowledge the neutrality of many of the European nations, pulled Germany out of a naval armament agreement with the United Kingdom, and declared that Germany was surrounded by enemies and was not afraid to plunge Europe into war in order to combat the Nazi fabricated threat of world Jewry.⁴³ Many western outlets reported on this speech with grave concern as this was rhetoric that laid the foundation for war. The newspaper article which was titled "A Summary of Hitler's Speech at a Session in the German Reichstag" received an entire page in the newspaper:

The Fuhrer gave an important speech to the German Reichstag on Saturday at noon. In this speech, Hitler responded to a letter from Mister Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, and the statements of British Prime Minister Chamberlain. The speech lasted for two hours and eighteen minutes. Hitler began his speech by referring to Germany's policies and the trends in the current European and international political situation. Hitler stated that Germany's policies were based on peace and he responded with documents and compelling arguments against the British policies. Hitler continued on and stated that the French are throwing stones at Germany and have repeatedly stood against Germany's policies, which stand for peace.

What is interesting about this article is that *Sawt al-Hijaz* does not focus on the aggressive rhetoric and potential for war. Instead, it focuses on the details of Hitler's speech as well as the fact that Germany's policies stand for peace. Moreover, the article portrayed Nazi rhetoric as rational and logical and does not point out the rhetorical fallacy that just because a nation opposes German policies does not mean they are opposed to peace. The article goes on to state that:

Hitler immediately announced the cancelation of the naval agreement between Germany and Britain as well as the cancellation of the non-aggression treaty between Germany and Poland. As for the Maritime agreement, it was based on the classification of weapons. Hitler reasoned that there was no reason for war between Germany and Britain, but British policy did not reflect this

⁴² "Al-wathiqat al-āmāniyat [The German Document]" *Sawt al-Hijaz*, October 11, 1938.

⁴³ Herf. *The Jewish Enemy*, 78.

and Germany would no longer honor this treaty. As for the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and Poland, Hitler also declared its annulment....⁴⁴

The content of the speech is not sympathetic to the German position nor is it critical of the German position. This is worthy of noting because as was previously demonstrated, *Sawt al-Hijaz* did not have a problem openly criticizing Britain for their policies or rhetoric.

Throughout the winter of 1938 and spring of 1939, the reporting in *Sawt al-Hijaz* also continued to maintain a neutral tone despite the reality that Nazi leadership actively increased tensions in Europe. One instance of this stance can be seen from the issue on November 1, 1938, when the front page headlined article was titled “Political and Economic Activity in Germany”. In this article, *Sawt al-Hijaz* reported that increasing tensions in Europe and the possibility for war could be linked to the increase in German military spending and military maneuvers but it does not solely blame Germany. The article stated that, “The German government has prepared military maneuvers and these are being carried out day by day. The German government has stated that this was not meant as a show of force but as a means of deterring an image of weakness and an indirect reference to demonstrate the amount of money that has been invested in the military...”⁴⁵ The tone of this article is still rather neutral as it offers what the German response was for these drills. The article goes on to state that, “The countries that are most interested in Germany’s preparations are England, France followed by Russia. In addition to those nations, there is a small union of countries that are potentially in danger as a result of Germany’s preparations...”⁴⁶ This clear identification that there would be nations in potential danger seems to suggest that the German Reich was not entirely innocent if it was in a position to put other nations at risk, but also that Germany was not wholly to blame for unrest in Europe.

This manner of reporting in which *Sawt al-Hijaz* discussed events happening in Europe but refused to place the entire brunt of responsibility on Germany continued through the Danzig crisis and the outbreak of war. In an issue printed on August 6, 1939, on a front page headlining article titled “Almanīa wa mas’alat danzīg” (Germany and the Issue of Danzig), *Sawt al-Hijaz* reported that instead of the major issue being the German demands for the city of Danzig from Poland, the German Reich was frustrated in the manner it was being reported. The article states:

German newspapers have criticized the publication of foreign correspondents in Berlin and how they reported on the issue of Danzig. In particular, it was the picture painted by the newspaper Reuters. The German newspapers expressed that the desire of the German government was for a peaceful solution to be reached over the question of Danzig. The German government is not prepared to give up on this situation but has been silent for too long.⁴⁷

With war looming on the horizon, one would think that those at *Sawt al-Hijaz* would be discussing why Danzig had become a crisis. Nazi leadership had made it clear that either Poland would cede territory to Germany or face war. Instead, those at *Sawt al-Hijaz* decided to focus on the frustration that the Reich had with how it was being presented. This article further demonstrates that even as the potential for war was a possibility, the editor and writers at *Sawt al-Hijaz* were publishing a neutral stance for its readers regarding the German Reich.

⁴⁴ “Khulāṣat khitāb al-har hitlar [A Summary of Mr. Hitler’s Speech]” *Sawt al-Hijaz*, April 30, 1939.

