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A Russian Diplomat in the Vilayet of the Hejaz at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

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ABSTRACT

This article endeavors to detect the goals, main tracks and priorities of Russian diplomacy in a vilayet of the Ottoman Empire, the Hejaz, through the official correspondence of a Russian diplomat, Mikhail Nikolsky, who in the early twentieth century served as a Secretary of the Russian Consulate in Jeddah. The article is a result of close scrutiny of the perused archival documents from the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Empire, pertinent to the period of the First Russian Revolution of 1905-1907. Many of these documents are being introduced into academic discourse for the first time.

Keywords: Hejaz, Russian Consulate, Vali, Sharif, Tribes

20. Yüzyıl Başında Hicaz Vilayeti'nde Bir Rus Diplomatı

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı Cidde'deki Rus konsolosluğunda 20. yüzyılın başlarında görev yapan Rus diplomat Mikhail Nikolsky'nin resmi yazışmalarından faydalanarak Rus diplomasinin o dönemde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Hicaz vilayetiyle ilgili amaçlarını, yöntemlerini ve önceliklerini analiz etmektir. Makale, 1905-1907 tarihlerindeki Birinci Rus Devrimi dönemine ait Rus İmparatorluğu Dış Politika Arşivi'ndeki belgelerden faydalanılarak kaleme alınmıştır. Sözkonusu diplomatik belgeler, bu makale ile ilk defa akademik literature kazandırılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hicaz, Rus Konsolosluğu, Vali, Şerif, Kabileler

From the History of the Russian Diplomatic Presence in the Hejaz

The area of the Hejaz, where the main shrines of Islam are located, was one of the vilayets, or provinces, of the Ottoman Empire during the period under review. During the Hajj season, between 5,000 and 16,000 pilgrims from the Russian Empire and Central Asian khanates came to these shrines,¹ which largely predetermined St. Petersburg's attention to this area. In 1890, the Russian Empire opened its consulate in the Hejaz.

The aim of the present article is to review the goals, primary tracks and priorities pursued by Russian diplomacy in the Hejaz, on the basis of documents from the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Empire, pertinent to the initial period of the first Russian Revolution of 1905-1907. The article is dedicated exclusively to the research of activities accomplished by Russian diplomats in the Hejaz vilayet during the above period, but not to the problems of the Hajj, broadly covered in a great deal of publications, or the internal situation in that area, which has largely predetermined an extremely limited historiographical basis for the article.

The analysis demonstrates how closely politics and religion were intertwined in the activities of Russian diplomats. Examination of the Russian Empire's foreign policy in this area of Arabia at the "micro-level", i.e. on the example of correspondence of mainly one diplomat, allows us to assess the influence on its conduct of interpersonal relations (what in English is called human agency), sometimes wrongly not taken into account, but that played a significant role in real politics. Recent events show that even in the era of hyper-globalization, despite the triumph of systemic institutions, the personification of politics remains a phenomenon on a planetary scale. This approach, although not articulated in theory, is, to some extent, close to one of the anthropological models of historical research and can be characterized as a kind of "anthropological" study. Elements of this approach can be found in the works of a narrow circle of Russian authors, who studied the topic under consideration in this article.²

The aims and directions of diplomacy highlighted in this article on the basis of the analysis of documents, many of which are here first introduced into scientific circulation, create a sense of *déjà vu* against the background of our knowledge of the work of Soviet/Russian diplomacy in the Hejaz in Saudi Arabia during the Soviet and post-Soviet eras.³

After a lengthy debate among the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about whether or not to appoint a Muslim to the post of Consul in the main city of the Hejaz, Jeddah,⁴ the first

1 "Letter of the Consul in Jeddah Vladimir von Zimmermann to the Committee of the Voluntary Fleet" (in Russian), *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii* [Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire -AFPRI], 517/2 – 5310, Fund Posol'stvo v Konstantinopole [Embassy in Constantinople], 1903, p. 28.

2 See for example, Arapov, D.Y. (ed.), *Islam v Rossijskoj imperii; zakonodatel'nye akty, opisanii, statistika* [Islam in the Russian Empire; legislation, descriptions, statistics], Moscow, Institut Afriki, Akademkniga, 2001; and *Ocherki istorii Ministerstva inostrannykh del Rossii, Vol. 1: 860-1917* [Essays on the history of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Vol. 1: 860-1917], Moscow: OLMA-Press, 2002.

3 See Kuznetsov, V. A. and V. V. Naumkin, "Dezhaviu: srednevekovye motivy v sovremennoi arabskoi politicheskoi mysli" ["Déjà vu: Medieval Motives in the Modern Arab Political Thought"], *Vestnik MGIMO* [MGIMO Herald], No. 12 (4), 2019, p. 38-53.

