From Conservative to Permissive: The Shift in Saudi Arabia's Management Approach in the Shadow of English Relations [1]

Utku AYBUDAK [2]

Abstract

This study examines the founding period of the current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with a particular focus on the role that Saudi-British relations played in shaping the nation's development. Experts believe that these diplomatic ties, which were established prior to World War I, were instrumental in enhancing Saudi Arabia's position in the region. Through its interactions with the British and its ability to adapt to changing global politics, the Saudi government learned to consider realpolitik in its decision-making processes. As a result, the main argument of this study is that the Saudi perception of Wahhabism underwent a transformation, shifting from a conservative interpretation to a more permissive one. Through this investigation, we aim to contextualize the evolution of the Saudi government's understanding of religion, starting from its highly uncompromising stance in the Arabian desert and culminating in the Kingdom's proclamation in 1932.

Keywords: *Hejaz, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom, Wahhabism*

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Muhafazakârlıktan Müsamahakârlığa: İngiliz İlişkilerinin Gölgesinde Suudi Arabistan'ın Yönetim Anlayışındaki Değişim

Utku AYBUDAK [3]

Öz

Bu çalışmada, Suud-İngiliz ilişkilerinin, bugünkü Suudi Arabistan Krallığı'nın gelişimini şekillendirmede oynadığı role odaklanarak, ülkenin kuruluş dönemini incelenmektedir. Araştırmacılar, Birinci Dünya Savaşı öncesinde İngilizlerle kurulan diplomatik bağların, Suudi Arabistan'ın bölgedeki konumunu güçlendirmede etkili olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. İngilizlerle olan etkileşimleri ve değişen küresel siyasete uyum sağlama becerisi sayesinde Suud hanedanı, karar alma süreçlerinde reelpolitiği göz önünde bulundurmayı öğrenmiştir. Bu çalışmanın temel argümanı, Suud Hanedanının Vahhabilik algısının muhafazakâr bir yorumdan daha müsamahakâr bir yoruma doğru kayarak bir dönüşüm geçirdiğidir. Bu araştırmada, Suudi hükümetinin din anlayışının, Arap çölündeki son derece tavizsiz duruşundan başlayarak, 1932'de Krallığın ilanıyla sonuçlanan evrimi okuyucuya sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Birleşik Krallık, Hicaz, Suudi Arabistan, Vahhabilik*

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Introduction

Salafism and Wahhabism are subjects that have received increasing attention and scrutiny, particularly in Türkiye. This study focuses on the early transformation of Saudi Wahhabism and the relationship between Saudi Arabia and United Kingdom (UK). To avoid confusion, it is important to clarify that the term "Saud Wahhabism" refers to the view of Islam adopted by the state founded by Abdulaziz ibn Saud, which is now known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and was previously known as the Emirate of Saud III.

It is important to note that while the State of Saud is commonly associated with the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, it is not the only entity that adheres to this interpretation. There are also other Wahhabi interpretations that are opposed to the House of Saud and the state. However, these intra-sectarian differences fall outside the scope of this study. It is beyond the scope of this study to delve into a theological analysis or explanation of Saudi Wahhabism. The primary aim of this study is not to engage in theological discussions, but rather to examine the pragmatic approach adopted by the Saudi leader and the shifts in religious understanding within the context of diplomatic relations and political-economic circumstances, while also considering the relevant historical framework. In order to fully understand the factors that contributed to the rise of Abdulaziz ibn Saud as a powerful figure in the region, it is necessary to examine the socio-economic structure of Arabia. Therefore, the first chapter of this study is dedicated to summarizing the geographical features of the Arabian Peninsula and outlining its social and economic structure. The fragmented nature of Arabian society, the harsh geographical conditions, and the isolated location of the Najid region in particular, were important factors in understanding the success of the Sauds.

It is crucial to have a background in the history of the Saud tribe in order to understand the foundations upon which the current structure was built. The present-day Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is not the first state established by the Saud tribe. Two previous attempts, known as the Emirate of Saud I and Emirate of Saud II, preceded it. The Emirate of Saud I played a particularly significant role in the emergence and spread of the Wahhabi sect. As a result, the second part of this study is devoted to exploring the failed state-building efforts that preceded the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Ikhwan Organization, which made Abdulaziz ibn Saud, the founder of the Emirate of Saud III, a dominant military force in the region, is specifically addressed as a subheading in the second chapter.

Finally, the third section of this study addresses the relationship between Saudi Arabia and UK. The events of World War I, in particular, presented significant opportunities for Abdulaziz ibn Saud to extend his sphere of influence. Over time, the House of Saud systematically eliminated rival power centers in the region, eventually leaving Sharif Hussein in control of the holy lands. Through their superior military strength, the Sauds were able to defeat Sharif Hussein and become the sole rulers of both the Hejaz region and the Najid region. However, the relationships and agreements developed with UK during this process are of significant note. Additionally, as Abdulaziz ibn Saud expanded his borders, his understanding of governance evolved and some of the rules he implemented in the Najid region were not applied in the more cosmopolitan regions he acquired. When faced with resistance from conservative Wahhabis due to his flexible approach to governance, Abdulaziz ibn Saud took decisive action by disbanding the Ikhwan organization, thereby solidifying his position as the sole ruler of Arabia..

Geographical and Socio-Economic Structure of Arabia

The Arabian Peninsula, particularly its central regions, was isolated from the rest of the world due to the absence of modern modes of communication and transportation. The barren deserts covering the region and the resulting harsh climate, which is inhospitable to agriculture, have resulted in low population densities. To

the west of the peninsula lies the Hejaz region, which is home to the cities of Mecca, Medina, and Jeddah and has both symbolic and economic value. To the east lies the Persian Gulf, which, like the Hejaz region, has economic value due to its proximity to important maritime trade routes. The region in the center of the peninsula with low population density is called "Najid". The Najid region in the center, the Basra region in the east, and the Hejaz region in the west, constitute the three major parts of the Arabian Peninsula. It borders the Ottoman Empire provinces of Damascus and Baghdad to the north and Oman and Yemen to the south.

