Communism and pan-Islamism became the most perilous challenge to the post-WWI international order that practically sustained the global predominance of the British Empire, and British and French rule in the Middle East and northwest Africa in particular. At least, they looked as such to the security services of these two imperial powers prone to analyze local political developments from the perspective of international strategic rivalry.\textsuperscript{1} The western Arabian Peninsula embracing Mecca and Medina epitomized the intersection of the two anti-imperialist movements. Culling from Soviet archives and India Office Records, this paper addresses the Bolshevik involvement in Arabia, focusing on two Soviet diplomats (one Tatar and the other Kazakh), and their interplay with Saudi and Yemeni political actors in the transport of Muslim pilgrims (hajjis) and Soviet merchandise. In so doing, I shed fresh light on the Soviet endeavor and failure to project its anti-imperialist cause overseas in the age of the steamship by means of very imperial legacy and modus operandi.

In his seminal article “Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism,” Ronald Robinson argues that domination was only practicable insofar as alien

\textsuperscript{1} Martin Thomas, \textit{Empire of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914} (Berkeley, 2008), chapter 3.
power was translated into terms of indigenous political economy. As the financial and human resources at the disposal of colonial rulers were limited, they continued to work through native collaborators and to manipulate the relationship.\(^2\) James Onley has developed Robinson’s theory in studying the Pax Britannica in the Persian Gulf that was created by the Political Residency based in Bushahr (1822-1971). He contends that the political infrastructure of informal empire everywhere was largely indigenous. He sees the Gulf residency’s effectiveness in its operations within the indigenous political systems of the Gulf. Arab rulers of local sheikhdoms in need of protection collaborated with the political resident, while influential men from affluent Indian, Arab, and Persian merchant families served as the resident’s native agents. There, both the British and the local rulers could save face by blaming the native agents. This collaborative power triangle sustained Britain’s informal empire in the Gulf.\(^3\)

In recent years, students of the Russian Empire and its entanglements with contiguous countries also reveal that Russia’s exertion of power beyond its borders was a negotiated and contended undertaking, with the help of consulate officials, mobile subjects, and those local go-betweens extracting Russian support for their own interests.\(^4\) Russian Muslim immigrants and travelers invoked their citizenship as a means of receiving assistance from Russian officials operating in the Ottoman


\(^4\) For an Ottomanist’s marvelous illustration of Russia’s entanglement in the Caucasus, eastern Anatolia, and partly northern Iran, see Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (Cambridge, 2011).
Empire, who were in turn ready to offer them determined support. The Russian Embassy in Istanbul and consulates in the Ottoman territory also heavily depended on the Muslim, Jewish, and Armenian subjects' networking for intelligence and diplomatic leverage.\(^5\) The capitulations regime in Qajar Iran under the Treaty of Turkmanchay of 1828 did not pave the way for the Russians to impose their influence upon the Qajar court, provincial governors, merchants, or even their own subjects from the Caucasus, but opened a vast array of manipulation of legal and trading practices as well as subjecthood and European patronage among them.\(^6\) Based on these arguments concerning the Russian and British empires, I pinpoint not so much indigenous men of power, as the study of empire's collaborators usually does, but non-native Muslim intermediaries who imparted a “Muslim face” to the Soviet policy in the Hijaz and Yemen. By so doing, I examine the extent to which the Soviet Muslim diplomats' involvement in the local politics refracted Moscow's initial intentions on the ground.

So far, a few works have addressed the maritime dimension of Russia's empire building. The establishment of a naval port in Vladivostok in 1860 required the maintenance of a sea route between the Black Sea and the Far East. This led to the expansion of Russia's strategic interests in the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and Southeast Asia, especially with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Russia's economic presence in northern China grew with the establishment of the Volunteer

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Fleet (Dobrovol’nyi flot) of merchant vessels in 1880 and the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway in the 1890s. Russia’s diplomatic missions in Southeast Asia were primarily to safeguard its economic and strategic concerns in China by carefully monitoring the designs and advances of imperialist rivals in the region: the British, the French in Siam, and the Dutch in East India.⁷ In the Persian Gulf, which the British regarded as their exclusive sphere of influence, the Russians were inclined to link it with the South Caucasus and northern Iran by rail, with the Gulf ports (particularly Basra) working as coal stations for their steamers. This could also have counteracted the German construction of the Baghdad Railroad.⁸ Southeast Asia and the Gulf were not just prey to the great power rivalry, however. Smaller countries were playing off the imperialist rivals against each other. The Siamese court attempted to forge diplomatic and commercial relations with Russia in order to fend off British and French control of their territory. Local sheikhdoms in the Persian Gulf welcomed the entrance of Russian steamers with a view toward countering British dominance.

The Soviets in the 1920s and 1930s also attempted to enter the Red Sea, with their non-Russian functionaries closely interacting with indigenous officials, notables, and merchants, and keeping track of their British, Italian, and Dutch rivals. In March 1927, the British Consul at Jidda reported that one Tuimetoff, first secretary of the Soviet plenipotentiary and “a Tartar from the Caucasus,” was working in

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Asmara of Eritrea “to extend his knowledge of colonial Africa.” But the Bolsheviks’ relationship with the Saudis and Yemenis was ideologically and politically precarious, as the sole common stance was anti-British. The Soviets tried to maintain this elusive alliance by their commitment to facilitating the hajj traffic and trading with the Arabs. Here the diplomacy formulated by Georgii Vasil’evich Chicherin (1872-1936) seems to have remained valid even after his tenure as commissar of foreign affairs (1918-1930). It was through the support of the Turkish War of Independence that the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID) shaped its policy to provide economic aid for anti-Imperialist national liberation movements in states out of Europe in general and Russia’s southern neighbors (Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and China) in particular. Chicherin believed that independent “national economy” in these countries would, in turn, assist the development of the Soviet domestic economy. Economic exchange continued to buttress Soviet-Turkish alliance against the European predominance well into the 1930s. As a matter of fact, Chicherin’s fascination with Russia’s eastern policy had grown during his career at the tsarist foreign ministry archives. In this paper, straddling the conventional divide of 1917, I hope to illustrate the extent to which the bricks left by their tsarist precursors took new form to build a Soviet seaborne

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9 When the Soviets established its residence in Jidda in 1924, R.W. Bullard, British Consul there, found “none of the five [staff members] is Russian by race,” with the consul, the first secretary, and the interpreter being Muslims (“Tartars”), and the second secretary and the clerk Jews. India Office Records (IOR), R/20/A/3214, 104, 110-111.

empire, and what the new empire looked like through the eyes of the Bolshevik bricklayers at the forefront of its expansion.11

Soviet Muslim Diplomats

Common conditions in challenging British dominance in Arabia before and after World War I led the imperial and Soviet diplomats on the ground to develop a similar agenda and take comparable measures to retain their influence. Most notably, the first representative in Jidda for tsarist Russia and the Soviets was a Muslim who had worked in Turkestan before his mission to Arabia. Secondly, despite the imperial officials’ obsession with pan-Islamism amplified by Muslim border-crossing mobility, and the Soviets’ overwhelming anti-religious stance, both the imperial and Soviet diplomats attempted to use the hajj as a medium for either Russia’s prestige as a great power or the Bolsheviks’ message of anti-imperialism.