4 It is interesting that similar debate took place in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union in early 1920's when a Soviet Consulate was established in the Hejaz region. See, Naumkin, V. V., *Nesostoiavsheesia partnerstvo. Sovetskaia diplomatia v Saudovskoi Aravii mezhdru dvumya mirovymi voynami* [Unfulfilled Partnership. Soviet Diplomacy in Saudi Arabia between the Two World Wars], Moscow, Aspect Press, 2018, p. 82-88.

head of the diplomatic mission in Jeddah became an attorney with an unusual destiny, a ranked state Councilor,⁵ Shahimurad Mirasovich Ibrahimov. He was born in 1841 near Orenburg. He studied in the Siberian cadet corps, participated in campaigns pursuing conquests, served in the Turkestan region, and in 1890 was transferred to the service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On 22 November 1890, he was appointed Consul in Jeddah. After less than a year in the Hejaz, the Consul, not having received proper medical care, died of cholera during a pilgrimage to Mecca and was buried in Jeddah.⁶

The goals and tasks assigned to the new Consulate were determined by the Russian Imperial Embassy in Constantinople, which, on 13 May 1891, sent Ibrahimov a “confidential instruction”.⁷ This instruction stated that the purpose of the establishment of the Consulate was “mainly to protect our pilgrims, a significant number of whom go to worship Muslim shrines in Mecca and Medina every year”.⁸ The Consulate was charged with the duty to observe the pilgrims and to protect them from the influence of “unscrupulous fanatics”, paying special attention to those Russian subjects, who after the Hajj took up residence in Arabia and engaged in “robbing compatriots”.⁹

The Consulate was obligated not only to protect Russian subjects, “but also the natives of the Central Asian khanates, turning for their needs to Russia”.¹⁰ Those who had moved to the vilayet for political reasons and those who were suspected of involvement in unfriendly actions against Russia by its old enemy, Turkey, were to be treated differently. The influences exerted by these people on the pilgrims during the Hajj season directly affected the interests of the Russian authorities. The Embassy demanded that the Consulate inform them regarding how a trip to Mecca and Medina impacted the worldview of Muslim peoples in general, and how important the title of Caliph, belonging to the Ottoman Sultan, was: “to what extent he is revered in various environments among Muslims, who are not Turkish subjects, and also what is the priority in their eyes of his political position as ruler of a state belonging to the European States of the Empire”.¹¹ Note that in this dispatch the Ottoman Empire is regarded as one of the European powers. This was due to the fact that it included the Balkans, a region particularly important for St. Petersburg.

From the instructions of the Embassy to the Consulate, it follows that Russian diplomacy looked at pilgrimage to the Arabian shrines of Islam through the prism of Russian-Turkish relations and considered the possibility of its use by Turkey to foment inter-confessional contradictions within the Russian Empire itself. It is no accident that in connection with the above-mentioned task, the Consulate was also entrusted with the duty to determine “the total amount of power of the Sultan in Arabia and in the lands adjacent to it”. The Embassy noted that Ibrahimov, himself a Muslim, who was

5 IV Class, Table of Ranks, corresponding to the army rank of Major General and Navy Rear Admiral. There were no other officials of such high rank among the Consuls in Jeddah.

6 Ishaev, S. M., “sviashchennyi gorod musul'man; Rasskaz palomnika” [“Mecca, the Sacred City of the Muslims; Story of a Pilgrim”], *Sredne-Aziatskiy vestnik, Ezhemesiachniy nauchno-literaturniy zhurnal* [The Central Asian Herald. Monthly Academic and Literary Journal], Tashkent, F. i G. br. Kamenskiye, November 1896, p. 63-64.

7 “Ibrahimov, 13 May 1891”, *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii, Fund: Turetskii stol* [Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AFPRI), Fund: The Turkish Table], 502-B – 3312, p. 4-13.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 4 & 4 rev. Please note that both sides of the papers in AFPRI documents were used for writing but reverse side of the papers have no separate numbers. To indicate these pages “rev.”, short for “reverse”, is used in this paper.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 6 rev. & 7.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 8 rev. & 9.

allowed to visit the shrines, had a unique opportunity to make the necessary contacts and study the local life, but he had to be extremely careful, “so as not to become the subject of slander by dangerous and clever intriguers or not to arouse unrealistic hopes among the population”.¹²

In addition to identifying the strength of positions in the Hejaz of Turkey, the Consul was instructed to pay attention to “the policy pursued in these areas by England”.¹³ The Embassy statement reported to the Consul that the United Kingdom, “using the Hajj as a means for the rapprochement of their Muslim subjects with the Arabs, was seeking to acquire through them, in their environment and their chiefs, support for itself”,¹⁴ thus trying to bring under its influence the Holy places of Islam. There was also an assessment of these actions: “in our view, we cannot tolerate such an increase in the importance of England throughout the Muslim world and in the East, in general”.¹⁵

