

# Shaykh Maraghi's Mission to the Hijaz, 1925

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*Martin Kramer, "Shaykh Maraghi's Mission to the Hijaz, 1925," Asian and African Studies (Haifa), vol. 16, no. 1 (March 1982), pp. 121-36.*

Simultaneous possession of the caliphate and the sacred cities of Mecca and Madina was a compelling argument for primacy in medieval Islam. For reasons of geography Egypt served as a convenient base for pursuit of both marks of universal Muslim authority, for in most periods Egypt was independent or autonomous and at all times Egypt enjoyed the influence of a proximate power in the Hijaz. The Mamluks, for example, were able to shelter a shadow Abbasid caliphate in Egypt at a time of general distress in Muslim Asia and succeeded in seizing the holy cities across the Red Sea. By virtue of these two unmistakable signs, they perceived themselves with transparent excitement as pre-eminent in all Islam.[1] But with the Mamluk demise, the ascendant Ottoman sultans appropriated the title of caliph and then linked their claim to their own possession of sacred Mecca and Madina.[2] Their self-perception as universal caliphs and protectors of the holy cities eventually inspired a global claim to suzerainty over Muslim lands as distant as Sumatra and Bornu. In the period of Ottoman decline Ottoman sultans became even more conscious of the advantages to be derived from simultaneous possession of these two symbols of authority. Through Ottoman example and propaganda the belief that the pre-eminent Muslim state should shelter both caliph and holy cities survived intact in the political creed of Muslims within the Empire and beyond.

The Ottoman defeat, which ended in the dismemberment of the Empire, left both the caliphate and the sacred cities vulnerable to seizure by various contenders for primacy in Islam. An earlier study established that Egypt's ruling house, during the reigns of Fu'ad and Faruq, advanced a claim to that primacy and sought to secure the title of caliph by open and covert means.[3] But this pursuit of the caliphate also was accompanied by a subtle renewal of Egypt's interest in the Hijaz. Among the state documents in the royal archives at Abdin Palace is a manuscript report by Shaykh Mustafa al-Maraghi, chief of Egypt's Supreme Religious Court, palace confidant, and later rector of al-Azhar, on a journey which was intended to be secret.[4] At a most delicate moment, in September 1925, Shaykh Maraghi boarded a Suez steamer for Jidda. For a year the Hijaz had been the theatre of an extended war between Husayn b. Ali

of Mecca, who had freed most of the Hijaz from Ottoman rule in 1916, and Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud, who now descended from Najd seeking in his turn to take the Hijaz from Husayn. So ill-conceived was Husayn's campaign of resistance that he finally abdicated his offices and departed the country, leaving his son Ali to fend as best he could against the steadily advancing Saudi forces. These had taken Ta'if and Mecca, and now besieged Jidda, where Ali desperately attempted to organize a counter-offensive.[5]

It was at this seat of conflict that Shaykh Maraghi put in a brief appearance in the autumn of 1925. Three standard sources speak of his visit only as a Muslim mission of mediation.[6] Twenty-five years after the event Shaykh Maraghi's biographer still declined to discuss the mission in detail. Shaykh Maraghi had raised "issues touching on the caliphate, and the resolution of the differences which then separated the two Muslim kings [Ali and Ibn Saud], who contested for the Hijaz... He succeeded in his task, although we cannot speak in detail about this mission at the present time." [7] Contemporary sources also suspected some connection between the mission and Fu'ad's scarcely concealed interest in the caliphate. Thus, Rashid Rida wrote to Shakib Arslan that the mission was widely thought to have something to do with the selection of Fu'ad as caliph, and added that "no Muslim looks favorably on this mediation, as it is not innocent of foreign scheming." [8]



*Shaykh Mustafa al-Maraghi*

But nothing more was ever made public about Shaykh Maraghi's trip. Only with the opening of the Abdin Palace file does the mission emerge as a complex negotiation, not only in Fu'ad's pursuit of the caliphate, but in a far more ambitious attempt to establish an Egyptian protectorate over the Hijaz.

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After his occupation of the Hijaz, and for many years thereafter, Ibn Saud would claim that he had discovered documents proving that Ali had sold the country to foreigners in those dark months under siege at Jidda. "He omitted to say how much the foreigners paid for it, in view of Ali's pecuniary embarrassment during the latter part, and indeed the whole, of his short reign." [9] But certain documents at least establish how much Ali asked.