When examining the patterns of urbanization in the Najid region, where Wahhabism emerged, it becomes apparent that the oasis-city model is dominant. The cities in this region are built around oases, which are scarce in the desert and generally far from each other. As a result, communication and economic relations between cities are not particularly intense. Agriculture in this region is only possible with human irrigation due to the climate, and even then, palm and cereals are the main crops grown. The production deficit is compensated for through trade relations with Syria, Iraq, and Yemen (Vassiliev, 2000, pp. 29-64).

In addition to geographical isolation and a harsh climate, the social structure in this region is highly stratified, hierarchical, and traditional. Society is divided into tribes, and there are three main hierarchical ranks determined by lifestyle. At the top of the hierarchy are the Bedouin tribes, who are nomadic and herd camels. In the middle are the semi-nomadic tribes, who herd sheep and goats. At the bottom of the social hierarchy are the settled people and peasants. Within the same hierarchical level, different tribes can also be ranked as superior or subordinate to one another (Wynbrandt, 2010, pp. 22-23). Members of the camel-herding Bedouin tribes, which exist in extremely challenging natural conditions, are also skilled camel drivers and warriors. This characteristic, which has been shaped by the demands of the geography throughout history, has made these tribes the military leaders of the region. However, since tribes operate independently, united armies do not emerge; conflicts are more likely to involve instances of looting and blood feuds rather than wars. Vasiliev (2000), the author of one of the most comprehensive works on the history and social structure of Arabia, even states that a Bedouin who has not engaged in plunder is not eligible for marriage.

It is not difficult to imagine that life in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in Central and Eastern Arabia, was extremely static and resistant to change. Although the administration of the holy lands passed to the Ottoman Empire as a result of Yavuz Sultan Selim's campaigns in the east, it is known that the Najid region was largely unaffected by Ottoman rule throughout history (Kurşun, 1998, pp. 6). It is worth noting that the Ottoman Empire had to pay the Bedouin tribes in the region every year in exchange for their agreement not to attack the pilgrimage caravans during the pilgrimage period. This provides insight into the nature of the relationship between the Ottomans and the people of Najid (Güner, 2019). The Ottoman Empire, which refrained from interfering with the social and economic structure of the region, sought to address any potential problems that might arise from the region in a non-violance manner. If the Bedouin tribes' looting reached an unacceptable level, military action would be taken, as ordered by the Sharif of Mecca, to suppress them.

The static way of life in the Arabian region remained largely unchanged within the framework described in this chapter until the emergence of Wahhabism. After the rise of Wahhabism, military and political relations in the region underwent transformation, and in the subsequent period, economic life underwent significant changes with the discovery of oil.

The political events leading up to the establishment of the present-day Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which was historically known as the Third Emirate of Saud in the region, will be briefly discussed in the next section.

The Road to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as it is known today, is the third Emirate of Saud in history. The first two Emirates of Saud were founded by the same tribe but were unable to endure due to historical circumstances. While the primary focus of this study is not to provide a political history narrative, it is important to have a historical background in order to understand the transformation of Saud Wahhabism. In this context, the events leading up to the establishment of the Emirate of Saud III will be briefly discussed, followed by an explanation of the hijra and ihwan organizations founded by Abdulaziz ibn Saud himself, which were crucial in enabling the Emirate of Saud III to assert its dominance in the region.

A Brief History of Arabia From the Emergence of Wahhabism to the Establishment of the Emirate of Saud III

The emergence of Wahhabism changed the fate of the Arabian Peninsula. The House of Saud's backing of the Wahhabi faith has served as a unifying factor for the Arab tribes in the Najid region, who have a history of intertribal conflict. To fully comprehend this historical process, it is necessary to also understand the religious structure of the region. When analysing the Arabian Peninsula, it is evident that the Najid region has a very puritanical Hanbalite belief. However, the same level of uniformity does not hold true for the rest of the peninsula. In areas of Arabia outside of Najid, there are people of various Shiite, Ibadi, and Sunni sects (Vassiliev, 2000, pp. 46).

Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi sect, was born in 1703 in the city of Uyeyna in the Najid region. As a member of a family of scholars, he traveled to important centers of Islamic civilization such as Basra, Baghdad, Qom, and Hemedan to study Islamic sciences. After developing his own interpretation of Islam, the details and scope of which are beyond the scope of this study, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab recognized that he would not be able to spread his doctrine in the region of his birth and migrated to the city of Dir'iye in the Najid region.

The Saud tribe is one of the most influential powers in the city of Dir'iye. Abd al-Wahhab was highly successful in disseminating his teachings, which would later be known as Wahhabism, in the region and gained the support of Emir Saud, the leader of the Saud tribe. In 1745, Emir Saud pledged to Abdul Wahhab that he would do everything in his power to promote his teachings, resulting in the establishment of the first Saud state, which is historically known as the First Emirate of Saud (Anishchenkova, 2020, pp. 40-41).

As previously mentioned, the Wahhabi faith acted as a binding agent that united the Bedouin tribes in the Najid desert, which had been unable to unite for centuries; from an Ibn Khaldun perspective, it allowed the people living in this region to transition from the asabiyyah of lineage (nasab) to the asabiyyah of reason. By the time Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab passed away in 1792, the Emirate of Saud I had established its dominance in the Najid region and turned its attention to the Holy Land. The absolute military superiority that resulted from unifying the Bedouin tribes made the Saud tribe an increasingly powerful force in the Arabian Peninsula.

In 1803, the holy land finally came under the control of the Sauds and, subsequently, the Wahhabis for the first time. However, this action was a major challenge to the legitimacy of the Ottoman Empire and the Empire naturally did not remain indifferent. Selim III, who was the reigning monarch at the time, commissioned the Egyptian Khedive, Kavalali Mehmet Ali Pasha, with the task of removing the Sauds from the holy lands. In 1813, Kavalali sent an army to the Hejaz for this purpose. The Saud tribe, which had achieved absolute military dominance in the Arabian Peninsula, was unable to withstand the modern Egyptian troops, and the Egyptian army recaptured Hijaz from the Sauds and advanced into Najid. This campaign is known as the collapse of the Emirate of Saud I (Al-Rasheed, 2010, pp. 23).