St. Petersburg understood that mounting a serious challenge to England in this region was unrealistic, but preventing the growth of British influence was seen as quite feasible for Russian diplomacy. For this purpose, the Consul should “exhibit both the favorable view of the Russian state and government toward Islam and our desire to preserve the present institutions of the Muslim world, those most appropriate to its needs”.¹⁶ Another aim was to gain the confidence of the Turkish Sultan, who would appreciate the friendship of the Russian Tsar and treat him with “the frank devotion of a faithful ally”. It is difficult to say whether St. Petersburg really believed in the reality of such a turn in relations with İstanbul. But it must be admitted that the emphasis on protecting the identity of the ruling Hejaz system from attempts by England to change it allowed Russian diplomacy to count on the support of local elites and a significant part of the local population.

Nikolsky Appreciates the Role of England

The instructions given to the Consulate in the early 1890s remained valid for a long time. The changes that have occurred in the world and in the Middle East region for a decade and a half, as well as in Russia itself, had not brought about significant progress in the tasks and priorities of Russian diplomats in the Hejaz. However, the Russian revolution of 1905-1907, which began in the final stages of the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905, was particularly turbulent in the Muslim-populated areas of the Empire, despite the attempts of the tsarist government to overcome the discontent of the population.¹⁷ Naturally, the perception of the threat posed by the Ottoman Empire’s hostile work with pilgrims increased. The policies pursued by Great Britain in Arabia caused greater concern which, as previously, were regarded as dangerous, despite taking place in 1904-1907, during the gradual folding up of the Russo-Anglo-French alliance, the Entente. Changes in the position of Muslims in the Russian Empire had only a minor impact on its diplomatic activity in Arabia.

12 Ibid., p. 10.

13 Ibid., p. 10 rev.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 11.

16 Ibid., p. 11& 11 rev.

17 In those years, the imperial government was forced to make some concessions to the demands of social movements involving Muslims. In particular, according to the Decree of 17 April 1905, as well as the Manifesto of 17 October 1905, for the first time the creation of Muslim public organizations and meetings was permitted. See Ananyich, B. V. et al., *Vlast' I reformy. Ot samodержaviia k sovetskoi Rossii* [Power and Reforms. From the Monarchy to Soviet Russia], St. Petersburg, Dmitriy Bulanin, 1996, p. 573-575; and Arapov (ed.), *Islam v Rossijskoj imperii*, p. 26.

But the winds of change also touched the foreign office. On 28 April 1906, Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamsdorf (25 December 1844 to 06 March 1907), lost the positions he had held since 9 June 1900 as Privy Councillor,¹⁸ and from 1889, as Comptroller.¹⁹ He was considered to be supportive of the conservative wing in the highest political circles of the Empire.²⁰ Lamsdorf, laying out his view to the Emperor, believed, in particular, that the Russian revolution was directed from abroad by “Jewish capital”, socialists, and the highest circles of Masons. He was a strong opponent of any compromise arrangements with Great Britain on the division of Persia into English and Russian zones of influence. The Minister was blamed for the miscalculations that allowed Russia’s defeat in the war with Japan, and was also criticized for passivity in the important Balkan-Middle East direction of its foreign policy. The same day Lamsdorf was removed, he was replaced by Aleksandr Petrovich Izvolsky (3 June 1856 to 16 August 1919), who in the same year, was also promoted to the rank of Chamberlain, a position in which he continued until 14 September 1910.

Izvolsky belonged to the number of statesmen of a liberal-reformist trend, who defended before the Emperor the idea of a constitutional monarchy and the creation of a government in Russia with the participation of liberal opposition. It was he who in 1907 agreed with Britain on the delimitation of spheres of interest in the Middle East (the Convention, in particular, included the agreement on Persia, providing for the creation of three zones – Russian, English and neutral).²¹ It was no accident that he was considered an Anglophile as a proponent of rapprochement with London.