In July 1925, the United States *chargé d'affaires* in Alexandria agreed to meet

with “one Iskander F. Trad Bey, who stated that he was financial agent in Alexandria of King Hussein and his sons, and that he called at [the] request of [the] Diplomatic Agent of the Hedjaz in Cairo.” To the Americans, Trad Bey was prepared to sell two concessions:

*He proposed that the United States should ‘intervene’ in the struggle now going on between King Ali of the Hedjaz and Ibn Seoud and in return for this intervention (which I gather was only expected to be more or less in the nature of good offices to bring about peace) and a loan of 1,000,000 pounds, the United States was to be given concessions for all of the minerals, including petroleum, in the Hedjaz. He said that Ibn Seoud was not in possession of any customs house, the only important position held by him being Mecca; that King Ali had control of the customs house at Jeddah and would pledge the customs receipts to the payment of the loan.*

Expressing a personal opinion, the chargé told the Hashimite financial agent that “there would not be the slightest chance of securing intervention of any sort by the United States. ” Trad Bey lamely offered to pay for a telegram communicating his proposal to the Department of State, and this offer, too, was spurned.[10] J. Morton Howell, the American minister to Egypt, added that the Hashimite protégé “Prince Habib Lotfallah, as well as his brother George, talked to me once about this proposition, but it appeared so untenable, or unreasonable, that I dismissed it at once without only that consideration required to hear their illogical, as well as untenable, proposition.”[11]

Once rebuffed by Howell, Habib Lutfallah turned to the Foreign Office and requested an audience with Foreign Secretary Austin Chamberlain. Predictably, Chamberlain would not agree to see him.[12] It was in fact the general consensus at the Department of State and the Foreign Office that Ali’s cause was a lost one which loans could not redeem. They were not the foreigners to whom Ibn Saud referred. If these fruitless negotiations remain of interest it is only because they reveal the extent of Ali’s financial crisis and the great sum of money needed to alleviate it. For the rest of the siege Ali remained obsessed with landing a large loan thanks to which, so he believed, he would field an army that would purge the Hijaz of Ibn Saud. And to secure that loan he was prepared to make virtually any concession, economic or political.

Since Ali's emissaries abroad could scarcely earn an audience for their appeals, Ali himself was forced to hound the foreign consuls in Jidda. Most of these regarded his overtures with a mixture of pity and contempt, such as is conveyed in Sir Reader Bullard's recollections of his Jidda service during the siege.[13] There was but one exception to this collective rejection. To the mind of the Egyptian consul, Salih Abd al-Rahman, the war between Ibn Saud and Ali was no less than a contest between darkness and light. In a despatch written from Jidda in early August 1925, the consul disclosed what he described as a conspiracy to establish a revolutionary regime in the Hijaz which would immediately threaten Egypt itself with revolution. Ibn Saud, argued Salih Abd al-Rahman, was only one party to a broad alliance linking Republican Turkey, the Soviet Union, the Indian Caliphate Committee, and the exiled Sanusi leader Ahmad al-Sharif, then in Mecca in Ibn Saud's entourage. The revolutionary aims of these enemies of Egypt were made public at the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East and, if fulfilled in the Hijaz, would menace all Muslims in neighboring territories. No state had a greater stake in the defeat of this sinister coalition than Egypt. Among the measures against Ibn Saud urged by the consul were "the creation of a highly secret [command] center in the heart of Arabia, to come in contact with its people," and the recruitment of "reliable persons" to spread propaganda among the amirs of the Arabian Peninsula and the peoples of Syria, Palestine, and Iraq.[14]



*King Ali bin Husayn*

Cairo's perceptions of the Hijazi situation thus were filtered through the actively interventionist prism of Salih Abd al-Rahman. One cannot say whether readers of this despatch in Abdin Palace and the Foreign Ministry accepted so radical an interpretation of the struggle for Arabia, offered without the support of any evidence. But the despatch did leave the impression that the war over Arabia had not yet ended in Ibn Saud's favor. Perhaps the powers had underestimated Ali; perhaps Egyptian intervention on his behalf would be sufficient to turn the tide in a direction favorable to Egyptian interests.

Salih Abd al-Rahman had outlined some possible courses of action but now came out with an even more explicit proposal. "Egyptian consul today hinted that his government should send troops to Hedjaz and should take it over from Ali considering apparently Fuad's lien on Caliphate would be furthered if in charge of holy places." [15] This, then, was the direction in which the Egyptian consul sought to lure his superiors. Whether they considered the possibility for

even a moment cannot be said, for they soon received an unequivocal warning against a policy of direct military intervention. Nevile Henderson, Acting High Commissioner, wrote that

*It is inconceivable that any responsible Egyptian (I do not regard their Consul at Jeddah as such) will contemplate for an instant the despatch of Egyptian troops to that hornet's nest. I have warned both the Government and the King in their own interests to walk very warily.[16]*

Having apprehended the warning, the Egyptian Prime Minister asked whether Great Britain would object to Egyptian mediation of the dispute. The suggestion seemed harmless, and the Prime Minister was informed that Great Britain had no objection to any attempt at mediation by King Fu'ad or his government, provided this meant no despatch of troops.[17] It was this word of acquiescence which decided that Egyptian intervention would take the ostensible form of neutral mediation.