A rapid increase in the number of hajjis and their demand for direct patronage forced the Russian government to establish a consulate in 1891. Alongside regulating the pilgrims’ conditions, it was expected to observe the mood (nastroenie) of the Islamic world, since “Mecca maintains a constant and living connection with the whole Muslim world.” It also aimed at “extending the fascination with our [Russia’s] name into the Muslim East.” For these purposes, the Russian Foreign Ministry considered it expedient to appoint a Muslim as the new consul.12

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11 Focusing on one Buriat-Mongol monk as the thirteenth Dalai Lama’s proxy, Nikolay Tsyrempilov also depicts rivalry among Russia, Britain, and China for Tibet beyond 1917. Nikolay Tsyrempilov, “The Open and Secret Diplomacy of Tsarist and Soviet Russia in Tibet: The Role of Agvan Dorzhiev (1912-1925),” in Uyama, Asiatic Russia, 216-233.

12 Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii (hereafter AVPRI), f. 149 (Turetskii stol),
The first Russian consul in Jidda was one Bashkir Shagimardan Miriasovich Ibragimov (1841-1892), who had taken charge of diplomacy in the Turkestan administration under the governor generalship of Konstantin von Kaufman (1867-1882). His primary task in the Hijaz was to monitor hajji traffic from Russia, and to observe whether the Muslim subjects were disposed to fanaticism or discontent with Russia. For this purpose, he himself was expected to undertake the hajj as a Muslim. He was also encouraged to travel deep into the Arabian Peninsula in order to gain a sense of the varied Arab tribes' relations with the Ottomans and the British. Furthermore, he was to seek the possibility of Russian merchants coming into direct contact with the locals and competing with their other European counterparts. He was required to know the colonization plans of the European powers (particularly Britain) at the ports along the Red Sea. It was even recommended that he monitor the political situation in Ethiopia and Italian policy there. Finally, he had to behave decently as a representative of a great power in order to earn the admiration of the indigenous population. And he also had to maintain good relations with his colleagues from other European powers.

Unfortunately, Ibragimov died of cholera less than a year after his appointment on his way back to Jidda from the hajj in 1892. After Ibragimov, no Muslim was posted to Jidda until the withdrawal of the consulate due to the world war in 1914. Still, the rivalry with Britain in Arabia constantly made Russian diplomats aware of the

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14 AVPRI, f. 151 (Politarkhiv), op. 482, d. 2976, ll. 1-5ob.
necessity of Muslim personnel at the Jidda consulate. In 1905, the Russian consul in Jidda, M. Nikol’skii, suggested designating a Muslim as secretary of the consulate. He referred to the British vice consul, Dr. Mekhmed-Khusein-Efendi, an Indian Muslim, as an ideal model: he had direct contact with the sharif of Mecca and other local authorities; British hajjis willingly relied on this vice consul’s protection; as a medical practitioner, he received tens of patients a day; and his eligibility to travel around the Hijaz permitted him to incline fellow believers towards British interests and to monitor whether any British subjects were engaged in anti-colonial or pan-Islamic activities.15

It was not until the Lausanne Conference in 1922, where the Turkish government tried to achieve the resolution of its Independence War, but not the liberation of other Muslim peoples, that the Soviet delegation made first contact with their Hijaz counterpart and began to turn their eyes from Turkey to the Arab world as an anticolonial force.16 Curiously enough, Georgii Chicherin’s argument concerning reopening of the consulate in Jidda was identical to that of the tsarist officials: “Jidda is located next to Mecca; our consul in Jidda will be at the very center of the Muslim world. Thus, although they are escaping our notice now, a great many political movements among Muslims will take place before our consul’s eyes.”17 In 1924, the Hijaz and Soviet Russia established diplomatic relations: the Hijaz posted to Moscow one Amir Habib Lutfullah, and the Soviets sent to Jidda a Karim

15 AVPRI, f. 149, op. 502b, d. 238, ll. 3-5, 7ob., 8ob.
16 Hirst, “Transnational Anti-Imperialism,” 221.
Abdraufovic Khakimov (1890-1938), a Tatar who used to work in Turkestan.\textsuperscript{18}

Karim Khakimov was born in the Belebei district of Ufa Province.\textsuperscript{19} He entered the Bolshevik Party in Samara in April 1918, but mainly made his career among Orenburg Muslim communists hostile to both Zaki Validi steering the Bashkir autonomy and Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev coordinating Muslim affairs at the center together with Stalin.\textsuperscript{20} His distinctive role as a Muslim proxy for the party took shape in the Red Army: he operated as a leader of political instructors in the Volga-Tatar Infantry Brigades. With the penetration of the Red Army into Turkestan, in February 1920, Khakimov moved together with M. V. Frunze, then commander of the Turkestan Front, to Tashkent to be appointed assistant to V. V. Kuibyshev, then head of the Political Department of the Turkestan Front.\textsuperscript{21}

Witnessing the revolution in Bukhara at the beginning of September that year, Khakimov became secretary of the Central Committee of the Bukharan Communist Party and then plenipotentiary of Soviet Russia in Bukhara.

After Central Asia, Khakimov was posted as a diplomat to those Muslim countries where Soviet interests collided with those of the British. Upon the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Soviets and Iran in February 1921, on Kuibyshev's recommendation, Khakimov worked as consul general in Mashhad and Rasht from

\textsuperscript{18} SSSR i arabskie strany 1917-1960: dokumenty i materialy (Moscow, 1961), 60; Dokumenty vneshei politiki SSSR, vol. 7 (Moscow, 1963), 215.

\textsuperscript{19} For Khakimov's biography, see L. Z. Gadilov, F. Kh. Gumerov, Revoliutsioner-diplomat: istoricheskii-biograficheskii ocherk (Ufa, 1977). The Bashkir version had been published in 1966. In the Soviet period Khakimov was lionized as a Bashkir hero.

\textsuperscript{20} On Khakimov's career in Orenburg, see G.G. Kosach, “Karim Khakimov: god zhisni v Orenburge (Chelovek i ego vremia)” Neizvestnye stranitsy otechestvennego vostokovedeniia, no. 2 (Moscow, 2004), 125-147.

\textsuperscript{21} Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv, f. 37976 (Lichnaia kollektiia), op. 3, d. 90-669.
1921 to 1923, the final years of the Qajar dynasty. In 1924, he was transferred to lead the Soviet mission in Jidda. Khakimov was called the “Red Pasha” in the court of ’Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman Āl Sa‘ūd (hereafter Ibn Saud, 1880-1953). From 1929 to 1932, he was both ambassador in Yemen under the rule of Imam Yahyā (1869-1948) and representative of the state trading company (Blizhvostgostorg) involved in commerce along the Red Sea. After an interval in Moscow from 1932 to 1935, he was once again dispatched as plenipotentiary to Saudi Arabia. His mission in Arabia abruptly ended in autumn 1937. His contribution as a Bolshevik intermediary to the Muslim countries did not save him from the Great Terror.

There was another man from Turkestan who became a Soviet consul general in Jidda: Nazir Tiuriakulovich Tiuriakulov (1892-1937), a Kazakh originally from Kokand, operated as such from 1928 to 1935. After entering the Bolshevik Party in October 1918, Tiuriakulov worked in Ferghana. He was promoted to chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan Republic (1920-1921), and then became a member of the Central Asian Bureau of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (1921-1922). He played an important role in introducing the Latin script to the written language of the USSR’s eastern peoples. He had been director of the Central Publishing House for the People of the USSR from 1923 to 1928 before coming to Arabia.