It is important to analyze how the staff of the Russian Imperial Consulate, which was then headed by Vladimir Vladimirovich von Zimmerman, operated in Jeddah under these conditions. The new consul, according to G. I. Kulikov,²² came from a poor noble family. His father was Lutheran, and his mother was Orthodox. The only source of family income was the salary of its head, who died when Vladimir was still a teenager.²³ First, the young man followed in his father’s footsteps, graduating from Nikolaev engineering school, but then there was a twist in his life: a three-year course at the Educational Department of the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages,²⁴ at the end of which he went to work in the Foreign Ministry. His entire diplomatic service took place in the vilayets of the Ottoman Empire, but his career was difficult. For 15 years, he was Secretary-Dragoman in the Russian consulates in Trabzon and Erzurum, and only after that did he receive the post of vice-consul in Samsun. Finally, in 1898, he was appointed consul in Jeddah, where he served longer than all other Russian consuls, until 1907. Due to conditions in this utterly difficult city, most consuls did not serve long. He came to Jeddah as a collegiate councillor,²⁵ and in 1901 became a state councillor.²⁶ Frequent

18 Civilian grade II, Table of Ranks, corresponding to the ranks of the Army Full General and Navy Admiral.

19 A high court rank.

20 Lamsdorf’s reputation as a man with a non-traditional sexual orientation did not interfere with his career, though it did spoil his reputation and made him the subject of gossip at court, but less so in the press.

21 See *Ocherki istorii Ministerstva inostrannykh del Rossii*, p. 519.

22 Kulikov, G. I., *Kurdy Halebskogo vilaieta Osmanskoy imperii po doneseniyam Rossiyskogo konsula, 1913* [*Kurds of the Vilayet of Haleb of the Ottoman Empire in the Dispatches of a Russian Consul, 1913*], *Vostochnyj Arkhiv* [East Archive], 2018, No 2 (38), App. 1, p. 63.

23 Smilyanskaya I. M., N. M. Gorbunova and M. M. Yakushev, *Siriya nakanune i v period Mladoturetskoi revoliutsii. Po materialam konsul’skikh donesenyi* [*Syria before and during the Young Turks Revolution. On the Basis of Consular Dispatches*], Moscow, Indrik, 2015, p. 77.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

25 A civilian grade VI, corresponding to the rank of Colonel in the Army hierarchy.

26 A rank V class, corresponding to the Director of the Department, Lieutenant Governor and Army rank of Brigadier, and

visits to St. Petersburg helped him withstand the hellish climate of Jeddah for almost a decade. During the absence of the consul, the mission was temporarily supervised by the Secretary of the Consulate, who in this capacity was referred to as the Chargé d’Affaires of the Consulate. Von Zimmerman changed his place of service in Jeddah, being appointed to the same position in Aleppo, where he also worked for a long time, until 1916,²⁷ when he was already 62 years old.

The Secretary of the Consulate, that is, the second person in the mission in the period considered in the article, was the collegiate Secretary,²⁸ Mikhail Erastovich Nikolsky, about whose life we know much less than about his boss. The correspondence of this diplomat with the Russian Imperial Embassy in Constantinople and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in St. Petersburg, which he led as managing Consulate, standing in for the Consul in his absence, (in fact, there were no other employees within the consulate having diplomatic rank, only dragoman or translators) is of particular interest in the context of our objectives in this article.²⁹ The Russian Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire was then a prominent diplomat-orientalist, privy counselor Ivan Zinoviev,³⁰ while the Director of the First Department of the Foreign Ministry³¹ (this position he held from 1900 to 1906) was an outstanding diplomat, Baron, and from 1904, Chamberlain Nikolai Hartwig (1857-1914).

Analyzing the role of England in the Hejaz, Nikolsky, in one of his reports, asked the question: “Is England as deeply rooted here as claimed by the newspaper *New Time*?” He answered, “absolutely, yes. Without even seeing the hidden knight, the Koshchey in the Russian fairy tale begins to worry that it smells of the Russian spirit. And similarly, with the Hejaz. The British themselves are nowhere visible (I speak about Jeddah as though it were so far inland that neither they, nor I, can get there), and yet, it no doubt smells like British spirit”.³²

Here the author of the report, who was well able to collect and analyze the facts, gives convincing arguments. During the last Hajj, 116 ships came to Jeddah, “the nationality of which was determined”, of whom 92 were English, or 79%, and this was during the Hajj, when ships from other countries came to the port of Jeddah. Consequently, in ordinary times, the percentage of English ships was even higher. And all wholesale trade in Jeddah was “in the hands of the English or English Hindus, who are large property owners here”. In the market, nine-tenths of all gold and silver coins were English, the Russian diplomat claimed. The Turkish was only copper, and silver could be found only at the moneychangers.³³

after the abolition of the latter in 1796 held an intermediate position between the ranks of Colonel and Major General.

27 See Kulikov, *Kurdy Halebskogo vilaieta Osmanskoy imperii po doneseniya Rossiysskogo konsula*.

28 A civilian rank, corresponding to the rank of staff captain in the Army.

29 The source base for this article constitutes primarily the secret reports by Nikolsky, the predominant part of which have not been used by the authors writing about the Hajj and Russian policy in relation to the pilgrimage of Russian Muslims to Arabia. However, the diplomat is credited for releasing an article in public sources entitled “The Pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca”, *Istoricheskij vestnik* [Historical Herald], Vol. 24, April-May 1911.