Despite the fact that modern Egyptian troops had an absolute advantage over the Emirate of Saud's army, which was made up of Bedouin tribesmen, the cost of maintaining a presence in the region steadily increased as Egyptian garrisons remained in the Najid desert. The logistics and supplies needed to maintain control in the region were carried out under very difficult conditions, and Egyptian troops were tired of the hit-and-run raids by the Bedouins. Under these circumstances, Egyptian troops withdrew from the Najid towards the Hejaz and the Najid was left to its own fate, as it had been for centuries.

It did not take long for the Saud tribe to regroup in the Najid region. Turki bin Abdullah bin Mohammed, a notable member of the tribe, seized the opportunity presented by the absence of authority in the region and established the political entity known as the Second Emirate of Saud in 1824. The events that occurred during the Second Emirate of Saud are outside the scope of this study. However, unlike the First Emirate of Saud, during this period, the Sauds learned from their previous experiences and realized that they would not be able to sustain a state without using diplomatic means. In this respect, the Emirate of Saud II placed more emphasis on diplomatic relations than its predecessor (Al-Rasheed, 2010, pp. 27-29).

In 1891, the Battle of Muleyda, fought against the Rashidite tribe, another important power in the region and supported by the Ottoman Empire, resulted in the destruction of the Emirate of Saud II (Wynbrandt, 2010, pp. 163). After the defeat, the House of Saud was exiled to Kuwait.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as it is known today, is historically the third Emirate of Saud. While the House of Saud lived in exile in Kuwait, it did not abandon its political ambitions over Najid in particular and the Arabian Peninsula in general. Favorable conditions began to emerge again with the approach of World War I. As a result of the raids by the Rashididid Emirate, which was protected by the Ottoman Empire, on regions (such as Kuwait and the Persian Gulf) that were of great importance to UK, UK sought an ally in the region and decided to cooperate with the Saud tribe (Troeller, 2013, pp. 1-2).

In 1902, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, backed by British support, took the city of Riyadh, the capital of today's Saudi Arabia, from the Rashidids. It is worth noting that Troeller (2013, pp. 21) stated that the fact that the people of Riyadh, being Wahhabi, favored the Saud administration was an important factor in the capture of the city. The Rashidis' sole rule in the Najid region, which lasted slightly over a decade, came to an end with the capture of Riyadh by the Sauds. In the following years, conflicts occurred between the two major powers of the region. However, in 1906, Ibn Rashid, the leader of the Rashid tribe, was killed in a raid, and the period of Saudi dominance began anew.

The Key to Military Superiority: Hijras and Ikhwan
The Hijrahs and the Ikhwan organization were of vital importance on the road to the Emirate of Saud III. Therefore, this section will briefly discuss what these organizations are and their importance. Abdulaziz ibn Saud believed that Wahhabism had been neglected, especially in the Emirate of Saud II, and he aimed to establish social formations that placed greater emphasis on religion. The Hijrahs were the embodiment of this idea.

As Ibn Saud consolidated his power in the Najid region, he dispatched Wahhabi scholars who were powerful orators and loyal to him to the Bedouin tribes. Their primary task was to convince the tribes to abandon their centuries-old way of life and settle down. Ibn Saud aimed to establish new settlements where different tribes lived together and practiced agriculture. However, due to various factors such as the long-standing blood feuds between many tribes and the fact that nomadic camel herding was considered the most honourable way of life in Arab society, this goal was very difficult to achieve. It seemed unlikely that the Bedouin tribes would sell

their camels and other animals and start farming on the fixed land they were offered. However, as Ibn Saud's preachers convinced the tribes one by one, hijras (communal settlements) began to be established. The Bedouin tribes were unexpectedly united under the banner of the Wahhabi unifying identity (Kostiner, 1985).

A hijra is the name of a settlement larger than a village but smaller than a city where nomadic Bedouin tribes settled down. It is known that around 150 hijrahs were established within a short period of time, with an average population of 1,500 (Demirci, 2013, pp. 65). The mosque served as the center of a hijra, and each family that chose to settle there was provided with sufficient land and agricultural tools to sustain themselves. As expected, the hijras were characterized by a strict and extreme interpretation of Wahhabi doctrine.

The significance of the social transformation from a political and military perspective was that every family that established itself in the hijrahs pledged their loyalty to Ibn Saud and were required to assist him when he requested help or called upon them to participate in a war. This organization was known as the Ikhwan.

The Ikhwan organization enabled Ibn Saud to become an unparalleled military force against the various factions within the Najid region and much of the Arabian Peninsula. The Ikhwan organization played a vital role in the power struggles in the region during World War I and the subsequent establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Kostiner, 1985, pp. 322). However, in addition to the significant role it played, this organization, which adhered to an uncompromising interpretation of Wahhabism, also altered its attitude towards Ibn Saud as his policies evolved, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

British-Saudi Relations and the Change in the Mentality of the Saud Administration

The House of Saud, which emerged as a major center of power in the Arabian region with the assistance of the Ikhwan organization, nevertheless, learned from history and preferred to strengthen its diplomatic relations rather than acting recklessly. These diplomatic connections were maintained not only with other local actors in the region, but also with the major regional powers, the Ottoman Empire and the British Empire.

Ibn Saud led an anti-Ottoman alliance with the prominent Arab actors in the region, including Sharif Hussein, who controlled the Hejaz region (Silverfarb, 1980, pp. 167). As a result of this treaty, the regional leaders pledged to unite in the event that the Ottoman Empire attacked any of its members. It is worth noting that the competing power centers in Arabia formed an alliance against the Ottoman Empire.