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22 Actually Zaki Validi met Khakimov in Mashhad in March 1922. In his famous memoirs Validi says that Khakimov was a Tatar. Zaki Validi Togan, Vospominaniia (Moscow, 1997), 374.

23 The Soviets signed a friendship treaty with Yemen on 1 November 1928. Khakimov was the first ambassador. SSSR i arabskie strany 1917-1960, 69-72.

Soon after his arrival in Jidda as the first Soviet agent, Khakimov found himself in the middle of political turmoil in the Arabian Peninsula. As is well known, the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence had induced Sharif of Mecca Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī ʿAlī al-Ḥāshimi (1853-1931) to revolt against the Ottoman Empire, together with Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888-1935). However, the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 had thwarted Husayn’s ambition to be “King of all the Arabs,” reducing him to king of only the Hijaz. When war broke out between King of the Hijaz Husayn and then amir of Najd, Ibn Saud, in 1924, the Soviet mission at first maintained strict neutrality, but gradually turned its preference to Ibn Saud. In April 1925, several months before Ibn Saud’s siege of Mecca, Khakimov succeeded in making direct contact with Ibn Saud. When he captured Jidda at the end of 1925, Ibn Saud showed Khakimov his gratitude for the Soviet mission’s neutrality during the military operation. On 16 February 1926, three weeks after the declaration of the existence of the Kingdom of Hijaz, Najd, and the Annexed Provinces, the Soviet Union became the first country to officially recognize this new state of Ibn Saud’s. Later, during Tiuriakulov’s tenure, the Soviet consulate was elevated to status of embassy, as the kingdom consolidated its power as an independent state. In 1932, it began to call itself Saudi Arabia.

Like their tsarist predecessors concerned with augmenting Russia’s prestige, Soviet diplomats in Jidda also attached substantial political importance to the hajj,

listening to the grievances of the pilgrims and those former Russian subjects residing in the Hijaz. Hajjis’ lodges (takîya or tekke) acquired a new political meaning during Khakimov’s tenure in Jidda. In Mecca and Medina as well as cities en route, such as Istanbul and Jerusalem, pilgrims and other travelers used networks of these facilities traditionally catering to people from some particular origin. Since these tekkes were practically pious endowments (waqfs), whose donors had disclaimed their property rights, Ottoman officials and Russian diplomats before WWI had often vied to control them. Now, Khakimov attempted to restore the rights in favor of the Soviet republics from which their founders had originally hailed. This is comparable to broader Soviet efforts to transfer the property of the Russian Orthodox Church abroad (particularly in Palestine under British mandate) to the control of the NKID. In August 1925, on Khakimov’s suggestion, Chicherin asked the governments of the Crimean, Tatar, and Azerbaidzhan Republics to provide information on waqfs in the Hijaz. As a result, the Tatar Section of the OGPU identified five tekkes belonging to Kazan Tatars in Mecca, just as had been recorded in 1895 by Shakirdzhan Ishaev, a Tatar dragoman at the Jidda consulate. In 1927, the Soviet Consulate in Jidda came to the conclusion that the waqfs once established by Russian Muslims should remain to serve their previous purposes according to Islamic legal tradition (shari‘at): a special


27 AVPRI, f.149, op.502b, d.3371, ll.31-32: f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 5301, ll. 2-3ob.; Selim Deringil, “The Ottoman Empire and Russian Muslims: Brothers or Rivals?” *Central Asian Survey* 13, no. 3 (1994): 414.


29 AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 5322, ll. 203-203ob. Ishaev had also worked in Tashkent before coming to Jidda.
philanthropic association should be organized to control these waqfs, with material support from the USSR republics concerned.\textsuperscript{30}

Medical aid for the local population as well as for the hajjis also continued to be seen as useful political leverage of the Soviet Consulate and other European consulates.\textsuperscript{31} Nazir Tiuriakulov gave the assurance that “our medical operation will be tremendously significant in the struggle for the USSR, as tens of thousands of people are annually flowing to the Hijaz from every corner of the Muslim world.” He observed that the British and the Dutch had their own medical staff and facilities, although he regarded most of the personnel as unsuitable, except for one doctor from Dutch Java. He particularly underscored the acute necessity for female doctors, as Muslims prevented their wives and daughters from consulting male doctors. Tiuriakulov argued that female doctors could serve as a channel for “doctor-Bolsheviks” to penetrate the core of the Arabic community.\textsuperscript{32} When Khakimov operated as ambassador in Yemen, one Viniamin Babadjan, “a Tartar from the Crimea” with a doctor’s diploma gained in Petrograd, was in charge of a clinic in San’a where he treated Imam Yahya more than once.\textsuperscript{33}


\textsuperscript{31} Much remains to be done in examining the interrelations between the Soviet and other European medical missions. For a comparison, see Martin Thomas, “Managing the Hajj: Indian Pilgrim Trafic, Public Health and Transportation in Arabia, 1918-1930,” in T. G. Otte and Keith Neilson, eds., \textit{Railways and International Politics: Paths of Empire, 1848-1945} (London, 2006), 173-191.


\textsuperscript{33} IOR, R/20/A/3214, 134.
British diplomats were unduly vigilant regarding the political implications of any activities of their Soviet counterparts’ apparently propagating communism. When Khakimov arrived in Jidda, his British counterpart R. W. Bullard found him “very young for his post (about 31 or 32), but clever and an enthusiastic communist.” He reported that Khakimov lost no opportunity to preach the mission of the Soviet Union to liberate the East, trying to enlist Ibn Saud “in the Soviet Union’s scheme for a great revolt of the East against the imperialistic and colonising powers.” Khakimov was also said to have wooed Shaikh Pravira, Netherlands vice consul in Jidda, and Ahmed Lari, an Iranian representative, with promises of setting the Javanese and Iranians free from their Dutch and British oppressors respectively.\(^{34}\) When Tiuriakulov worked as Soviet consul general in Jidda, George Lloyd, high commissioner in Cairo, related to Austen Chamberlain, foreign minister, in June 1929 that “even if [the Hijaz, Najd, and Yemen] governments succeeded in using Bolshevism without compromising the internal order of the state, it is inevitable that their anti-British nationalist tendencies must be accentuated by this association.”\(^{35}\)

Both the Soviets and the British were well aware of the significance of Mecca and Medina as hubs of networking by political elite refugees excluded from the state-building processes after the Great War. The takeover by the Bolsheviks and the highly repressive Stalinization forced a sizeable number of families out of Central Asia to seek shelter in the Hijaz.\(^{36}\) In his report of 1930, Tiuriakulov found