30 Zinoviev, Ivan Alekseevich (1835-1917), after graduating from the Lazarev Institute of Oriental languages, served in the Ministry of foreign Affairs, in 1855, during which service he defended his thesis on “Epic Tales of Iran” at St. Petersburg University, received a Master’s Degree in Oriental literature, and held various diplomatic posts in the Middle East and the Balkans. In 1883 he headed the Asian Department of the Ministry, created in 1819 on the Basis of the Department of Asian Affairs of the Collegium of Foreign Affairs, and in 1891 was appointed Ambassador to the King of Sweden and Norway. He served as Russian Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1897 to 1909, and was also an Honorary Member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences from 1901 and a member of the State Council from 1909.

31 This became the name of the Asian Department in 1897.

32 *Arkhiv vneshnej politiki Rossiisko imperii, 1905, Fund: Politicheskij arkhiv* [Political Archive], 482–779, p. 74 & 74 rev.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

The Chargé d’Affaires noted the huge role of Indian Muslims in the Hejazi market.³⁴ “Rich Hindus sometimes give dinners to *Kaymakam*³⁵ (or *Vali*,³⁶ when he is here), at which Europeans, except the English Consul, do not appear”.³⁷ Later in this detailed report, again, about the English: “There is no doubt that England covets the Hejaz. And she has many ways to master this area. From the south, through the spread of the Yemeni uprising, and in the center using the excitation of the discontented masses in the Hejaz and, perhaps, even from the North”.³⁸ Even in the case of the sluggish reaction of the Turkish authorities to the Bedouin attack on the Egyptian caravan with *Mahmal*,³⁹ of which the Consulate had previously informed St. Petersburg, there were traces of British intrigues, supposedly looking for a reason to intervene. However, the habit of seeing the machinations of external enemies behind all your troubles was always somehow typical of many states, not only in that distant era. Nikolsky drew from all this a somewhat unexpected conclusion:

‘and have we any reason to particularly oppose the seizure of this area by the British, except for a general reluctance to allow them to conduct a policy of conquest? What are our interests in the Hejaz? Commercial? What? The weak trade of kerosene and nothing more, although they might have access to our sugar, flour and wood. Politically, the Hejaz is undoubtedly of great importance to us, and we cannot be indifferent to its future fate, since every year up to ten thousand people undertaking the Russian Hajj, mainly Central Asians, come here to worship. And if there is now solid evidence to suggest that the pilgrims, from a political point of view, take very little good out of the Hajj, then under the rule of the British all harmful propaganda will certainly increase.

But hardly will we be able to protect the Hejaz from English attacks. When it will happen – in a year, in half a century – is impossible to say, but probably it will be impossible to prevent the holy land of Hejaz falling into British hands.’⁴⁰

As we know today, the forecast of the Russian diplomat did not come true, although after the First World War, Great Britain did seize a significant part of the Arab lands. Given that after the October Revolution, Soviet Russia’s foreign policy in the region retained some degree of continuity with that of Imperial Russia, or at least Soviet diplomats were familiar with the materials of their predecessors, one can better understand why they were so sympathetic to Saudi expansion as a factor weakening the hegemonic aspirations of the British.

Now Nikolsky did draw a logical conclusion given his position: as soon as the Hejaz becomes uninteresting to us – as England, all the same, will sooner or later seek to possess it – it is necessary to bargain (ideas, often the most absurd, all kinds of diplomatic “barter” exchanges are as old as diplomacy itself). His point, as usual, he expressed in a figurative form:

34 It was this influential part of the local trading class in the 1920s and 1930s, already in the Saudi era, that obstructed the work of Soviet foreign trade organizations in the Hejaz. See details in Naumkin, *Nesostoiavsheesia partnerstvo. Sovetskaia diplomatiia v Saudovskoi Aravii mezhdu dvumya mirovymi voynami*.

35 The chief Ottoman official in Jeddah.

36 Ottoman Governor of the Hejaz Vilayet.

37 *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii. 1905. Fund: Politicheskij arkhiv* [Political Archive], 482-779, p. 75 rev.

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Mahmal*, a pyramid-shaped wooden box with gold leaf-covered carved letters, was covered with a robe of satin woven in Egypt and spires of gilded silver. Starting from the end of the thirteenth century, carried by camels and accompanied by crowds of pilgrims, it was taken solemnly from Cairo to Mecca as a covering for the Kaaba, *kiswa*.

40 *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii. 1905. Fund: Politicheskij arkhiv* [Political Archive], 482-779, p. 76-77.