II

There was nothing original about the idea of mediation, for it had been tried earlier in the previous year by several hands. To Bullard, British Consul in Jidda, there was something pathetic, if not comic, about these endeavors:

*Several men came to Jeddah as would-be peacemakers. Saiyid Talib of Basra was one; another was an American writer of Syrian origin, Amin Rihani. Then there were some dilettantes, who were unlikely to be acceptable either to Ibn Saud or to King Hussein, who announced their intention of coming to use influence to bring about peace between the parties. The idea of such attempts to use influence with—say—the ferocious Ikhwan of Ghatghat moved me to write:*

*Ghatghat, Ghatghat, O word of fear,  
Unpleasing to a foolish ear.[18]*

Even the irrepressible H. St. John Philby arrived in Jidda with a scheme for reconciliation, and was stopped only by a severe case of dysentery that landed him in hospital in Aden.[19]

These initiatives, launched by private individuals of mixed motives, held no attraction for Ibn Saud, who had no particular interest in their success at a moment when his advance seemed irreversible, and it proved not very difficult to exhaust the determination of the peacemakers who clamored to see him. But an offer of mediation by a major Muslim state at a moment when Ibn Saud had hesitated to act decisively at Jidda could not be dismissed so lightly. To spurn an Egyptian offer would have confirmed precisely those apprehensions about Ibn Saud that he was anxious to quell: that he was an intolerant bigot without a shred of regard for wider Muslim opinion. Egypt may have had no discernable influence over, say, the *Ikhwan* of Ghatghat, but Ibn Saud's growing concern over his image in the Muslim world abroad guaranteed that an Egyptian mission would receive an audience.

It only remained necessary to clinch the commitment of Egypt, which had hitherto expressed only an interest in the possibility of mediation, and this not even to the parties in conflict. The matter apparently was decided following the arrival in Cairo of yet another despatch from Egypt's Jidda consulate, bearing important news.

*Yesterday evening [wrote Salih Abd al-Rahman] I received a telephone call from the Diwan of King Ali; he would like to visit the Egyptian consulate at four o'clock in the evening. His Majesty honored the Egyptian consulate by his presence at the appointed time. After coffee, he told me that he was very pleased to see the consulate of the Kingdom of Egypt in the Hijaz—Egypt, which is now the greatest Islamic kingdom and the pride of Islam in the present age. He wished His Majesty King I Fu'ad a long life and offered his support: and said that "I and the people of the Hijaz in general would not be satisfied with a caliph of the Muslims other than His Majesty King Fu'ad; this statement I could set down in writing, if it is now necessary." After that he rose and offered his respects, and I thanked His Majesty for his visit on behalf of Egypt.[20]*

In arranging this meeting, Ali, quite possibly at Salih Abd al-Rahman's prompting, knew precisely which chord to strike in Cairo. For over a year a committee of Azhar ulama had been mired in an attempt to convene a congress for the election of a caliph, an endeavor which some knew to be funded by Abdin Palace and which many thought would lead to Fu'ad's nomination. But the congress organizers had been unable to secure favorable responses from important foreign participants in any quarter, for most of those approached by

the committee shared the apprehension that the outcome of the congress had been fixed in advance.[21] The despatch carrying word of Ali's visit to the Egyptian consulate thus caused a stir of excitement at the Foreign Ministry, once received at the end of August.[22] It mattered little that Ali was at the end of his rope, or that his recognition of Fu'ad as caliph would convince no one to do the same. For, on the issue of the caliphate, Fu'ad was as friendless as Ali. On 30 August 1925, Fu'ad wired Ibn Saud expressing his concern about the situation in the Hijaz, and so indicated his desire to mediate. Ali immediately sent off an open telegram to Fu'ad, again appealing for such mediation by the "greatest and most powerful of Muslim kings." For Ibn Saud to have refused Muslim mediation after it had been accepted by his opponent would have cast him in an unpleasant role. He wired assurances to King Fu'ad, and this proved Fu'ad's license to offer Egypt as a disinterested mediator, with no stake in any outcome but a peaceful one.[23]

A few days later Fu'ad entrusted leadership of the projected mediation mission to Shaykh Mustafa al-Maraghi. The selection of a religious functionary, in preference to a professional diplomat, was intended to establish the mission of mediation as a Muslim one, untainted by any association with Egyptian policy. What the wider Muslim world did not yet know about Shaykh Maraghi was that he advocated, albeit covertly, the welding of the caliphate to the Egyptian ruling house, and the consequent ascent of Egypt to a position of uncontested Muslim primacy.[24] It was probably on this account that the mission's purpose, and even Shaykh Maraghi's selection, were to have remained secret. Henderson excluded all reference to the plan from his telegraph despatches, "partly because it is not a matter in which we should be mixed up and partly because the King [Fu'ad] begged that it might be kept secret as none, even of his Ministers, except Yehia Ibrahim know about it." [25]



*King Fu'ad I of Egypt*

### III

Shaykh Maraghi left Suez for Jidda on 10 September 1925, accompanied by the Royal *Diwan's* First Secretary Abd al-Wahhab Tal'at, as well as a physician and a pharmacist. The delegation was annoyed to discover upon arrival in Jidda that the entire city knew of their mission, having been alerted by Ali's representative in Cairo, and rumors circulated that the Egyptians, at British instigation, were going to force Ibn Saud to stop the war.[26] This was hardly an auspicious start, and despite an attempt by the hosts to isolate the mission from

unofficial contacts, first impressions in Jidda were not at all favorable.