\(^{34}\) IOR, R/20/A/3214, 110-115.
\(^{35}\) IOR, L/PS/11/248 P 2985.
\(^{36}\) Bayram Balci, “Central Asian Refugees in Saudi Arabia: Religious Evolution and Contributing to the Reislamization of Their Motherland,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26,
a naturalized young group of Bukharans hostile to the former Bukharan amir, Alim Khan (1881-1944), who was rumored to undertake the hajj. Tiuriakulov also contacted Abdurreshid Ibrahim (1857-1944), a pan-Islamist Siberian Tatar traveler temporarily living in Mecca, to prove the anti-Soviet intentions of the recent audience of the Polish Muslim head (mufti) Iakub Shen’kevich with Ibn Saud. After his abdication as ruler of Afghanistan in 1929, Amanullah Khan (1892-1960) stopped in Jidda on his hajj journey to communicate with Iranian, Turkish, and Soviet diplomats.37 In May 1928, the British Residency in Cairo warned that Shakib Arslan (1869-1946), a former pro-Ottoman Druse of Syria, after his recent visit to Moscow seemed to have persuaded Ibn Saud to conclude a treaty with the Soviets “with the intention of organising Bolshevik and anti-British propaganda in Arabia.” In fact, many Syrian exiles had already surrounded Ibn Saud with their anxiety to evict the French from Syria. A British report said that “these extremists were prepared to accept Bolshevik help to further the cause of Syrian nationalism.”38

Given the political importance of the road to Mecca, the Soviet authorities in Moscow in the second half of the 1920s even attempted to elaborate the ways of establishing and controlling the hajj traffic going through its own territory. Incorporating a steamship company linking the Black and Red Seas, they extended collaborative networks with local notables in such contentious zones with the British as western China, Afghanistan, and Iran with a view toward expediting the hajjis’ transit. On the one hand, the invitation of pilgrims from these countries to

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37 Nazir Tiuriakulov, 154, 156-157, 167, 212-213.
38 IOR, L/PS/11/248 P 2985.
witness the progressing socialist and anti-imperialist state reminds of “the Piedmont Principle” of the Soviet nationalities policy aiming at projecting the Soviet influence abroad. On the other hand, the ambivalence between baulking at the hajj from inside Russia as a “tolerated evil” and providing protection for those Muslim travelers imploring Russian diplomats’ help had been persistent since the late tsarist period.

The Soviet Highway to Mecca: Bolsheviks’ Attempts to Transport the Hajjis

The infrastructure of this Bolshevik venture had also taken form in the late tsarist period, when two companies, the Russian Society of Steam Navigation and Trade (ROPiT) and the Volunteer Fleet, had created the linkage between the Black Sea and Russia’s Far East via the Red Sea. Both had profited from the transfer of the military to the Boxer Rebellion and the Russo-Japanese War before they gave heed to the Muslim pilgrims not merely from Sevastopol’ and Odessa but also from Batavia and Singapore. At the turn of 1902 and 1903, when the Volunteer Fleet was planning the involvement in the hajj traffic, it was well aware of a large number of pilgrims from Kashghar and Afghanistan traveling through Batumi. In 1908 the Volunteer Fleet employed one Tashkent merchant, Sayyid Gani Sayyid ‘Azîmbayûf, as chief of the hajj logistics, who in his turn established a complex of

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41 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (RGIA), f. 98 (Parokhodnoe obshchestvo “Dobrovol’nyi flot”), op. 2, d. 285, ll. 249-250ob.; S. I. Ilovaïskiï, Istoricheskii ocherk piatidesiatiletiiia Russkogo obshchestva Parokhodstva i Torgovli (Odessa, 1907), 353-354.
42 RGIA, f. 98, op. 2, d. 285, ll. 85-86ob.
facilities for the hajjis (Hajj Khana) in Odessa. According to Sayyid ‘Azimbayuyf’s report of that year, 6964 pilgrims went through his hajj complex: 58.7% from Turkestan and Bukhara, 24.5% from western China, 8.5% from North Caucasus, and 2.2% from Iran. From September to November five vessels of the Volunteer Fleet transported 4816 pilgrims: the year of 1908 saw the hajj bring eighty percent of the whole profit from the eastward bound passengers.

The epitome of the Soviet involvement in the hajj was the dispatch of its delegation to the World Muslim Congress (‘Umami ‘Alam’i Islam Mu’tamari in Tatar) that took place in Mecca in June 1926. Assembling sixty-eight delegates from fifteen countries and regions, Ibn Saud demonstrated himself as the new protector of the hajj instead of the defeated sharif of Mecca, Husayn. The event also worked as an effective counterbalance to the Cairo Congress in the previous month, where the election of the caliph could have happened under the British auspices. It was at this moment that the Bolsheviks shared the language of anti-imperialism with the Soviet Islam leaders: just as a Soviet Orientalist journal applauded Wahhabism, the Saudis’ fundamentalist approach to Islam, for serving the “national liberation movement in Arabia,” so an organ of the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Ufa eulogized Ibn Saud as “uniting Arabs and liberating tyrannized Muslims from

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44 AVPRI, f. 149, op. 502b, d. 3362, ll. 11-12; Otchet Komiteta Dobrovol’nogo flota za 1908 god (St. Petersburg, 1910), 8-9.
imperialists.”46 Sending eight delegates with the chair of the Central Spiritual Board, Ridā’ al-Dīn b. Fakhr al-Dīn (1858-1936) as the head, the second largest after those from British India with thirteen, the Soviets conveyed their message that they were keen to champion the independence of Ibn Saud’s state. Testifying before the Oriental Section of the OGPU the esteem that the Soviet delegation had enjoyed at the congress, Ridā’ al-Dīn explained it not merely by “religious fraternity” but also by the fact that they were “citizens of the Soviet Union, which sincerely hopes for the liberation of the East and the Muslim world and demonstrates this by its own policy.”

The chair’s deputy, Kashshāf al-Dīn Tarjumānī, also a member of the delegation, gave a report on the congress to those present at a Muslim representatives’ meeting in Ufa on 27 October 1926. At the end he thanked Soviet diplomats in Istanbul, Ankara, and Jidda including Karim Khakimov for help to the delegation.47

The hajj was crucial for the Saudis not merely as a political leverage but as the source of revenue before the discovery of oil in 1938. They also attempted to secure the flow of profits generated by the pious endowments (waqfs) dedicated for the benefit of the Holy Cities in the Muslim regions of the world including the former territory of the Russian Empire. It was not accidental that the promotion of the hajj by the USSR and the preservation of these waqfs were among conditions the Saudis proposed in the early 1930s in negotiating with Nazir Tiutiakulov to conclude a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union. Obviously, the Saudis knowing that the Soviets found them difficult to accept tried to curry favor with the British alert to


the Saudis’ approach to the Soviets.\textsuperscript{48} But Karim Khakimov had taken seriously the hajj traffic and the patronage of hajjis, particularly those from adjoining Muslim regions passing through Soviet territory. Khakimov estimated that they were between two and five thousand from western China, Afghanistan, northern Iran, and eastern Anatolia. In his report to Chicherin in December 1925, Khakimov proposed that they facilitate these pilgrims’ transit by establishing direct steamer connections between the Black and Red Seas and by simplifying the visa procedure. He also posed a question on the possibility of the Soviet Consulate protecting those Muslims who had no diplomatic residence in the Hijaz; he related that in the midst of the war between Husayn and Ibn Saud, people from Kashghar continually asked for the protection they had enjoyed in the past.\textsuperscript{49}

The Moscow government loath to support Islamic practice in the country, nonetheless, could not disregard potentially huge profit that foreign pilgrims and partly Soviet citizens would bring. By the end of February 1926 several state organs and the Soiuzflot, an inheritor of the Volunteer Fleet, began to weigh up conditions of foreign Muslims’ transit through the Soviet territory and the establishment of direct steamer line between Odessa and Jidda.\textsuperscript{50} On 3 March 1926 Pastukhov, who was in charge of the Near East Section of the NKID, reminded Groman, head of the