In addition to local actors, the British also cultivated close relations with the Saudis before, during, and after World War I. With the impending Great War, Arabia became a significant region for the British, as important maritime trade routes to the east and west of the peninsula, particularly the Persian Gulf, could potentially pose a threat to India, a highly valuable colony for the British Empire. Furthermore, due to the possibility of military operations during the war, it was likely that British troops would need to cross the Arabian desert and move on to Syria and Iraq. For all of these reasons, the British required reliable partners in Arabia. The most crucial of these partners were Sharif Hussein in the Hejaz region and the House of Saud in the Najid region.

British support for the expansionist ambitions of the House of Saud can be seen throughout the entire political and military career of Abdulaziz ibn Saud. In fact, one of the first tasks that UK assigned to Ibn Saud was the destruction of the Rashidi tribe, which was allied with the Ottomans in the region. This action was intended to prevent potential looting raids and harassment attacks from the Rashidis in the event that British troops crossed through the Najid desert during the war.

Anticipating that if the Wahhabis defeated the Rashidis and gained control of Najid, they would not stop there and would target other local actors in the region, these actors sought to support the Rashidis during the conflict between the Saudis and the Rashidis. Requests for assistance to the Rashidis by the Sharif of Hejaz and Arab leaders in Kuwait, which was then under complete British control, were met with a British veto; UK requested that the Rashidis not be aided (Al-Rasheed, 2010, pp. 41). As demonstrated, there was an indirect level of support from UK even as the House of Saud became the sole ruler of the Najid region. In the subheadings of this chapter, the shift in the perception of religion and governance of the Sauds will be examined through more specific historical cases.

Treaty of Darin

The Treaty of Darin is significant as it is the first official agreement between the British government and the Sauds. It is also a crucial first step in terms of international recognition of the House of Saud, which was just beginning to institutionalize politically and was transitioning towards the Emirate of Saud III.

Ibn Saud, who was one of the most powerful military powers in the region, gained an advantageous position at the negotiating table when World War I broke out. Furthermore, the declaration of jihad by the Ottoman Sultan, who was also the caliph, prompted the British to hasten their diplomacy in Arabia. However, according to Silverfarb (1980: 170), a leading researcher on the region, the declaration of jihad had no impact on Abdulaziz ibn Saud and he "lost none of his antipathy towards the Turks". It was certain that the Saudis would not fight alongside the Turks. However, they also had conditions for fighting on the side of the British. After lengthy negotiations, Ibn Saud, who was aware of his position and value in the field, signed the Darin Treaty on December 26, 1915.

The Darin agreement begins with a clause recognizing Ibn Saud as the 'sole' and 'independent' ruler of the Najid region and defining the boundaries of the Najid region. The inclusion of the word "independent" in the agreement is worth noting as a significant detail that Ibn Saud took into consideration (Wilkinson, 1991, pp. 135).

The first article not only declares that Ibn Saud is the ruler of the region, but also acknowledges that Ibn Saud's fathers previously ruled the region and that the right to rule in the future will pass to Ibn Saud's heirs. Thus, the rule of the House of Saud in the Najid region was recognized by the superpower of the time. However, the primary focus of the British in the agreement was not to establish the sovereignty of the Najid region. Rather, UK was more concerned with the security of its colonies in the region. The second article of the Darin Agreement included a pledge by Ibn Saud not to attack Qatar, Bahrain, Oman or any other territory under British protection.

Under the terms of the Darin agreement, it was also agreed that the British would provide Ibn Saud with financial and military support. Lastly, the British pledged to assist the Sauds in the event of an attack on them by any "external" power. Cox, the British official who managed relations and signed the agreements on behalf of the British in the Arabian region, stated that there was no harm in making such a commitment because the Turks were the only power other than the British that could be involved in the Central Arabian region (Wilkinson, 1991, pp. 136).

Thus, with the Darin Agreement, Ibn Saud not only received financial and military aid from the British, but also assurance against a possible Ottoman attack. Moreover, while the British intended to include in the text of the agreement the phrase "aid against an "unprovoked attack", Ibn Saud was uncomfortable with the word "unprovoked" and had it removed from the text of the agreement with the intention that the aid would apply to all attacks (Wilkinson, 1991, pp. 138).

Under the terms of the agreement, in exchange for this recognition and military-financial aid, Ibn Saud, who solidified his dominance over Najid, promised to refrain from interfering with the British colonies. It is possible that the Ikhwan organization and conservative Wahhabis did not pay heed to the promise of non-aggression against the British colonies in the face of lands of great spiritual value such as the Hejaz. However, as time passed and the Sauds approached their natural borders, these limitations would begin to elicit pushback.

The Khurma Case

The Khurma case is of historical significance as it was the first incident in which the Ikhwan and Ibn Saud had serious tensions and holding paramount importance as the primary indicator of the evolution in the Sauds' governance approach.

Khurma is a town about a hundred kilometers from Mecca and three hundred kilometers from Riyadh. Although it is considered to be within the borders of the Hejaz region, it forms the border between the Hejaz and the Najid regions. Throughout history, it has been an important stopping point for trade caravans traveling from Najid to Hejaz (Kostiner, 1985, pp. 303).

As the town of Khurma was located in the Hejaz region, it was naturally governed by Sharif Hussein, the Emir of Hejaz. However, the town was also accessible from the Najid region and subject to Wahhabi influence, so the inhabitants eventually embraced Wahhabism. Sources also mention that a Hijra of 500 people was established near Khurma (Habib, 1970, pp. 163-164). Sharif Hussein was troubled by the town's growing inclination towards Wahhabism and the fact that its governor and qadi were establishing relations with Ibn Saud. In response, Sharif Hussein initially sought to appoint a new governor of Khurma, and when the existing governor of Khurma refused to relinquish control, he sent a military force to take over the town in 1917. During this period, the Wahhabi population of Khurmeh sent letters of support to the Ikhwan organization and Ibn Saud. As mentioned earlier, there were villages in the vicinity of Khurma that had joined the Ikhwan organization, as well as a hijra. Given the context, the Ikhwan organization wished to assist the people of Khurma. However, in line with the interests of the House of Saud and British demands, Ibn Saud sought to eliminate the presence of the Rashidi tribe in the Najid region and become the sole ruler of Najid. This marked the first major disagreement between the Ikhwan and Ibn Saud. It was even said to be the first time that the Ikhwan deviated from its characteristic features and openly opposed Ibn Saud (Kostiner, 1985, pp. 303).