Shaykh Maraghi wrote that the forces at Ali's command, a mix of Egyptians, Palestinians, Transjordanians, and Yemenis, had come to the Hijaz solely in pursuit of money, believing that the situation remained unchanged from the days of the Arab Revolt "when the gutters flowed with gold." Now they were experiencing the worst sorts of misery. Their pay was five months in arrears and the lack of food had driven them to subsist on grass. One hundred Egyptian mercenaries in this bind had turned to the Egyptian consulate for relief. Shaykh Maraghi also learned that the government had no source of income other than the Jidda customs house, which yielded no more than £500 a month. The government thus had taken to extracting loans and grants from merchants and notables (*a'yan*) kept in Jidda by force. The first proposal presented to the mediation mission by Ali was that the Egyptian government should facilitate the extension of loans, either with the customs house receipts as collateral or in exchange for any economic concession (*imtiyaz*), anywhere in the Hijaz.[27] From the Egyptians, wrote Shaykh Maraghi, Ali expected not military but financial aid, in the form of grants and loans. Were Egypt to show generosity in this regard, Ali believed that the rest of the Muslim world would follow suit. With new funds, Ali claimed that he would raise an army of Yemeni soldiers, go on the offensive, and rid the country of his enemy. "It is clear from talking with some of the government's officials that minor financial aid will not suffice, and that he needs something close to half a million pounds." [28] This figure was already half of that which Ali's agent had mentioned to the Americans, but then the Egyptians did not enjoy a comparable reputation for open-handedness.

All this made an extremely poor impression on Shaykh Maraghi, who also found Ali to be "weak-willed and slow witted." But the mediator apparently had been given instructions to negotiate with Ali regardless of personal impressions. Shaykh Maraghi opened by claiming that his role was strictly that of a mediator, that "the aim of His Majesty [Fu'ad] and the Egyptian people was that peace spread over the Holy Lands," and that "we bear no specific demand, and we have no purpose other than to mediate in the current dispute between the Jidda government and Ibn Saud." But Shaykh Maraghi then suggested that Ali write to Fu'ad and clear up some outstanding questions that concerned Egypt and the Hijaz:

*We indicated to him that his letter should guarantee that Egypt has the absolute right to send the mahmal with soldiers, and detachments composed of medical missions and the like; that these have absolute freedom to come and go without restrictions or conditions; that they and all the accompanying Egyptian*



*pilgrims have the right to lease what they require of public mounts without the interference of the local authorities, if the Egyptian government should see this in its interests; that Egypt have the right to send the kiswa that it is accustomed to sending, in accordance with its own customs; that Egypt have the right to establish religious institutes, general schools, hospitals, health stations, storehouses, shelters, and hospices in any part or place of the Holy Lands; and that the Hijaz government give every possible assistance in securing the necessary sites. Egypt is to have the right to carry out projects beneficial to the country, like the diversion of water from its original sources to where it is needed, digging wells, and facilitating the distribution of water to pilgrims. Egypt is to have the right during the pilgrimage season to assist in organization of health measures for the pilgrims, and to have the right to expend the proceeds from the endowments (awqaf) of the holy cities, tithes, charities, and emoluments, whether in kind or in cash, and the conveyance of these to Egypt's people and beneficiaries in accord with observed regulations and in accord with that which Egypt sees as faithful to that purpose.*

*We also mentioned to him that Egypt should be accorded the right to assist in security during the pilgrimage season, and that there be agreement with Egypt in general Islamic questions; that the Hijaz not follow a policy opposed to Egypt's or injurious to Egypt's interests, internal or external; and that Egyptians have priority [over other foreigners] in technical and non-technical appointments.[29]*

Such a letter, completely unrelated to the peaceable resolution of the conflict between Ali and Ibn Saud, would have granted Egypt a decisive say over matters of water, land, security, and policy, and the dictation of the text by Shaykh Maraghi amounted to little less than a demand for an Egyptian religious protectorate over the holy cities.