\textsuperscript{48} Nazir Tiuriakulov, 55-56, 169-173, 177-179.
\textsuperscript{49} See documents from Soviet Foreign Ministry archive in “K. Khakimov – pervyi sovetskii polpred v Saudovskoi Aravii” Ekho vekov May (1995)\url{http://www.archive.gov.tatarstan.ru/magazine/go/anonymous/main/?path=mg/numbers/1995_may/06/2/\&searched=1} Indeed, a report from the Jidda consul to the Foreign Ministry in 1907, for instance, says that the consulate furnished pilgrims from Chinese Turkestan with official protection since its establishment: it registered their passports, kept deposit, received inheritance when hajjis died, and provided shelter for the destitute before their departure. AVPRI, f. 149, op. 502b, d. 3371, ll. 30-31.
\textsuperscript{50} Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE), f. 7795 (Vsesoiuznoe ob”edinenie sovetskogo torgovogo flota dlia zagranichnykh perevozok (Sovtorgflot) Narkomata vodnogo transporta SSSR), op. 1, d. 259, ll. 8-10.
Soiuzflot, that while nothing prohibited Muslim Soviet citizens from going to Mecca and Medina and the steamer company could pursue commercial profits, “it is necessary to stick to the line of not promoting the pilgrimage.”51 In the same month Vladimir Mikhailovich Rozenberg from the Soiuzflot traveled to Central Asia to examine the possibility to send pilgrims not only from Central Asia but also from northern Afghanistan (Herat and Mazar-i Sherif) and northwestern China (Kashghar and Kul’dzha). He found that if the company’s service should satisfy, albeit a small number, “fanatically inclined elements (fanatichno nastroennye elements)” in Central Asia, it would be possible to attract numerous pilgrims in the future.52

At the end of November 1926 the Sovtorgflot, a successor of the Soiuzflot, launched preparations for the direct steamship connection between Odessa and Jidda in the coming spring. The Moscow headquarters circulated an instruction to its regional offices in Semipalatinsk, Ufa, Samara, Batumi, Tiflis, Nizhnii Novgorod, Orenburg, Tashkent, Astrakhan, Baku, and Rostov-na-Donu. It made clear that the majority of the passengers would be pilgrims from Western China, Afghanistan, and Iran; the enticement of domestic Muslims should be undertaken only through the Central Muslim Board of Ufa, not by the Sovtorgflot agents themselves.53 The instruction also informed that a foreign passport cost 220 or 330 rubles depending on “social status (sotsial’noe polozhenie);” a round-trip fare would be 650 rubles for the third

51 RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 259, l. 11.
52 RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 259, ll. 4-5.
53 In the Muslim Board’s organ Islâm Majallası, I have found a notice inviting pilgrims from the Soiuzflot published in January 1925, as well as two articles reporting the Sovtorgflot steamer’s departure from Odessa to Jidda in the middle of May 1927 (İslâm Majallası 21 (1927), 855-856).
class, 800 rubles for the second, and 850 for the first, which included train tickets to and from Odessa, sea travel with food, and quarantine fees.\textsuperscript{54} Interestingly enough, the fare also covered a five-day stay at the “Hajji-Khana” in Odessa, where disinfection should take place according to the international sanitary conventions of 1912 and 1926.\textsuperscript{55} This institution might have been Sayyid ‘Azīm bāyūf’s legacy.

Indeed, the Sovtorgflot saw its business with the Muslim pilgrims as a return of the tsarist venture. On 1 December 1926 the Moscow headquarters sent out another instruction, this time, to its agencies in Kul’dzha, Chugchak (northwestern China), Mashhad (northeastern Iran), Herat, and Mazar-i Sherif. It began with the following phrase: “Private steamers’ companies of imperial Russia had made endeavor to attract pilgrims to the realization of their travel to Mecca by transit through Russia before the war. As the route though Russia is relatively comfortable and safe, all the evidence allow to expect that our mission of restoring this route should be crowned with success.” The headquarters told that V. M. Rozenberg would be based in Tashkent to handle the operation and that he would visit Kashghar, Kul’dja, and Mashhad. The instruction stipulated that each agency propagate the Sovtorgflot’s new service and gather pilgrims in coordination with a Soviet consulate, which in its turn would receive a command from NKID to issue transit visas to pilgrims without delay. These agencies were also expected to notify the Moscow and Tashkent offices whether the local governments were impeding the pilgrims’ movement to the Soviet territory.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54} RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 260, ll. 6-6ob.
\textsuperscript{55} RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 262, ll. 1-1ob.
\textsuperscript{56} RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 262, ll. 2-6.
The OGPU were so vigilant, however, lest the Sovtorgflot’s business encourage the religious practice that it kept its local agents under constant surveillance. At the beginning of 1927, O.V. Nikulin, a representative of the Odessa Office, communicated to one Mawlān Ḥājjī Tāsh Muḥammad in Samarkand, who had traveled to Mecca through Odessa in the previous year, that the Sovtorgflot would organize a direct line between Odessa and Jidda for pilgrims, establishing a special Ḥajji-Khana and furnishing them with as much comfort as possible. When the correspondence was revealed, the Sovtorgflot assured that this was a completely unexpected case, as the company had strictly complied with the principle of “allowing the pilgrimage, but not promoting.” The Oriental Section of OGPU proposed Nikulin’s dismissal.57 In another case the same OGPU section warned the Sovtorgflot of incautiousness of its agent Kozlov, who after his arrival in Semipalatinsk had talked with local mullahs about the Soviets’ two purposes in encouraging Chinese Muslims’ pilgrimage: to demonstrate the Soviet achievements and to make money.58

Embroiled between the commercial pursuit and the Bolsheviks’ anti-religious policy, the Sovtorgflot attempted to maximize profits by negotiating with OGPU. On 28 December 1926, the Sovtorgflot wrote to Pastukhov of NKID and Petrosian of OGPU, suggesting that the company could transport not more than thousand Soviet pilgrims, given availability of trains and vessels and without provoking a massive pilgrimage. It argued that the increase of foreign Muslims’ transit from the countries bordering Turkestan might trigger “some ferment (nekotoroe brozhenie)

57 RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 601, ll. 100-104.
58 RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 601, l. 115.
among our Muslims” and that the partial legalization of Soviet Muslims’ hajj would halt uncontrolled illicit passage of borders.\(^{59}\) In March 1927, when the Sovtorgflot found only a small number of pilgrims moving through Tashkent (600 from Kashghar, 100 from Mashhad, and 25 from Herat),\(^{60}\) it asked Petrosian for cooperation to increase domestic passengers up to 1500. Petrosian coolly replied that the absence of zeal (рвеніе) among the Soviet Muslims for the hajj deprived us of any possibility to assist the Sovtorgflot.\(^{61}\) He was completely silent on the increasing administrative pressure his organ began to impose upon the Muslim clergy at that time.\(^{62}\)

In contrast, Karim Khakimov, Soviet general consul in Jidda, was eager to collaborate with the Sovtorgflot in facilitating the hajj traffic through the Soviet territory. Sovtorgflot received information that 10,000 hajjis from Western China, 2000 from Afghanistan, 1800 from Iran were stuck in Jidda, many of whom had come to the hajj through the Indian Ocean in 1926. The Sovtorgflot and Khakimov attempted to send these pilgrims back home through the USSR. On 28 January 1927, the Sovtorgflot proposed to the NKID’s Near East Section that Khakimov expedite the issuance of transit visas to the hajjis with the proviso that the latter should use the Sovtorgflot vessels exclusively. Khakimov in his turn suggested to the Sovtorgflot that it open its office in the Hijaz, vouching for one Mukhamed Fazil Abdul Arab as a local agent of the company.\(^{63}\)