⁴⁵ “Al-nashāt al-siyāsā wa al-āqtiṣādā fī al-mānīa [The Political and Economic Activity in Germany].” *Sawt al-Hijaz*, November 1, 1938.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “Al-mānīa wa masālat danzīg [Germany and the Issue of Danzig].” *Sawt al-Hijaz*, August 6, 1939.

With the outbreak of war in September 1939, *Sawt al-Hijaz* continued to report on the events in Europe, however, it still maintained a rather neutral tone when discussing German policy. As previously stated, King Ibn Saud had promised Fritz Grobba that Saudi Arabia would adopt a stance of benevolent neutrality towards Germany and this diplomatic stance was also reflected in how *Sawt al-Hijaz* reported on the war. With war between Germany and Britain underway, the newspaper had to navigate how to report on these events without endorsing one side or the other. Being openly sympathetic to Germany could attract British intervention in the region. But supporting Britain could hurt any chances of maintaining Saudi independence and close relations with the Reich in the event of a German victory. In one of the many instances in which *Sawt al-Hijaz* reported on a clash between German and British policy, the newspaper refused to endorse either side. In an article titled “tatawur sayasaa khatir (A Dangerous Political Development), printed on October 1, the newspaper reported on German treaty negotiations with the Soviet Union and efforts to make peace with the British.⁴⁸ The article reads:

A new treaty between Russia and Germany was signed today and according to both governments, the Polish war is over. According to both governments, the state of Poland has been definitively divided between Germany and Russia. Furthermore, the two governments requested that the British and French states recognize the end of the Polish War by tomorrow morning. The two governments urged Britain and France to recognize this peace instead of insisting on a continuation of the war.⁴⁹

From this brief excerpt, readers of *Sawt al-Hijaz* would have been presented with a representation of Germany that was seeking peace, and a serious lack of context in the fact that Germany had started the war with their invasion of Poland. Moreover, Germany is presented as seeking peace and urging Britain and France to not continue the war but the article does not go so far as to praise their efforts. In addition to this, the article continues to report on Britain’s response and states, “The political leaders in Britain were not surprised when they learned about the new treaty between Germany and Russia, which was because the existence of a non-aggression treaty between the two countries was already known.... The British government is considering this new position and immediately invited war ministers and leaders to discuss this treaty and consult about the new situation in international affairs.”⁵⁰ In contrast to portraying the Germans as seeking peace, *Sawt al-Hijaz*’s language suggests that Britain is aware of the situation and organizing a response. Once again, the reader is not given any sort of contextual information regarding the conflict but instead is presented with a neutral tone of these nations and their actions.

In another front page article published on November 22, 1939, *Sawt al-Hijaz* focused on the diplomatic efforts of Germany and Britain but refused to offer any sort of endorsement to one side.⁵¹ Moreover, this article is one of the first instances in which the reader understands that war changed the ability for the newspaper to independently report on various events in the war. Instead, newspapers like *Sawt al-Hijaz* would focus on how other newspapers in the countries they were reporting on would discuss events. This can clearly be seen when the article states “The British newspaper ‘Reynold’s News’ reported that Germany is preparing to carry out a diplomatic effort in response to the shock caused by the English-Turkish dialect.... The outcome of this diplomatic effort would be the isolation of Turkey and forcing her to ‘remain silent’ if asked to do so.... ‘Reynold’s News’ also reported that Von

⁴⁸ “Taṭawur saīāsā khaṭīr [A Dangerous Political Development].” *Sawt al-Hijaz*, October 1, 1940.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “Masā‘ aī ‘al-mānīā fā al-bulqān [German efforts in the Balkans]” *Sawt al-Hijaz*, November 22, 1939.

Papen had been keen to restore his status and prestige in the region after he had failed to restrain Turkey from supporting Britain and France and approved of Papen's failures."⁵² Once again, the readers of this paper would have been presented with a brief analysis of diplomacy between the two nations but there is no commentary on which nation's efforts should be commended or who is in the wrong.

As the war continued into the spring of 1940, *Sawt al-Hijaz* reported on various aspects of the war but its articles became small and limited in scope. One reason for this lack of reporting was because of the economy and the supply shortages that come with war. Ayalon writes, "A crisis did occur. War brought economic hardship and a shortage of supplies because of difficulties in transport.... The smaller and weaker papers were the first to suffer, and most of them disappeared for the duration of the war."⁵³ One way to combat these supply shortages was to cut back on paper usage and remove headlines. As a result, articles that discussed international events were limited to multiple sentences at most. *Sawt al-Hijaz* also continued to rely radio broadcasts and newspapers from other countries to report on events, but readers would have received limited updates. For example, on April 11, 1940, *Sawt al-Hijaz* reported on the German invasion of Denmark by saying, "This morning's radio broadcast [From London] stated that the German government violated Danish neutrality. Germany sent more than sixty ships to secure the Danish waters and islands, and also sent in armies from the mainland."⁵⁴ Because of this, readers would have been aware of events happening during the war, but any specific tone was limited at best. This trend of succinct reporting would last until July 1941 when the newspaper eventually went out of business.