Ali had no choice. He composed a letter agreeing to all of these demands and took the additional step of agreeing to any further demand that might arise. On “the great Islamic question”—an obvious reference to the caliphate—Ali reiterated his “full agreement” with Fu’ad and obligated himself to give his best effort to the unification of Muslim opinion along agreed lines.[30] Shaykh Maraghi records no effort to elicit a comparable list of concessions, or even negotiating points through which an accord might have been reached, for

transmission to Ibn Saud. All of the spoils were to be reserved for the mediator. But then, neither did Ali wish the mission to play the role of peacemaker, seeking instead to use Shaykh Maraghi to muster those financial means necessary to mount a military offensive.

Having secured a *carte blanche* for Egypt, Shaykh Maraghi then crossed the lines and reached Mecca with nothing to offer Ibn Saud but various reasons why he should not hold sway over the Hijaz. As might have been expected, none of these arguments made any headway in Ibn Saud's camp. Ibn Saud's negotiator, Shaykh Hafiz Wahba, wrote:

*We did not want to antagonize Fuad, whom we held in great affection and esteem. But equally we did not want to conclude a peace; information reached us daily of how hopeless conditions in Jedda and Medina were becoming every day; victory seemed even nearer.[31]*

Ibn Saud would not budge from his earlier stated position that he would never suffer the rule of any member of Husayn's family over the Hijaz, and instead offered a proposal that elections under the supervision of an international Islamic committee decide the fate of the Hijaz. Hafiz Wahba relates that this idea left the Egyptian mission "delighted, considering it much more desirable than the mere conclusion of peace which they had originally sought. We on our part were pleased too, as we considered that to win over Egypt and its monarch was more important than anything else." [32] Why should the Egyptians have been so delighted with this outcome of their Meccan stopover? Shaykh Maraghi's account adds the missing detail. Ibn Saud was astute enough to realize that a peaceful resolution of the current dispute was a secondary aim of the mediation mission and so addressed its principal purpose:

*He [Ibn Saud] declared that, on the question of the caliphate, he himself was not qualified to possess it, and what some had spread about his desire for it was untrue. For the caliphate must belong to a rich Islamic state able to bear the burdens. He saw the King of Egypt as the foremost of these, and is ready to pledge his allegiance to him whenever the King of Egypt so desires.[33]*

Shaykh Maraghi thus secured a decisive concession for Egypt, without bringing

the dispute between the warring parties any closer to resolution.

His report to Fu'ad, written upon his return to Cairo, therefore ended not with a plan for peace but with a straightforward calculation of Egypt's interests and how they might best be served. Shaykh Maraghi's position could not have differed more radically from Salih Abd al-Rahman's. On the question of Ali's probable fortunes, Shaykh Maraghi was far more perceptive than the consul:

*We believe that the present government of the Hijaz rests on flimsy foundations, does not hold the favor of the people of the Hijaz, does not rest on a powerful army, and is not supported by influential states. If we might be so open as to express our opinion, we do not recommend assistance to the government of the Hijaz, because it is probable that any aid given to it would go to waste and not reach the desired aim. The appearance of Egypt as the financier of this government will not be met with satisfaction by Islamic public opinion, which loathes Husayn and his sons. The government of the Hijaz has come to an agreement out of weakness and dissipation of strength; it is probable that it would not keep its promises to Egypt were it to gain strength and its situation improve, and were it to break out of the encirclement which embraces it.[34]*

But this did not mean that Egypt's interests necessarily need suffer. Ibn Saud's proposals, wrote Shaykh Maraghi, appeared "beneficial" to the Hijazis, the Muslim world, and Egypt. Under Ibn Saud's plan, the Hijazis themselves would be allowed to elect their own government and improve local administration; and given these conditions, surmised Shaykh Maraghi, "it is probable that Egypt would have the greatest voice among the Islamic states, and the most influence, in the Holy Lands." [35]

With this recommendation, Shaykh Maraghi closed his report. There is every indication that his document was instrumental both in dampening enthusiasm for direct Egyptian intervention on Ali's side, and in ruining any chance for the loan which Ali and his emissaries sought so desperately. Official Egypt now awaited the conclusion of the battle for the Hijaz not in dread of Ibn Saud's victory but in that optimistic anticipation kindled by Shaykh Maraghi. Ibn Saud would take Jidda and Madina; he would then recognize Fu'ad as caliph; and once Fu'ad had been prayed for as caliph in the mosques of Mecca and Madina, his claim would be unassailable.

In December 1925, Ibn Saud finally entered Jidda and Ali retreated into exile, confirming Shaykh Maraghi's assessment that Ali was a spent card. It is only in light of Ibn Saud's victory that one can understand the cryptic comment of Shaykh Maraghi's biographer: "He succeeded in his task, although we cannot speak in detail about this mission at the present time." [36] How could success be attributed to a mission of mediation which resulted in no appreciable movement toward peace between the warring parties, one of which destroyed the other within a few weeks of the mission's departure? The biographer's conclusion is logical only if one concedes that his measure of success was not the establishment of peace through negotiation but the defense of Egypt's interests, and that Shaykh Maraghi's success lay in saving Egypt from heavy involvement in a losing cause. The detail which the biographer withholds is that the mission was not one of mediation at all.