\(^{59}\) RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 260, ll. 10-10ob.
\(^{60}\) RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 601, l. 99.
\(^{61}\) RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 260, ll. 4-5.
\(^{63}\) RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 386, ll. 144, 176, 213.
Despite all the endeavors, the Sovtorgflot venture seems to have made only a modest achievement: it gained profit of 208,625 rubles by selling 1214 round-trip tickets between Odessa (and Batumi) and Jidda in 1927; 194,000 rubles from 1065 tickets in 1928. A chain of miscommunication and logistical mess accounted for the loss of foreign passengers and their disillusionment with the Soviet route. The OGPU complained that in 1926 the chief of the Sovtorgflot’s office in Kashghar had sent pilgrims not to Dzhalal-Abad as planned, but to Andizhan: “The concentration of the pilgrims in Andizhan is not unfavorable for us in political terms, as it is in Andizhan that anti-Soviet groups are most strong and active.” Moreover, the spring of 1927 saw those from Kashghar transported from Andizhan by filthy ill-equipped cargo train, which caused conflicts with the pilgrims, as the company had promised passenger cars. In March 1928 a Sovtorgflot agent at Kushka (a town of Turkmenistan bordering Afghanistan) and the Soviet general consul at Herat collaborated in sending 300 pilgrims from Herat, and negotiated with the Tashkent office to discount the travel fare. But their efforts fell flat, as the Soviet plenipotentiary in Kabul failed to agree with the Afghan authorities in entrusting the hajj transportation to the Sovtorgflot. In Iran in the spring of 1928 the company deputed the Ruspersbank (Russo-Persian Bank) to gather pilgrims, with the latter employing one Aga Sid Dzhafar from Iraq to solicit support from influential religious leaders. But Soviet diplomats in Teheran, Tabriz and others issued transit visas irrespective of whether the pilgrims bought tickets from the Ruspersbank. As a result the Sovtorgflot could not monopolize the transit

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64 RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 382, ll. 46-47.
65 RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 601, l. 67.
66 RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 382, ll. 33-34.
passengers in Batumi, and was forced to vie with the Turkish steamers.67

The most menacing challenge derived from the competition with the British tempting the Muslim population to travel to Mecca through India. Kashghar was one such front where the Bolshevik and British ventures collided. In the spring of 1927, one Ochakovskii from the OGPU Oriental Section came to Kashghar with a view toward inspecting “British intrigues (angliiskie intrigi).” He found the pro-British governor of Kashghar and other Chinese officials recommending the Indian route and denouncing the Soviet one as treacherous and insecure. Moreover, British agents were prowling around bazaars to propagate a markdown of the Bombay-Jidda tickets. While negotiating with the Sovtorgflot for possible discount of its travel fare, Ochakovskii colluded with a representative of the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Trade at Kashghar to bribe an influential Chinese merchant, who in his turn contacted Chinese officials so that pilgrims obtain passports to enter the Soviet territory for commercial purpose. Sneering at the Soviet General Consul at Kashghar, Ochakovskii boasted “All the sympathies from pilgrims are on our side, despite British agents’ rabid agitation.”68 In the end the Sovtorgflot managed to gather 600 pilgrims. Fearing that the British out of malice might organize bandit acts against those crossing the Soviet borders, the company requested the OGPU to attach a convoy to the travelers.69 The situation changed in the season of 1928, however. At first the Sovtorgflot’s agents in Kashghar successfully assembled 2000 people wishing to travel through the Soviet territory. But in September 1927 the Sovtorgflot’s native collaborator, one merchant

67 RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 382, ll. 36-41.
68 RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 601, ll. 90-91.
69 RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 601, l. 98.
Abdurasulov, had been arrested after his return from the hajj, only to be released by paying 2000 rubles three months later. What was worse, in February 1928, Yang Zengxin, Governor General of Shinjiang Province based in Urumchi, took prohibitive measures restricting the pilgrims to those who could afford to pay 750 gold rubles as a duty. Yang vindicated the policy by citing a violent conflict that had occurred between the Old and New Teachings in the Gansu Province: 70 he argued that those returning from the hajj would sap local Islamic tradition. In contrast, the governor of Kashghar had already issued 1500 passports to those pilgrims who would move through India. Although the Soviet General Consul in Urumchi worked well enough to reduce the prohibitive duty up to 250 rubles, the Sovtorgflot could send only two from Kashghar and twenty two from Chugchak in time for the hajj period. 71

Northern Iran was another front of the Soviet-British rivalry over the heart of the Muslim pilgrims. Based on the information from the General Consul of Iran at Jidda, the OGPU found that 4800 Iranians had undertook the hajj in 1928, out of whom 1000 had hailed from the Khorasan region: 600 obtained visas from the British General Consulate at Mashhad, and 400 from the British representatives in Teheran and others. What irked the OGPU officials was the fact that the British route from Mashhad via Duzdab (Afghanistan) to Karachi by train, then from Karachi to Jidda by sea was three times cheaper than the Soviet route of Mashhad, Ashkhabad, Krasnovodsk, Baku, Batumi, Odessa, and Jidda. Reminding that pilgrims from Khorasan had traveled through Russia before the Great War, the OGPU urged the Sovtorgflot to adapt to new circumstances. It demanded the

71 RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 382, ll. 34-36.
further reduction of the fare, as “only the lower [price] would do for an Iranian to reach [Jidda] anyhow: it does not matter whether a steamer has any human condition or not.” It also proposed that the company constantly deploy a Muslim agent in Khorasan, versed in Persian and Russian, who would be engaged in propaganda and intelligence, commanding the locals’ trust, forging connections with the notables, and mobilizing the latter to gather passengers. 72 While agreeing on collaborating with the notables, the Sovtorgflot in turn countered that the transport of pilgrims “like sardines (kak sel’dei v bochku [sic])” would violate an international Paris convention, the fulfillment of which was supervised by the Egyptian High Sanitary Council in Port Said and El Tor with a British as the head. 73

Against a backdrop of the growth of anti-religious pressure in the country, the Sovtorgflot created a continent-wide network of the hajj traffic serving the Muslim peoples from Western China, northern Afghanistan, and northern Iran. With the OGPU and NKID personnel tightly involved, the Soviet route to Mecca fiercely vied with its British counterpart. Naturally, this high competition persisted in Jidda, too. There in 1928 the Sovtorgflot relied on an Italian company “Latsarini,” particularly targeting those from western China coming there via India by British ship. One authoritative merchant from Kashghar, Nasir Akhun Khodzhaev, was such an ally that he tried to wipe up malignant rumors against the Sovtorgflot. But the Pro-British governor (qāiymaqām) of Jidda was so hostile to the Soviet venture that he thwarted and threatened one Latsarini’s agent Abdulla Musa. Still, a Sovtorgflot

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72 RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 601, ll. 2-3.
73 RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 601, ll. 15-16ob.
vessel managed to send 336 Chinese to Odessa.\textsuperscript{74} This hostility of the Jidda governor was a function of the broader tensions between the Saudis and the Soviets concerning the latter’s economic commitment in the Red Sea.