As the disagreement escalated, Ibn Saud held a meeting with the leaders of the Ikhwan in a region called Shakra. There, after lengthy discussions, he convinced them to embark on an expedition against the Rashidis, but this discussion was one of the most significant sparks of the disagreement that would occur later on (Habib, 1970, pp. 164).

The Khurma incident is also a significant indicator that after the Darin agreement, the religious understanding of the House of Saud began to adapt to the surrounding conditions and political landscape. Rather than supporting the Wahhabis, who were under attack by Sharif Hussein, the House of Saud chose to launch an expedition against the Rashidis due to political expediency and diplomatic relations.

The Uqayr Protocol

The Khurma incident was a significant disagreement between the Ikhwan and Ibn Saud, but it was not the only one. A military/social organization created by Ibn Saud himself was gradually becoming beyond his control and acting on its own without taking into account "realpolitik". This situation would gradually start to jeopardize the position of the House of Saud in the region. The Uqayr protocol, concluded subsequent to a military conflict, holds significant importance in elucidating the pragmatic shift in the governance paradigm of the House of Saud within the historical context of Arabia and warrants thorough examination.

In 1922, despite the Darin agreement mentioned in the previous chapters, a group of Ikhwan, organized among themselves, attacked the British-protected town of Tureyb (a town near Amman, the capital of present-day Jordan) and massacred the Ben al-Shaqir tribe living there. Since Wahhabi faith is based on a more literal interpretation of Islam and has relatively sharper lines, it is easier to target and declare as infidels those with opposing beliefs. For this reason, the Ikhwan organization often did not hesitate to attack and put to the sword communities that "did not hold the correct beliefs as they did" and to take their property as booty.

The attack on the town of Tureyb and the complete destruction of a tribe under British protection meant crossing red lines for UK. Regardless of how useful Ibn Saud and the Ikhwan organization might be for their political ambitions in the region, ignoring such a move would have severely damaged UK's weight and prestige. Therefore, British military units responded very harshly to the aggression. As a result of an operation in which the air force participated, only eight of the 1,500-strong Ikhwan unit that participated in the Tureyb Ghazwa were able to return to their homes (Çakır, 2016, pp. 53). This, of course, meant the complete destruction of the unit.

Ibn Saud's response to such a high number of casualties was eagerly awaited. However, Ibn Saud preferred to take strategic steps in favor of diplomacy, which was more in line with realpolitik. In fact, the circumstances of the time prevented Ibn Saud from jeopardizing his relationship with the British. Economically, he relied on British aid starting with the Darin agreement. Although he had become the sole ruler of the Najid region, the Najid was the least productive region for Arabia. At that time, the Sauds lacked the economic resources to maintain a state of constant conflict. Given these circumstances, he declared to the British that the Ikhwan had carried out this attack without his knowledge and that the eight survivors would be duly punished (Çakır, 2016, pp. 53).

Despite the confrontation with the British and Ibn Saud's open attitude, the Ikhwan organization did not refrain from attacking British protectorates. After the Tureyb aggression, the Ikhwan organization began to attack the British protectorates in present-day Iraq and Kuwait. As a result, High Commissioner Percy Cox, the highest-ranking British official in the region, imposed the Uqayr Protocol on Ibn Saud. The 7 November 1922 Uqayr Protocol determined the borders of the Najid region with Iraq and Kuwait. It stated in the agreement that the determined borders could not be violated for military purposes and that military camps, gatherings, and positions could not be established in the regions close to the border. Therefore, UK secured the regions important to it against attacks by the Wahhabis. On the other side of the agreement was the tension between Ibn Saud, who made decisions based on diplomatic relations and UK's irrefutable power in the region, and the Ikhwan, who followed an uncompromising Wahhabi creed. With each new development, the Ikhwan grew increasingly distant from its leader and saw him as more deviated from the "right path".

Capture and Administration of Hejaz

Although it brought international recognition to the House of Saud's sovereignty in Najid, the treaties with UK made the east, north, and south of the region impregnable. Therefore, the only option left for expansion for Ibn Saud was Hejaz, the holy land. The military campaign towards Mecca and Medina, which the Ikhwan had eagerly awaited, was now the only option left for Ibn Saud. To lay the groundwork for the legitimacy of such an operation, the forces of Najid and the forces of Hejaz controlled by Sharif Hussein began to clash in the border regions. The region was becoming increasingly unstable, and UK, unable to tolerate the conflict between its two local allies any longer, decided to cut off aid to both sides (Çakır, 2016, pp. 53). However, contrary to expectations, this decision did not bring an end to the conflicts, but rather spurred the Saudi side to accelerate their plans for the Hejaz region. As previously mentioned, it is not possible for the Najid region to emerge victorious in the economic competition with the Hejaz region in the medium to long term. The cities of Mecca and Medina not only hold significant prestige for those who control them, but also serve as a significant source of economic income through the pilgrimage industry.

Military superiority can only provide a temporary advantage, so the circumstances prompted Ibn Saud to act quickly to take control of the Hejaz region. On March 3, 1924, shortly after the Turkish Republic abolished the Caliphate, Sharif Hussein declared himself Caliph on March 6, 1924, which gave Ibn Saud the justification he needed to go to war. The Ikhwan troops initially captured the city of Taif. Upon entering the city, the Wahhabi troops carried out a massacre of non-combatants, which would later serve as a psychological pressure factor in the course of the war (Schneer, 2015, pp. 389). In October 1924, Mecca surrendered; Medina surrendered on December 5, 1925 and Jeddah surrendered on December 22, 1925. After the fall of Taif, other cities were unwilling to risk a long siege and surrendered without a fight, enabling Abdul Aziz ibn Saud to become the sole ruler of both Najid and Hejaz.