'We, as in the tale, stand at the junction of three roads: "If I go to the left, I will die. If I go to the right, I will die and so will my horse. If I go to the right, my horse will be destroyed". So, is it not better, if indeed the loss of the Hejaz is inevitable, to go to the right, and for non-interference in the affairs of England in Arabia to receive from her by treaty a concession elsewhere?'"⁴¹

Against the background of these philosophical arguments about the future of the Hejaz, the collegiate Secretary put before the authorities two practical questions, not failing here to sound a little cavil, to the Ambassador in Constantinople:

'I suggested to His Excellency, the Ambassador, to express to the local authorities a protest against the illegal extortion of Russian subjects and against the lack of free exit from the city. Taking the first proposal upon himself, his Excellency declined the second, until the matter was raised by another power. At the same time, the Ambassador graciously informed me about the reasons for his failure: "we cannot have influence on the course of affairs in the Hejaz, and Turkey itself has little influence here". What opportunity is there to work under such conditions? And if we had a treaty with England, everything could be settled."⁴²

The diplomat's conclusion that the influence of the Sublime Porte in this remote vilayet was weaker than in other areas of the Empire ruled from Constantinople was confirmed by many facts. Nikolsky also considered the role of other powers: "among other powers with interests here, other than us and England, there is still France (up to 5,000 pilgrims) and the Netherlands (7,000-8,000 pilgrims). Austria is also involved, although only 500 to 1,000 Bosnians come here every year. An average of 2,000-3,000 people come from Persia."⁴³ The role that Germany might wish to play here was left out of the scope of the diplomat's report, as the matter was not within the competence of the Consulate.

The Secretary of the Consulate Rigidly Defends the Honor of His State and Himself

In addition to engaging in "big politics", diplomats were required to maintain the prestige of their state and even monitor whether the local side was celebrating Russian national holidays by raising the flag. On December 9, 1905, Nikolsky had told Hartwig (No. 1073 and 1074) that although 6 December is "day of great celebration", as it is the name-day of Emperor Nicholas II, "the flag was not raised on the barracks of the troops of the local garrison", even though on the morning of 5 December, the Secretary of the Consulate did notify the local Ottoman official of the Russian national holiday. Nikolsky wrote: "Mr. Consul Zimmerman told me that the Turks should raise the flag in two places. As appears from my personal inquiries and from the attached report of Dragoman Voinov, in all previous years, the flag was raised on two barracks. On the day of the English national holiday, I saw myself that the flag was hoisted on two barracks."⁴⁴

Since the Ottoman Vali not only failed to congratulate the consulate personally, but did not even send congratulations by telegraph, Nikolsky decided not to accept the *kaymakam*, believing that

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., p. 77 rev.

43 Ibid., p. 77 rev. & 78.

44 *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii. 1905. Fund: Politicheskij arkhiv* [Political Archive], 482-779, p. 98 & 98 rev.

this step on the part of the local ruler was clearly not enough. Obviously exacerbating the situation, but wanting to demonstrate firmness, he ordered the dragoman to the *kaymakam* to convey the following oral message: “When you insulted me and disrespected me, I complained to my superiors, but I can’t accept any person who expresses a clear lack of attention to my Sovereign Emperor”.⁴⁵

The conflict flared. The *kaymakam* told the *chargé d’affaires* that raising the flag in the barracks on such an occasion was not necessary. Nikolsky stood his ground. He reported: “But it has always been so, and I could not ignore the disrespect for our Emperor or belittling him in the eyes of the whole city before the King of England, for whom all the flags were raised”.⁴⁶ It is curious that Nikolsky sent a copy of the substantive parts of the first message, quoted above, to the Embassy in Constantinople, but to Hartwig it went in full, including the passage where he criticized the Embassy. Reading this report, I was ready to face another internal intrigue, because I had already been convinced (initially, to my surprise) that in such a small team, such as the Consulate in Jeddah, there was a behind-the-scenes struggle, at times resembling a tempest in a teacup. But it wasn’t just that. We quote an excerpt from the passage sent to Hartwig reads;

‘Being in such a difficult time, I must admit, for us, with the diminution of our prestige in such a responsible post as Jeddah, responsible precisely because the local authorities are not so much dependent on the Porte, I several times reported the difficulties I have coping with my task. Adopting a policy of energetic persistence, and not one of simple paper shuffling, I received no support, no clear condemnation of the Imperial Embassy. I was “ignored” for my inability to write in a respectful tone. If, as a result of a failure to receive instructions, for example on business about two slaves released by me, I would cause the second Yemeni revolt, and it would be my fault... this time I again should be that ill-fated “switchman” on whom it is possible to shift all guilt’⁴⁷

The energetic diplomat knew that the Embassy bureaucrats did not want to take responsibility for risky, tough action in response to the rudeness of the Turkish authorities in the Hejaz, preferring to grant free reign to a junior diplomat, from whom they could dissociate themselves in case of any problems. But Nikolsky also clearly wanted to curry favor, demonstrating more loyal zeal than higher ranks. “What can I do”, he asked, not without cunning, “if I put the dignity of Russia and the Sovereign above personal calculations? I wrote many times: if I am ordered to grin and bear it, it will be a whole different story”.