**Merchandise as Soviet Political Leverage**

Both Karim Khakimov and Nazir Tiuriakulov were enthusiastic about expanding Soviet commercial presence in Ibn Saud's country and Yemen. The major exports from the USSR were kerosene, benzene, flour, sugar, matches, timber, and manufactured goods.\textsuperscript{75} On the one hand, as the Saudi country and Yemen had little that they could export, the Soviets’ one-sided gains often deterred the Saudis and Yemenis from lively involvement with the Soviets. On the other hand, Ibn Saud and Imam Yahya cautiously steered their diplomacy amidst great power commercial rivalry. Ibn Saud approached the Soviets for a counterweight but behaved carefully so as not to irritate the British too much, with his country neighboring Transjordan and Iraq (both were the British mandatory territories), and its economy substantially dependent upon merchants from British India. Imam Yahya in his turn counted on Italian assistance in armament to obtain Asir, a territory disputed with the Saudis. He might regard the Soviets' material help as a useful supplement to Italy's aid, as he was much more disposed than Ibn Saud to reinforce the commercial relationship with the Soviets.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{74} RGAE, f. 7795, op. 1, d. 382, ll. 45-47, 121.


\textsuperscript{76} IOR, L/PS/11/248 P 2985, Lord Lloyd in Cairo to Sir Austen Chamberlain, 14 January 1928: Nazir Tiuriakulov, 48-49.
In November 1927, the Soviets attempted to offensively penetrate the Hijaz market. When the Soviet steamer *Tomp* called at Jidda with flour and sugar, they strove to sell their products at a lower price than that of the local market. Touting the Soviet products, a member of the Soviet agency even suggested that he was prepared to undercut the market at any price. Supported by Haji Abdullah, governor of Jidda and a local business tycoon, and Fuad Hamza, Saudi foreign minister, Indian merchants in Mecca and Medina resolved not to touch the Soviet goods. But their Turkish, Bukharan, and Syrian counterparts were willing to purchase from the Soviets. On 12 November a series of skirmishes broke out between supporters of the Jidda governor and the Bolsheviks, accompanied by “interminable squabbles with lightermen, customs and municipal officials, all of whom had been instructed to place every conceivable obstacle in the way of the new traders.” As a protest, a Bolshevik representative (presumably Karim Khakimov) set off for Mecca to see the Amir Faisal, Ibn Saud’s son governing the Hijaz part of the country, “threatening that if he received no satisfaction he would go to Riyadh and see [Ibn Saud] himself.” In the end, the *Tomp* steamed out of Jidda on 16 November, with the cargo lying at customs but not realized in the market.77

From this incident on, the Saudis imposed discriminatory taxes upon Soviet merchandise that practically made their trade impossible. By doing so, the Saudis attempted to be rewarded by the British: both Hamza and Faisal tried to seek “some mark of appreciation” for their protection of British trade in the Hijaz and even compensation for the material loss as “but for the [Saudi] government prohibition,

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many of the leading merchants were quite prepared to take up the Soviet goods.”78

The British were well aware of the Saudis’ maneuver. In their eyes, “the whole business is, on Ibn Saud’s part, something of an attempt—on recognised Afghan lines—to play on British apprehensions of Bolshevik intrigue for his own advantage.” They thought that Ibn Saud needed their support to establish his hold on Asir against Imam Yahya, and to avert Bolshevik propaganda in the Hijaz so that foreign governments would not prevent their subjects from undertaking the hajj.79 Tiuriakov struggled to end the impasse facing Soviet merchandise for five years out of his seven-year tenure, tenaciously negotiating with Abdullah Suleiman, Saudi finance minister competing with Hamza’s pro-British group. In 1933, the Saudis finally rescinded their restrictive measures against the Soviets. But the Saudis persisted with their maneuver. While soliciting the Soviets for long-term financial credit, industrial goods (including oil products and even weapons), and reduction in debt, the Saudi government nonetheless continued to stymie the signing of a friendship treaty with the Soviets.80

After the debacle of the trading venture in the Hijaz at the end of 1927, the Soviets strove to achieve a breakthrough in Yemen the next year. On 22 June 1928, the Soviet steamer Theodore Nette loaded with sugar and flour and carrying pilgrims from Batumi to Jidda arrived in Hodeida, accompanied by Naum Marcovitch Belkin,

78 IOR, L/PS/11/248 P 2985, Ibn Saud to Lord Lloyd, 6 December 1927; Faisal to the High Commissioner in Egypt, 9 December 1928; Consul at Jidda to Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 9 February 1929.
79 IOR, L/PS/11/248 P 2985, Lord Lloyd in Cairo to Sir Austen Chamberlain, 28 January 1928); an interior document of the Political Department dated 27 February 1928.
80 Nasir Tiuriakov, 27-28, 56-57, 62-64, 78-79, 93-95; IOR, L/PS/12/2117; RGAE, f. 4040 (Vsesoiuznoe ob”edinenie po torgovle so stranami Vostoka, Vostgostorg), op. 5, d. 22, ll. 13, 16, 17; d. 35, l. 10; Ali Mukhammad, “Sovetsko-saudovskie,” 56-57, 64-65, 70-73, 80, 86.
a Jew and Khakimov’s former second secretary in the Jidda Consulate, and G. A. Astakhov, former secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Ankara. Their aim was to conclude a commercial agreement with Yemen.\textsuperscript{81} To facilitate the negotiations, Belkin asked the NKID to send him “caviar, vodka, photos of communist chiefs, and Bolshevik literature in French, Arabic, or Turkish.” He added that “caviar is the most important as [I want] to distribute it amongst the high placed personages.”\textsuperscript{82}

In August, the Soviets reached an agreement with Imam Yahya. In British eyes, this was motivated by the pique he felt after his withdrawal from the Aden Protectorate by the British forces in the summer.\textsuperscript{83}

Khakimov’s move to Yemen as Soviet plenipotentiary and representative of the state trading company (Blizhvostgostorg) in January 1929 heralded the Soviet cultivation of commercial frontiers in Yemen. In marked contrast to the business in the Hijaz, the Soviet traders thrived particularly in selling oil. They were convinced that they would soon almost totally conquer the Yemen kerosene market.\textsuperscript{84}

According to a British report, out of the sales of oil in Hodeida in 1932, Soviet oil accounted for 55 percent and Shell & Anglo Persian oil, 41 percent.\textsuperscript{85} Moreover, in November 1930, having heard from Khakimov that the Yemeni government requested provision of full equipment for a modest textile factory, Pastukhov, head of the first Oriental Section of the NKID, regarded its materialization as “extremely desirable,” as its success should “significantly fortify our political and economic

\textsuperscript{81} IOR, R/20/A/3214, 7, 8, 12-13, 19, 20.
\textsuperscript{82} IOR, R/20/A/3214, 95-96.
\textsuperscript{83} IOR, R/20/A/3214, 127-128.
\textsuperscript{84} RGAE, f. 4040, op. 5, d. 35, l. 3; “Sovetsko-iemenskie torgovye vzaimootnosheniia,” Za industrializatsii (organ narkomata tiazheloi promyshlennosti), 17 January 1933, 4.
\textsuperscript{85} IOR, R/20/A/3548, 11-13. The report added that “the people are buying from the Russian oil only on account of the cheap price and not due to the superiority of the quality.”
Judging by Yemen's location at the crossroads of global trade as well as its struggle against the British for independence, L. M. Karakhan, deputy of the foreign affairs commissar, expected that Yemen was becoming a fulcrum in expanding Soviet exports to Eritrea, Ethiopia, and other countries of the Arabian Peninsula.87