The cities of Jeddah and Medina agreed to surrender without a fight on the condition that Ikhwan troops would not enter the cities. The Ikhwan, who had been under siege in desert conditions for a prolonged period and were anticipating a significant reward from these two wealthy cities, were extremely disappointed when Ibn Saud agreed to this condition (Büyükkara, 2016, pp. 99-101). However, the issues between Ibn Saud and the Ikhwan were far from resolved with the conquest of the Hijaz region.

The Hejaz region was much more diverse than the Najid region and contained cities with populations belonging to various sects of Islam. Additionally, the city of Jeddah, in particular, served as the gateway of Arabia to the world and was home to many companies and state representatives conducting business with the Arabian region. While Wahhabism's intolerant stance towards all forms of innovation was suitable for the deserts of Central Arabia, maintaining it in the Hejaz region could lead to conflicts with both the Islamic world and the Western world. Recognizing this, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud excluded the Ikhwan from the administration of the Hejaz region and adopted a more permissive approach to governance in the Hejaz region than in Najid. However, this decision further exacerbated the rift between the Ikhwan and Ibn Saud.

While Wahhabism's intolerant stance towards all forms of innovation was suitable for the deserts of Central Arabia, maintaining it in the Hejaz region could lead to conflicts with both the Islamic world and the Western world. Recognizing this, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud excluded the Ikhwan from the administration of the Hejaz region and adopted a more permissive approach to governance in the Hejaz region than in Najid. However, this decision further exacerbated the rift between the Ikhwan and Ibn Saud. Finally, in 1926, the leaders of the Ikhwan released a declaration in which Abdulaziz ibn Saud was severely criticized for his rule in the Hejaz region. The criticism included accusations of permitting practices such as hookah and tobacco use, allowing sects outside of Islam to perform the Hajj pilgrimage, and allowing innovations like telephones, telegraphs, and automobiles to be introduced into the holy land (Silverfarb, 1982, pp. 228).

Another notable criticism in the declaration is the accusation that the Al Saud regime prevented the people from waging jihad in non-believing regions. This criticism seems to be directed at Ibn Saud's agreements with the British. With the capture of the Hejaz region, the Saudi state had reached its natural borders, and all of its neighbors were under British protection. It is understandable that it would be difficult for the Ikhwan organization, which was accustomed to the spoils of war and placed war at the center of its existence, to accept this situation. A period of peace would also mean a decline in the political and social significance of the Ikhwan. In an effort to reduce tension, Ibn Saud organized a large consultation in Riyadh in 1927, which was attended by the leaders of the Ikhwan, high ulema, and tribal leaders. As a result of this meeting, Ibn Saud made promises to placate the Ikhwan, such as implementing Wahhabi rules in the Hejaz, prohibiting all innovations, and mobilizing resources to educate the Shiites about Islam. In return, he required them to acknowledge that he was the legitimate head of state and that only he had the authority to order jihad (Habib, 1970, pp. 219-254).

Following the agreement with the Ikhwan, another agreement was signed between the Saudi state and UK in 1927, called the Jeddah Agreement. According to this agreement, which replaced the Darin Agreement, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud was recognized by UK as the king of both Najid and Hejaz, and in exchange for this recognition, he promised not to attack British protectorates. This effectively ended the concept of jihad for the Saudi state. However, there were Ikhwan units that did not recognize Ibn Saud's agreements with "infidels" and continued to carry out raids against Iraq and Kuwait. This further strained relations between Ibn Saud and the Ikhwan. Finally, in 1929, an Ikhwan unit attacked a caravan directly linked to the Saudi state, giving Ibn Saud the opportunity he had long been waiting for. He immediately declared war against the Ikhwan, and after two battles, the Ikhwan presence in Arabia was eliminated (Vassiliev, 2000, pp. 274-281). Thus, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud had destroyed the greatest power that could rival him in the administration of Arabia.

In the Jeddah Agreement with the British, Ibn Saud's state was referred to as the Kingdom of Najid and Hejaz. With the resolution of the Ikhwan problem for the Saudi administration, there were no longer any obstacles to unite the two kingdoms under a single banner, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was declared on September 23, 1932. Between the time of Abdulaziz ibn Saud's capture of Riyadh in 1902 and the proclamation of the Kingdom in 1932, the understanding of Wahhabism underwent changes due to external factors and realpolitik. This process of change continued with the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia. In the concluding section, we will examine the evolving perception of religion within the Saudi administration in this historical context.

Conclusion

During the construction of his state, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud believed that the Emirate of Saud II neglected religious sensitivity. He supported a more uncompromising and strict Wahhabi policy. In fact, the Ikhwan organization even attacked telegraph poles in Najid on the grounds that they were "bid'ah" and were highly suspicious of any technological innovation (Silverfarb, 1982, pp. 228). However, the most decisive factor in the conflicts that resulted in the elimination of the Ikhwan was the possession of motorized and armored vehicles purchased from the UK by the Saud side (Vassiliev, 2000, pp. 280).

A closer examination of the recent history of Saudi Arabia reveals shifts in the interpretation of Wahhabism in response to political realities. The Darin Treaty, which granted political recognition in exchange for non-aggression against UK, a global superpower at the time, may seem surprising when viewed in the context of Saudi Arabia's internal history. However, it can be understood that, at the time the treaty was signed, the Saudis were not yet the sole rulers of even the Najid region and thus did not prioritize commitments to distant British colonial territories. The Khurma case, however, marks the first instance of the Saud administration prioritizing political considerations over religious sensitivity. While the first and second Al Saud Emirates are beyond the scope of this study, it is worth noting that the Emirate of Saud I, which was founded in the early days of Wahhabism and pursued a strict adherence to its principles, was defeated by the modern armies of Egypt, highlighting the importance of political considerations. In contrast, the Emirate of Saud II, which emerged from this defeat, took a more diplomatic and balanced approach. Regardless of the rhetoric employed by Abdulaziz ibn Saud, it is evident that he pursued a policy similar to that of the Emirate of Saud I until he consolidated control over Najid, and then adopted a policy more similar to that of the Emirate of Saud II as global circumstances changed and the threat of World War I loomed. The fact that Ibn Saud did not react, even verbally, to the British military action against a 1,500-strong Ikhwan unit that had crossed the border, which took place around five years after the Hurmeh incident, is one of the key indications of this shift. Instead, he declared that those who managed to return alive to their Hijrahs would be punished and reaffirmed the relations with the British through the Ukayr agreement. This demonstrates the prioritization of political considerations over religious sensitivity.

