

UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED
FACULTY OF ARTS
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HISTORY
MODERN HISTORY DOCTORAL PROGRAMME

PHD THESIS

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BRITISH IMPERIAL POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST 1902–1925
FORMATION OF THE STATE OF SAUDI ARABIA

SZEGED
2024

From 1902 to 1925, Ibn Saud unified the Arabian region from his exile in Kuwait. He first conquered Riyadh, then Najd, then Hasa, and after World War I, he regained Jabal Shammar from the Rashids. He then assumed the title of Sultan, finally ousting Hussein ibn Ali, the sharif of Mecca. In 1925, he unified the territories, which he managed to stabilize by 1932, when he proclaimed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, he could not have carried out this unification process without British arms, support and subsidies.

When France and Great Britain divided up the Arab-inhabited territories of the disintegrating Ottoman Empire under the Mandate system, Arabia came under the latter's sphere of influence, but the region had neither natural resources nor any particular economic or strategic advantage, therefore was not included in the Mandate System. It was allowed to remain independent, but two important factors did not make it possible for the British to leave the peninsula completely on its own.

On the one hand, in order to ensure internal stability in the emerging Iraq and Transjordan and to secure its southern borders, it was important for London that Arabia did not descend into internal war and anarchy.

On the other hand, in order to preserve the internal tranquility of India, Britain had to ensure the unhindered flow of Muslim pilgrims to Mecca and Medina, which also required peace in the region. To strengthen its interests and position in the region, Britain wanted a stable Middle East, of which Inner Arabia was an integral part. Especially as competition for control of the region with its old rival France had resumed after the Great War. Having failed in the 1920s to reconcile the claims of the two prominent leaders, Hussein and Ibn Saud, to control the peninsula, London had to choose between them. King Hussein's self-destructive post-war anti-British policy strengthened London's resolve to take the side of Ibn Saud. With British approval, the latter took power in Hijaz in 1925, finally ousting the Hashemite family from Arabia and creating the opportunity for the establishment of a third Saudi Kingdom.