The Soviet commercial enterprise in Yemen was also immersed in collaboration with native elites and merchants. In particular, Prince (Saif al-islām) Mohamed and his brother Ahmed became “constant and most solid purchasers” of Soviet products.88 Mohamed even tried to transfer to Soviet steamers those pilgrims who had booked tickets for Italian steamers.89 Prince Mohamed in his turn was keen to find a foreign market for salt produced by his own endeavor. Khakimov suggested to L. M. Karakhan that Mohamed's salt be transported by Soviet steamers to the Persian Gulf and its value be realized in southern Iran.90 These indigenous intermediaries did not always work just as the Soviets wished, however. One Misgadzhi, Prince Mohamed's favorite and “financial adviser,” acquired so much material and political capital thanks to his trading with the Soviets that he began to deal independently with Soviet merchandise. The office of the Soviet trading company (Vostgostorg) in Hodeida considered it necessary to watch him and remind him every day of his debts, as “the best among [Yemeni merchants] is, if not great, still a thief (vor).”91

86 RGAE, f. 4040, op. 5, d. 35, l. 11.
87 RGAE, f. 4040, op. 5, d. 36, l. 33.
88 RGAE, f. 4040, op. 5, d. 36, l. 37.
89 IOR, R/20/A/3214, 50-51, 56.
90 RGAE, f. 4040, op. 5, d. 36, ll. 38-39.
91 RGAE, f. 4040, op. 5, d. 36, ll. 10-11. In 1930 Blizhvostgostorg was liquidated and transformed into Vostgostorg in charge of the broader commerce in the East including
But the Soviets’ mismanagement might also betray the expectations of local collaborators. What irritated Khakimov most was the fact that “the center [Moscow, that is] too feebly reacted to local needs, too feebly guided local operation.”\textsuperscript{92} In the inland town of Ta’iz closely related to Aden in commercial terms, one Ali Ibn Vezir practically monopolized importation of kerosene and sugar. Khakimov was convinced that “we have to forge trading connections with Ali Ibn Vezir, who . . . would acquaint markets of southern Yemen with our merchandise.” Khakimov tried to connect Ali Ibn Vezir to the Port of Hodeida, where the Vostgostorg office was based, promising to provide him with fifty thousand boxes of kerosene there. But Khakimov later found that the headquarters of Vostgostorg met only half this quantity, which frustrated Ali Ibn Vezir and forced him to trade with the British Oil company Shell. Khakimov complained to Vostgostorg that “we at one stroke will destroy what has been built by long laborious work.”\textsuperscript{93}

Conclusion

In the second half of the 1930s, as Nazi Germany was becoming an increasing threat to the balance of power in Europe, the latter overwhelmingly occupied Soviet diplomacy to the detriment of the Middle East. As a result, the Soviets chose alliance with the British instead of challenging the latter’s interests everywhere possible. As was often the case with the fate of the great powers’ collaborators, Stalin’s government also readily abandoned its agents in regions where the Russians and the British had vied for influence. In 1938, it resolved to close the

\textsuperscript{92} RGAE, f. 4040, op. 5, d. 36, l. 40.
\textsuperscript{93} RGAE, f. 4040, op. 5, d. 36, ll. 41-44.
residences in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Iran. True, after Nazir
Tiuriakulov, Karim Khakimov was once again dispatched to Saudi Arabia as
ambassador in 1936. But in September 1937, Khakimov was recalled to Moscow,
arrested, and executed in the middle of the Great Terror.94

This was the end of Russia’s endeavor to build a seaborne empire around the Red
Sea that had begun in the 1890s. The Bolshevik enterprise inherited much of tsarist
legacy ranging from such fundamental infrastructure as steamship and railroads to
strategic thinking to vie with the British dominance. Both the tsarist and Soviet
officials used Muslim intermediaries to forge webs of collaboration with indigenous
political and commercial notables. The hajj kept its significance as an opportunity
through which to augment either Russian or Soviet prestige in the Muslim world,
particularly adjacent countries. Such a perspective derived in the tsarist period
mostly from diplomats operating in Ottoman territory, and in the 1920s, directly
from Moscow. Thus, wielding anti-imperialist slogans, the Central Muslim Spiritual
Board managed to find a common language with the Bolsheviks and to maintain
their niche in a state increasingly hostile to Islam. Furthermore, from the late
1920s to the mid-1930s, the Soviets attempted to nurture and expand a fledgling
commercial venture on which the tsarist steamship companies had embarked into
political leverage enabling them to vie with the British, Dutch, and Italians in the
Hijaz and Yemen.

A persistent thread running through the late tsarist and early Soviet diplomacy,
either as a player of the Great Game or as a devotee of anti-imperialism, was the

rivalry with the British, spreading from western China through Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey to the Red Sea. This vast space was not merely a theater of strategic rivalry among great powers, however. It was the ways of involvement in local politics that counted if they were to sustain their political and economic presence there. It was this practice that often eclipsed the Bolsheviks’ anti-imperialist cause, along with logistical difficulties, a lack of resources, and miscommunication between Moscow and its functionaries at different levels. The Soviets and the British were enmeshed in internal feuding in the Saudi government between Fuad Hamza and Prince Faisal on the one hand and Abdullah Suleiman on the other. Assembling the Mecca Congress in 1926 and inviting Soviet delegates, Ibn Saud established himself as the new protector of the Holy Cities and thereby amplified the British paranoia of global Muslim unity in collusion with the Bolsheviks. In the aftermath of the Great War, the significance of Mecca and Medina rose as hubs of those political exiles alienated from the turbulence of new state building in the Muslim regions of Eurasia. Representatives of great powers had to monitor and keep contact with these dissidents, too. In Yemen, where the Soviets were relatively successful in opening new markets, they still hinged upon native collaborators either trying to make themselves as prosperous as possible by means of Soviet goods or resiliently seeking other European partners, British or Italians, to compensate for the deal with the Soviets when it turned sour.

It remains to be studied whether the bricks left by early Soviet diplomats ranging from Chicherin and Karakhan to Khakimov, Tiuriakulov, and other lower functionaries would serve as a foundation of diplomacy in the Arabian Peninsula during the Cold War and after. It was not until 1990 that the Soviet Union restored
diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. At that time, 1,500 Soviet Muslims undertook the hajj. In recent years, more than twenty thousand Russian citizens annually go to Mecca, which enables Dagestani Il'ias Magomed-Salamovich Umakhanov, chair of the Hajj Council within the Russian government, to count Russia as a Muslim power. In South Yemen, the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen established in 1970, the USSR had an air base at al-'Anad near Aden, the largest on the peninsula dwarfing US presence. Usma bin Ladin (his family originally from Hadramawt, South Yemen) and his Arab associates proud of having ousted the Soviets from Afghanistan fought against the ruling socialist party in the 1994 Yemen civil war, which was ironically in accord with US interests. The western part of the peninsula continues to be a place where great power rivalry and networking by pious and dissident individuals are intricately intertwined.