It is noteworthy that the Ikhwan were not permitted to enter the cities of Medina and Jeddah during the process of taking control of the Hejaz region. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, Jeddah is a major trade center and home to the representative offices of many international companies. Interestingly, after capturing the region, Ibn Saud selected only one of the seven members of the Commercial Courts established in Jeddah from the ulema. This suggests that the courts continued to operate according to pre-existing procedures even under Al Saud rule (Al-Jarbou, 2007, pp. 219). At this point, it becomes clear that Ibn Saud was attempting to avoid disrupting the international economic system.

Ibn Saud's aforementioned political transformation also contributed to his consolidation of power in Arabia. This is demonstrated by an article titled "Wahhabism and British Interests," written by a British official in 1925. In the article, the author asserts that British favoritism towards Sharif Hussein is insignificant and that it is of no concern to UK who controls the Hejaz region as long as the sea trade routes are not jeopardized. The author also emphasizes that it would be wasteful to devote economic and military resources to maintaining Sharif Hussein as the ruler of the Hejaz region (Hogarth, 1925). It appears that UK shaped its Arabia policy accordingly. Through his permissive administration in the Jeddah region, Ibn Saud indicated that he had no objections to the existing economic system and did not pose a threat to it. In fact, as noted in the consultation held in Riyadh in 1927, the Saud administration implemented a very different type of administration in the Hejaz region compared to the Najid region. From a Wahhabi perspective, non-Muslims are even permitted to perform the Hajj and various innovations such as tobacco and hookah are tolerated. The complaints raised at the 1927 Riyadh meeting can be interpreted as further evidence that the Saud administration did not wish to cause issues with the global system.

The Jeddah agreement marked the public end of Jihad. It is believed that the Ikhwan, who viewed this announcement as a major deviation from the "right path," gradually lost control. In fact, when the situation became untenable, the Saud administration took decisive action to eliminate the Ikhwan. Following the suppression of the Ikhwan, the Saudi Arabian government established relations with the US similar to those it had previously established with the UK. The discovery of oil in the Arabian peninsula raised the question of which country would be granted the rights to extract it. In order to reduce his dependence on UK, Ibn Saud chose the US, a rising global power at the time, as his ally in this venture. As a result, ARAMCO, now one of the largest oil companies in the world, was established in 1944. The cooperation with the US led to the arrival of US technical personnel in Arabia and the management of oil extraction and refining. Despite facing criticism from his own public for these relations, Ibn Saud paid little heed to the criticism and expanded the economic cooperation with the US to include military cooperation, paving the way for the establishment of US military bases in Arabia. For the first time, students were even sent from Arabia to a non-Muslim country, the US, setting the stage for the emergence of a "white-collar, middle class" in the country (Wynbrandt, 2010, pp. 199). As a result of these social changes, the ability of the ulema to control life and politics in Arabia diminished, and a modernist interpretation of religion, which was modernist in the context of Arabia, emerged and was able to challenge the classical interpretation of religion. Furthermore, there is an anticipation that Mohammed bin Salman, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, will guide the nation towards a more secular trajectory. This conjecture finds validation in the ongoing organization of events such as music festivals and concerts featuring metal bands within the country. Concurrently, as the administration undergoes transformation, a crucial consideration pertains to whether the ulama, intricately involved in both the state and the House of Saud, will formulate an interpretation of religion that aligns with these changes. The progression of activities in domains like sports and arts underscores the increasing integration of Saudi Arabia into the capitalist system, signaling an intent by the administration to become a robust participant in the economic system beyond its traditional role as a rentier state reliant on oil revenues. The pivotal inquiry revolves around the extent of objections that

conservative ulama may raise against these transformations and the strategies the administration will employ to address such objections. These inquiries are poised to dominate the agenda of Saudi Arabia in the imminent years.

To summarize, an analysis of the recent history of Arabia suggests that the Saud regime set aside sectarian prejudice for political purposes during the founding phase of the state. This theme is evident in the major events that occurred between the capture of Riyadh and the declaration of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The aforementioned pragmatic approach persisted after the establishment of the Kingdom.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Amaç

Bu çalışma, özellikle Türkiye'de artan ilgi ve dikkatle karşılanan Vahhabilik konusunun gelişimine ve Suud Krallığının inşasını konu edinmektedir. Özellikle Suud Vahhabiliğinin erken dönemdeki gelişimi ve dönüşümü ile Suudi Arabistan-Birleşik Krallık arasındaki ilişkilerin bu dönüşüm üzerindeki rolü çalışmanın odak noktasını oluşturmaktadır. "Suud Vahhabiliği" terimi, Abdulaziz ibn Suud tarafından kurulan devletin benimsediği İslam görüşünü ifade etmektedir. Bu devlet günümüzde Suudi Arabistan Krallığı olarak bilinse de tarihte Suud hanedanı tarafından kurulan üçüncü kralliktır. İlk iki Suud Devleti'nin kuruluşu ve çöküşü sürecinde iktidarın İslam dinini anlama biçimini şekillendiren önemli gelişmeler yaşanmıştır. İslam Dünyası'nda Suudi Arabistan Krallığı'nın resmî yorumunu benimsemeyen ve onunla çatışan çok sayıda Selefi-Vahhabi İslam telakkileri bulunmaktadır. Ancak Selefiliğin farklı yorumları bu çalışmanın kapsamının dışında kalmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı teolojik tartışmalara girmek değil; tarihsel çerçeveyi göz önünde bulundurarak Suudi yönetimindeki pragmatik dönüşümün izini sürmek ve diplomatik ilişkiler ile siyasi-ekonomik koşulların bu dönüşümdeki rolünü gözler önüne sermektir.