But this favorable appraisal of Shaykh Maraghi's mission failed to take account of his serious misreading of Ibn Saud's intentions. Upon Shaykh Maraghi's return to Cairo, he circulated Ibn Saud's plan for elections under the auspices of a Muslim committee, with his own tacit endorsement. Some form of internationalization of the Hijaz first appeared in Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi's *Umm al-qura*, in this respect a utopian work, and Fu'ad Bey al-Khatib, Ali's Foreign Minister, was absolutely certain that Ibn Saud's plan represented no more than a similar flight of fancy:

*He is convinced that Ibn Saud, despite his many declarations to the contrary, has no intention of evacuating the Hedjaz unless driven from it. He bases this assertion on the fact that Ibn Saud is well aware that the dissensions amongst the world's Moslems will render difficult any attempt at international Moslem control of the Hedjaz, and that he will consequently remain in possession for years before an effective administration could be formed, during which time he would so consolidate his position as to assure his domination of the territory in future years.[37]*

This was a fairly accurate prediction of things to come, and Ibn Saud soon proved himself bent on the eradication of all foreign influence in the Hijaz, including that of Egypt. On 7 January 1926, Ibn Saud had himself proclaimed King of the Hijaz, ending all illusions about free elections or an international Muslim regime for the holy cities. Hafiz Wahba described the reaction in Egypt:

*I was still in Egypt at the time, and cabled the King [Ibn Saud]*

*telling him that the Egyptians considered this step to be a flagrant violation of his pledge. Abdul Aziz replied, explaining that the Nejdi and Hejazi people had insisted on his action, but this did not satisfy the Egyptian authorities, who knew Arabia and its people well, and suspected that their insistence had been inspired by Abdul Aziz himself.[38]*

Further symbolic evidence for Egypt's loss of standing was provided later that year, with the Saudi suppression of Egyptian *mahmal* traditions at pilgrimage time.[39] And most embarrassing of all for Shaykh Maraghi, Ibn Saud never gave the slightest indication to anyone else that he was prepared to recognize Fu'ad as caliph. In fact, rumors soon circulated in Jidda that Ibn Saud would have himself proclaimed caliph, an act



*The mahmal, accompanied by Egyptian police.*

which would have dashed all of Fu'ad's hopes. The Egyptian consul in Jidda felt vindicated: "Only God knows the truth on this subject, since it is not inconceivable that the likes of the present King of the Hijaz [Ibn Saud] would proclaim himself caliph on a Friday after the prayer, just as he took for himself the kingship of the Hijaz." [40] Reading this despatch, Fu'ad could only conclude that his opportunity to spread his wing of protection over the Hijaz had been lost.

Whether Abdin Palace held Shaykh Maraghi at all responsible for his misappraisal of Ibn Saud's intentions is difficult to say. But when Ibn Saud convened a Muslim congress to discuss the administration of the holy cities in June-July 1926, the official Egyptian delegation was led not by Shaykh Maraghi but by his rival, Shaykh Muhammad al-Ahmadi al-Zawahiri. It seems not improbable that this choice reflected a loss of royal confidence in Shaykh Maraghi's political judgment, which had so thoroughly succumbed to Ibn Saud's assurances. The full extent of the mission's miscalculation doubtless became clear once Shaykh Zawahiri had filed his own report from Mecca, confirming the absolute incompatibility of Egyptian and Saudi aspirations in the Hijaz, and conceding that Egypt's window of opportunity had closed.[41]

#### IV

In a curious sequel to Shaykh Maraghi's mission, the defeated Ali made one

last attempt to persuade Fu'ad that the King of Egypt might eventually be prayed for as caliph of the Muslims in the mosques of Mecca and Madina. Following his departure from Jidda, Ali found refuge with his more fortunate brothers. Ali settled down on an estate near Baghdad, capital of the kingdom of his brother Faysal, and paid frequent visits to Amman, capital of the amirate of his brother Abdallah. Just what should be done about Ali was a nagging question for his near ones, for Ali still had political aspirations that he ached to fulfill. During his few remaining years he continued to follow events in Arabia very closely, eager for an opportunity to strike should Ibn Saud stumble. And his brothers felt obliged to supply those funds necessary to keep open the remote possibility of Ali's restoration. The German diplomat Fritz Grobba, who served in Baghdad during the early 1930s, reported that Faysal's private papers, once examined upon his death in 1933, revealed that during his reign he had disbursed some 700,000 rupees (over £50,000) to the shaykhs of Najd and the Hijaz as well as to the tribes of Shammar, Harb, and Utayba.[42] This was no doubt intended to keep Ali in the contest.