It cannot be overlooked that although the Secretary of the Consulate did not send the second part of the report to Constantinople, he took a great risk in criticizing Zinoviev himself. Transparently hinting at his abilities, Nikolsky, somewhat reminiscent of a confession, stressed that he had successfully managed the consulate for ten months, and pathetically exclaimed: “We must live in this God-forsaken wilderness to appreciate what prestige means. For ten months I have struggled alone, without support”.⁴⁸

Mikhail Erastovich was probably a man by nature of unparalleled quarrelsome, prone to hard, uncompromising, and displaying undiplomatic reactions in cases where, in his opinion, the prestige of the state and the interests of Russian subjects, and most importantly, his personal dignity were

45 Ibid., p. 98 rev.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., p. 98 rev. & 99.

48 Ibid., p. 99 rev.

infringed upon. For example, in his report to the Ambassador at Constantinople of 2 June 1905, he wrote what was quite provocative, through his personal resentment and dissatisfaction with the position of the ambassador:

‘I had the honor to receive from Your Excellency in response to my report No. 258 encrypted telegram in which you deign to urge me to refrain from protesting against the illegal extortion of the Russian subjects in the Hejaz, as the Porte has a very small influence in this region... In another telegram of your Excellency, received by me on the same day (May 30), You deigned to express the opinion that we are deprived of the opportunity to have any influence on the course of affairs in the Hejaz.’⁴⁹

Here, Nikolsky set out his own point of view, different from the opinion of his high-ranking seniors: “I saw that the Porte was powerless against the Bedouins, that it must reckon with the Sharif of Mecca, but I did not suppose that the Turkish government had no influence over the Hejaz Vali, an official whom it could replace at any moment”.⁵⁰ He also believed that,

‘...under unfavorable conditions, we can’t direct events in the Hejaz, but, unfortunately, I could not think that our country is so insignificant that we must tolerate even the unlawful fleecing of our citizens... But now, having received proper instructions from Your Excellency, I will confine myself henceforth only to reports on the facts of local life, paying no attention to things impossible for us to change in the life of the Hejazi.’⁵¹

On the same day, the chargé d’affaires of the consulate, hedging his bets, sent a copy of this report to Hartwig in St. Petersburg (No. 389). With all the unusual boldness of the report, Nikolsky, as always, was impeccable in observing the rules of bureaucratic politeness, concluding with the usual phrase: “With excellent respect and perfect devotion, I have the honor to be Your Excellency’s most obedient servant”. Mikhail Erastovich was kind to his superiors, even though he disagreed with them. And, at the same time, Hartwig was sent copies of two secret reports by the chargé d’affaires to the Ambassador in Constantinople. Nikolsky directly reveled in his right, in the absence of the consul, to send dispatches signed by him both to the ambassador and to the Director of the First Department of the Foreign Ministry (No. 388). In an accompanying letter, he reported:

‘In the first one you will desire to see that, wishing to remind Vali of his promise to send me his *kavas*,⁵² with his apology (my reports of May 14, No. 264 and May 19, No. 268), I, notifying him of the arrival of the Dragoman Voinov, told him why I can’t offer him my dragoman... In response, Vali wrote me a long letter, where the main motifs are repeated several times thinking that I came to him without warning, that he is very offended, that I, ostensibly, drew a sword against his *kavas*, that I required at the customs office to get my things without inspection, and that even with the Consul Zimmermann I am in a bad relationship, which was allegedly communicated by Vali earlier in Mecca.’⁵³

49 *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii. 1905. Fund: Politicheskij arkhiv* [Political Archive], 482-779, p. 53 & 53 rev.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 53 rev. & 54.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 54 & 54 rev.

52 *Kavas* – a servant, a guard, also a porter.

53 *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii. 1905. Fund: Politicheskij arkhiv* [Political Archive], 482-779, p. 56 & 56 rev.