By analyzing the language of *Sawt al-Hijaz* from 1938 to 1940, there is a clear difference in how the newspaper reported on Britain and Germany. In 1938, in the midst of the Palestinian uprising, *Sawt al-Hijaz* articles openly criticized British policy in the region. Moreover, the articles discussed violence in Palestine, British citizens' frustration with the Palestinian mandate, and a call for Arab unity to help alleviate the issue in Palestine. In short, the newspaper and its editor did not shy away from open disapproval of the British. As an independent nation, they could speak freely and not worry about being censored.

German diplomats, sensing Arab frustration with British policy in the region, sought to take advantage of this diplomatic opportunity. Despite the difference of opinions and the factionalizing within the German Foreign Office, Fritz Grobba established contact with influential Saudis and was eventually able to institute and solidify diplomatic relations between Germany and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, Grobba reported that many individuals in upper echelons of Saudi society, including the King himself, were eager to free Saudi Arabia from British influence. As a result, a Saudi envoy, Khalid al-Hud, visited Germany in the summer of 1939 and concluded an arms deal between the German Reich and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In light of Saudi Arabian leadership's efforts to develop closer relations with Germany, one would assume then that the development of close ties with Germany would be reflected in the media of Saudi Arabia. After 1938, Saudi Arabian leadership flirted with the prospect of utilizing Nazi Germany as a means of attaining diplomatic and material independence from the United Kingdom. Analyzing *Sawt al-Hijaz*, however, seems to indicate that there was rarely anything more than a neutral tone when discussing Germany. There were multiple instances in which the newspaper published articles on the front page or in the section dedicated to foreign policy that discussed Germany. The tone of those

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ayalon. *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History*, 104.

⁵⁴ "Al-mānīā taqatahim haīāt al-danmārk [Germany violates Danish Neutrality]" *Sawt al-Hijaz*, April, 11, 1940.

articles never openly criticized Germany. Due to Saudi Arabia's independence, and its willingness to speak freely about Britain, we can conclude that the Kingdom had the freedom to openly challenge Germany for its policies as well, but it chose not to. The newspaper never openly embraced the Germans despite how the relationship was portrayed in German media as well as in other Western media outlets. Furthermore, *Sawt al-Hijaz* did not report on any of the military agreements between the Kingdom and Germany or the fact that an envoy had traveled to Germany. The United States publicized this meeting, so the meeting was well known, but the Saudi media failed to comment on the existence of the event. This silence was intentional and further reflects the fact that Saudi Arabia was not willing to commit to closely tying itself to Germany or Britain and instead relied on an image of neutrality within its local media.

By closely examining *Sawt al-Hijaz*, it becomes possible to use this newspaper as a means of interpreting Saudi foreign policy. This analysis is beneficial because access to Saudi foreign documents is limited. Moreover, looking at the German diplomats accounts of Saudi Arabian leadership in conjunction with the newspaper offers a deepened look at the aims of Saudi leadership. Diplomats like Grobba and Hentig commented on the Saudi King's cautious desire to free him from British restraint. Similarly, to the way the Germans reported on Saudi leadership, *Sawt al-Hijaz* demonstrates that the Saudi foreign effort was critical of the British but cautious towards making any substantial promises with Germany. Furthermore, *Sawt al-Hijaz* revealed that the German foreign office had overestimated the warm relations of the Saudi Kingdom and that this diplomatic relationship between Germany and Saudi Arabia was much more nuanced from the Saudi perspective.

After the outbreak of war on September 1, 1939, Saudi Arabia was thrust into a tricky diplomatic position of balancing relations between Germany and the UK. This attempt to balance can be seen in the early days of how *Sawt al-Hijaz* reported on interactions between the British and Germans. In articles such as "German Effort in the Balkans" and "A Dangerous Political Development", readers would have understood that there were clashes between German and British forces in the Second World War but the articles remained neutral. Moreover, this neutrality would have given the Saudi leadership the means of waiting and observing how the war was playing out before it needed to openly endorse one nation over the other.

Sawt al-Hijaz went out of business in July of 1941 but Saudi Arabia continued to watch the events of the war closely in hopes of declaring its support for the right side. This became clear when in April of 1945, Saudi Arabia officially declared war on the Axis Powers and officially sided with the Allies. The Kingdom was able to utilize wartime diplomacy to its advantage and wean itself off British reliance but it replaced the British support with an unlikely nation, the United States. Nevertheless, this episode of diplomacy between Germany and Saudi Arabia demonstrates that the Kingdom was capable of manipulating diplomatic situations and rising tensions between western powers to its advantage.

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