But for whatever reason, sufficient money was never on hand for a major move. After 1929, Ibn Saud faced a series of domestic rebellions, and Ali's hopes waxed. This led him, in late May 1931, to summon an Egyptian consular official then visiting Baghdad for a frank conversation. According to the consul's despatch, Ali spoke with him about the situation in the Hijaz, citing from reports which had reached him concerning the misery which engulfed the province.

Fu'ad, Ali continued, was known for his solicitude for religion and the holy cities, and might consider offering assistance. The people of the Hijaz and Najd were biding their time, waiting for the first opportunity to throw off their present yoke. To start the process, to lay the foundations, and to finance the tribes between Yemen and Ta'if, Najd and Mecca, Jidda and Madina, Ali needed £20,000 to £30,000. The final stage of the uprising would then require an additional £20,000.



*King Fu'ad reviews troops.*

Ali offered three concessions to Fu'ad in return for providing these necessary funds. First, Ali would swear allegiance to Fu'ad as caliph over the Hijaz, secure the recognition of Fu'ad as pre-eminent religious figure in Iraq and Transjordan, and then work to secure similar recognition in Syria and Palestine. Second, Ali would guarantee Egypt's political and economic interests in the Hijaz. Finally, Ali promised that all outstanding issues between the Hijaz and Egypt would be

settled in Egypt's favor. Ali expressed himself ready to fly to Egypt within three days, if his proposal required further elucidation; and attached to the consul's despatch was a personal letter from Ali appealing for Fu'ad's aid, and offering to discuss the plan in greater detail.[43] For a tenth of the price which Ali had asked six years earlier, he was prepared once again to make Fu'ad both caliph and protector of the holy places.

It is not improbable that the Egyptian reaction to this proposal is to be found somewhere in the royal archives at Abdin Palace, but circumstantial evidence suggests that the overture may not have worked. For, later that same year, a Hashimite agent turned to a far less amenable source, for a comparable sum, for an identical purpose. The Palestinian Arab notable Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani was a Hashimite protégé closely linked to Ali's brother Abdallah. He was also a virulently anti-Saudi polemicist, and as the rebellions against Ibn Saud gathered momentum, Shaykh Dajani published a venomous tract accusing Ibn Saud of excessive religious zeal and lack of commitment to the cause of Palestine's Arabs.[44] But in October 1931, Haim Arlosorov, director of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, met with Dajani at the latter's home. Shaykh Dajani, wrote Arlosorov in his political diary,

*seems to have a much broader scheme at which he only hints. The Emir Abdullah seems to be preparing himself for a little military adventure in Ibn Saud's territory. He apparently seeks to regain the Holy Places which his father once lost to the Wahabis. He has a scheme in mind according to which we should finance that little war (a trifling sum of some £70,000, I believe he mentioned!) in exchange for which he would be ready to subscribe to a scheme of an autonomous Jewish National Home in Palestine with the immigration and everything. I am sure Theodor Herzl would have considered the price more than equitable. We agreed to discuss... this great mysterious plan on another occasion.[45]*

## Notes

1. On the Mamluks and the Hijaz, see Gaston Wiet, "L'Égypte et les Lieux saints de l'Islam," *Mélanges René Crozet*, Poitiers 1966, i, pp. 123-9.
2. A link has also been suggested between the Ottoman caliphal myth of testamentary designation by the last Abbasid caliph, and the legendary surrender of the keys of the Ka'ba to Mecca's Ottoman conquerors. See Butrus Abu-Manneh, "A Note on the 'Keys of the Ka'ba,'" *Islamic Quarterly*, 18/3-4

(July-December 1974): 73-5.