Yöntem

Bu çalışma, döküman analizi yöntemi kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmada, tarih kaynaklarından elde edilen bilgiler ve akademik literatürdeki çalışmalar değerlendirilmiştir. Suudi Vahhabizminin erken dönüşümü, Abdulaziz ibn Suud'ın liderliğindeki pragmatik yaklaşım ve siyasi değişiklikler bağlamında incelenmiştir. Diplomatik ilişkiler, politik ve ekonomik faktörler dikkate alınarak analiz edilmiştir.

Abdulaziz ibn Suud'un bölgede güçlü bir siyasi aktör olarak yükselmesine katkıda bulunan faktörleri idrak edebilmek için Arabistan'ın sosyo-ekonomik yapısının incelenmesi gerekmektedir. Bu nedenle çalışmanın ilk bölümü, Arap Yarımadası'nın coğrafi özelliklerini özetlemeyi ve sosyal-ekonomik yapısını ana hatlarıyla çizmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Arap toplumunun parçalanmış yapısı, zor coğrafi koşullar ve özellikle Necid bölgesinin izole konumu, Suud ailesinin başarısını anlamada önemli faktörlerdir.

Bölgenin coğrafi ve sosyo-ekonomik şartları izah edildikten sonra bir sonraki bölümde III. Suudi Krallığı'nın kuruluş sürecinden bahsedilmektedir. Bu noktada bölgede Vahhabi inancının doğuşu, ilk Suud Krallığı'nın kuruluşu ve Mısır Hidivliği ile olan ilişkileri önem arz etmektedir. Suud Hanedanı; her ne kadar bedevi savaşçıların sağladığı güç ile Necid bölgesinde askerî üstünlüğü ele geçirebiliyor olsa da modern ordular karşısında fazla bir şanslarının olmadığını bu dönemde fark etmiştir.

Suudları bölgede yenilmez bir askerî güç haline getiren gelişme ise İhvan teşkilatının kurulmasında yatmaktadır. Bu çerçevede göçer bedevî kabileler "Hicre" adı verilen yeni kurulmuş yerleşim bölgelerinde ikamete zorlanmış ve yüzyıllardır devam ettirdikleri hayat tarzını terk etmişlerdir.

Son bölümde ise Suud devletinin Birleşik Krallık ile olan diplomatik ilişkileri ele alınmaktadır. Yaşanan reel politik gelişmeler, hanedanın yönetim anlayışını derinden etkilemiştir. Bu bağlamda Darin ve Ukayr anlaşmaları, Hurme vakası, Hicaz bölgesinin ele geçirilmesinin ardından yaşanan gelişmeler incelenmektedir.

Bulgular

Bu çalışma, günümüz Suudi Arabistan Krallığı din anlayışının tarihi süreç içerisinde yaşanan siyasi, ekonomik, toplumsal vb. gelişmeler ışığında oldukça önemli değişiklikler geçirdiğini göstermektedir. Birleşik Krallık ile yapılan anlaşmalar ve bu anlaşmaların içeriği, politik gerçeklerin önceliklendirilmesinin güzide örnekleridir yansıtmaktadır. Abdulaziz ibn Suud, gücünü konsolide etmek için erken dönemde mevcut olan katı, reel politik ile uzlaşmaz Vahhabilik anlayışını değiştirmiştir. Özellikle İhvan Örgütü'nün dağıtılması, bu dönüşümün hem en önemli göstergelerinden hem de dönüşümün kendisini hızlandıran tarihi bir vakadır. Arabistan coğrafyasında petrolün keşfi, Suudların ABD ile ekonomik iş birliği içerisine girmesini sağlamıştır. İlerleyen dönemde bu iş birliği askerî alana da sıçramıştır. Bu süreç, Suudi Arabistan'ın modernleşmesine ve geleneksel dini yorumun karşısında yeni yorumların ortaya çıkmasına yol açmıştır.

Sınırlılıklar

Çalışmanın birincil sınırı teolojik bir tartışmayı kapsam dışı bırakmasıdır. Vahhabilik ve Selefilik kendine özgü İslam anlayışlarıdır. Ancak bu inançların teolojik incelenmesi çalışmanın kapsamı dışında kalmaktadır. Bunun haricinde Vahahbilik öncesi Arap siyasi yapısı ile 1930 sonrası gelişmeler de tarihî aralık açısından çalışmanın kapsamı dışındadır. Çalışmada coğrafi olarak, günümüzdeki Yemen, Umman, Katar gibi devletleri de içine alan tüm Arap yarımadası değil sadece Suud hanedanının etki alanı odakta tutulmaktadır.

Öneriler

Suudi Arabistan bölgenin önemli aktörlerinden biridir. Vahhabilik, Selefilik gibi konular Türkiye popüler gündeminde yüksek tarafgirlik eşliğinde ele alınmakta yahut tamamıyla gözardı edilmektedir. Bu çalışma konuyu tarihi bağlam ve siyasi gelişmeler ışığında ele alma teşebbüsüdür. Suud hanedanının yönetim anlayışı zaman içerisinde yaşanan olaylar çerçevesinde değişim göstermiştir. Ancak bu değişimin ekonomi-politik veçhesi de aydınlatılmayı beklemektedir. Bunun yanında Suud modernleşmesinin esas itibariyle kendisini gösterdiği 1930 sonrası dönem de çalışmanın kapsamı dışındadır. Bu anlamda makale, Suud siyaset anlayışının ekonomi-politik bir çözümlemesi ile Suud modernleşmesine bir basamak olarak düşünülebilir.

Özgün Değer

Bu çalışma, Suudi Arabistan Krallığı'nın yönetim ve din anlayışının tarihi vakalar çerçevesinde analizini içermektedir. Literatürde genel olarak teoloji alanına bırakılan Selefilik, Vahhabilik gibi konuları siyasi ve ekonomik ilişkiler çerçevesinde irdelemektedir ve bu teşebbüsü çalışmanın özgün değerini oluşturmaktadır.

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