3. Elie Kedourie, "Egypt and the Caliphate, 1915-52," in his *Chatham House Version and Other Middle Eastern Studies*, London 1970, pp. 177-207.
4. On the 'Abdin collection, see Martin Kramer, "Egypt's Royal Archives, 1922-52," *American Research Center in Egypt Newsletter*, 113 (Winter 1980): 19-21.
5. For a general account of the war, see Gary Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, London 1976, pp. 216-35.
6. Amin Sa'id, *al-Thawra al-'arabiyya al-kubra*, Cairo n.d., iii, p. 207; Fakhr al-Din al-Ahmadi al-Zawahiri, *al-Siyasa wa'l-Azhar, min mudhakkirat Shaykh al-Islam al-Zawahiri*, Cairo, 1364/1945, pp. 236-8; Sheikh Haliz Wahba, *Arabian Days*, London 1964, pp. 151-3.
7. Anwar al-Jundi, *al-Imam al-Maraghi*, Cairo 1952, p. 109.
8. Rashid Rida to Shakib Arslan (11 Rabi' II 1344/29 October 1925), in Shakib Arslan, *al-Sayyid Rashid Rida aw ikha arba'in sanna*, Damascus 1356/1937, pp. 413-4.
9. S.R. Jordan (Jidda), enclosure no. 1 in despatch of 23 June 1926, F0371/11433.
10. Stewart Johnson, *Chargé d'affaires a.i.*, despatch of 14 July 1925, NA, Record Group 59, 890f.00/4.
11. J. Morton Howell (Alexandria), despatch of 23 September 1925, NA, Record Group 59, 890f.00/7.
12. On this appeal, see FO371/10809, E5069/10/91.
13. Sir Reader Bullard, *The Camels Must Go: An Autobiography*, London 1961, pp. 139-43.
14. Salih 'Abd al-Rahman (Jidda), despatch of 9 August 1925, MRJ, file 763. For the actual outcome of the Baku Congress, see Stephen White, "Communism and the East: The Baku Congress, 1920," *Slavic Review*, 33/3 (September 1974): 492-514.
15. S.R. Jordan (.Jidda), telegraphic despatch of 3 August 1925, L/P&S/10/1127, P4062.
16. Nevile Henderson (Alexandria) to J. Murray, 9 August 1925, FO371/10809, E4901/10/91.
17. Policy minute by V.A.L. Mallet, 4 August 1925, FO371/(0809, E4521/10/91.
18. Bullard, *The Camels Must Go*, p. 142.
19. Elizabeth Monroe, *Philby of Arabia*, London 1973, pp. 142-3.
20. Salih Abd al-Rahman (Jidda), despatch of 18 August 1925, MRJ, file 1480, part 1.
21. On the Cairo caliphate congress, see Kedourie, "Egypt and the Caliphate," pp. 183-9, 193-5; see also the account and sources provided by Martin Kramer, *The Congress in Modern Islam*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Princeton University, 1982, pp. 194-231; and on the congress archives, now in the library of al-Azhar, see Mahmud Sharqawi, "Dirasat watha'iq 'an mu'tamar al-khilafa al-



- Islamiyya 1926," *al-Katib* (Cairo), 10/113 (August 1970): 115-22; 10/114 (September 1970): 132-7; 10/115 (October 1970): 156-61; 11/119 (February 1971): 151-8.
22. Note by A.F.H. Wiggin of 27 August 1925, enclosed in letter from Henderson (Cairo) to J. Murray, 29 August 1925, L/P&S/10/1155, P3908.
23. For the texts of these telegrams—Fu'ad to Ibn Saud, 30 August 1925; Ali to Fu'ad, 1 September 1925; Ibn Saud to Fu'ad, 4 September 1925—see *al-Ittihad* (Cairo), 6 September 1925.
24. On Maraghi's activities, see Kedourie, "Egypt and the Caliphate," passim; and Kramer, dissertation, pp. 143-8, 230-6.
25. Henderson to J. Murray, 6 September 1925, F0800/264.
26. Interview with S.R. Jordan (Jidda), enclosure no. 1 in despatch of 28 September 1925, FO371/10810. E6383/10/91.
27. Report by Shaykh Muhammad Mustafa al-Maraghi and Abd al-Wahhab Tal'at (Bey) Pasha, 15 Rabi' I 1344/3 October 1925, 18 pp., in *MRJ*, file 1476 [hereafter: Maraghi Report]. Although Tal'at was also a signatory of the report, it was Shaykh Maraghi who presented the document to the Royal *Diwan* under a cover letter of 3 October 1925.
28. Maraghi Report.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Ali to Fu'ad, 2 Rabi' I 1344, in *MRJ*, file 1476; a French translation of this letter, apparently made for Fu'ad, can be found in *MRJ*, file 1480, part I.
31. Wahba, *Arabian Days*, p. 152.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
33. Maraghi Report.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. See note 7 above.
37. Jordan (Jidda), despatch of 29 October 1925, L/P&S/10/1127, E7054/10/91.
38. Wahba, *Arabian Days*, p. 155.
39. Jacques Jomier, *Le Mahmal et la caravane égyptienne des pèlerins de la Mecque*, Cairo 1953, pp. 67-73.
40. Salih Abd al-Rahman (Jidda), despatch of 14 January 1926, *MRJ*, file 1480, part 1.
41. For an account of the Meccan congress, with citations from Shaykh Zawahiri's report, see Kramer, dissertation, 239-66.
42. F. Grobba (Baghdad), despatch of 14 June 1934, Documents of the German Foreign Office, Library of Congress series, L1111/L313147—3151.
43. Egyptian consul (name?) (Baghdad), despatch of 31 May 1931, *MRJ*, file 1685.
44. Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani, *Fi sabil al-Islam wa'l-'Arab li'l-haqiqa wa'1-tarikh. Hawla hawadith al-Hijaz al-akhira*, Jerusalem 1351/1932.

45. Arlosorov Diary Notes of 10 October 1931, CZA, Z4/3663ii. The published Hebrew translation of this political diary suppresses Dajani's name, the request for finance, and the disparaging remark about Herzl's belief in the power of checkbook diplomacy. See Haim Arlosorov, *Yoman Yerushalayim*, Second ed., Tel Aviv 1949, p. 74.