The second copy contained Nikolsky's reply to this letter. He, again with noticeable audacity, wrote to the ambassador that he was waiting for his orders, but at the same time: "it is necessary to show the Turks that if we are kind to them, then we will not allow ourselves to be offended" (clearly relevant today). And further, "If Your Excellency is unwilling or unable at this time to give me Your powerful support in this matter, I humbly ask you to give me complete freedom of action. I will not make any sharp remarks, but I will delay the matter until the Consul arrives".⁵⁴

But here Mikhail Erastovich could not resist the temptation to give his critical assessment of the position of the consul, anticipating his possible actions (apparently, Vali, speaking about the hostile relations between the consul and the secretary, was not so wrong):

'If Mr. Zimmerman returns, (who did not want to come back here, a fact he didn't hide from anyone), by his character and opinions, it would be too easy for him to make just any concessions and even to send me to apologize to Vali to which I submit as secretary, but that I can't do as a *chargé d'affaires*, obliged to hold the prestige of the Russian name as of old it was written, "honest and indestructible".'⁵⁵

Having unobtrusively shown the authorities that he much better defends the honor of the Russian name than von Zimmerman, Nikolsky continued: "Any other course of action Your Excellency may take in relation to me, even if you find me wrong, will force the Turks to 'become conceited' and lose the last respect for the Consulate. They don't like me, but they seem to consider me".⁵⁶ Well, the thesis that the partner/opponent is considered only by those who show an occasional rigidity, strength and intransigence has always been popular with politicians. Nikolsky thus stipulated, assuming that the ambassador might consider his actions wrong, asked in this case to save face before the Turks: "Expose me to secret Turkish disciplinary punishment, sick and exhausted by this life, but keep unshakable prestige of the dear Russian name".⁵⁷ He concluded his dispatches to the ambassador with much more restraint than those sent to the Director of the Department: "Please accept, etc."

And the arrival of a dragoman to serve at the consulate was reported by the *chargé d'affaires* offended the Vali on 29 May 1905 (No. 375) with his usual sharpness:

'I have the honor to inform Your Excellency that at the Imperial Consulate arrived a dragoman of the genus Tatar Warriors, a Mr. Voinov... Unfortunately, I cannot introduce him to you in person, as I am afraid to go to your house where I have been insulted. Having failed to send a *kavas* with your apology, despite your promise, Your Excellency thereby demonstrated that you are a weak appeaser and protector of the people causing insult to the *chargé d'affaires* of the Russian Consulate. I can't send Mr. Voinov to you either. If a *chargé d'affaires* of the consulate in uniform can be insulted, what can a dragoman expect when he comes alone?'.⁵⁸

Expressing the hope that Vali will further protect him from abuse, Nikolsky completed the message with really a quite lapidary ending: "Compliments. Signed / Nikolsky".

54 Ibid., p. 57.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., p. 57 rev.

57 Ibid.

58 *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii. 1905. Fund: Politicheskij arkhiv* [Political Archive], 482-779, p. 41 & 41 rev.

On 2 June, a day of exceptionally generous correspondence, the diplomat sent Vali another message, again full of accusations (No. 386):

‘Your Excellency, instead of punishing your *kavas*, as the perpetrators of the insult, You give in Your letter a lot of space to their lies: as if I would have taken my sword against your *kavas*. The lie is obvious because I was not alone, but with my *kavas* to whom there is no reason to lie. And Your *kavas* tell lies, fearing punishment for their deed... I don’t have to tell you I’m coming. If I come at a bad time, you may not see me. It makes no difference to me whether I come with or without warning. I was in uniform, and you knew me well. I did not come at dusk, but at 5 o’clock, when it was perfectly light.’⁵⁹

After describing the details of the incident, Nikolsky recalled how he helped local dignitaries, and reproached Vali for ingratitude: “When the agent refused Mr. Kaymakam three tickets for the steamer to Constantinople for half the price, I immediately went myself to the agent and arranged the matter. And Your Excellency’s courtesy is only in words, and You do not even wish to send rude with apologies”.⁶⁰

Nikolsky was particularly hurt by the Vali’s arguments about the relationship between the secretary and the consul: “What kind of relationship I had with Consul Zimmerman is not Your Excellency’s concern, and it is inconvenient even for such a great dignitary as You to write some market gossip”. “It is a pity,” quipped the secretary, “that You have not yet written that You have heard that I have stabbed my father and poisoned my mother”.⁶¹ Nikolsky asked the Vali to leave his private life alone.

But the Secretary of the Consulate seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of reproaches against the Vali. Now another, in violation of Protocol: “I have paid You great attention: I have visited You in full dress, as You told my messenger, and You have been in my home in just Your home clothes”.

“Now it is Your turn to show,” Mikhail Erastovich reasoned, “how much You respect the Russian Imperial Consulate. If You really respect him, You will send the *kavas* to apologize, and that will be the end of the story”.⁶²

And further, more humiliation (you see, this very Russian diplomat did not love Vali, though maybe love was not the point in regard to him): “If you are offended that I came without warning, although you left me to lunch, I didn’t know there was such a custom here, and I am ready to apologize to You for this violation, as soon as You bring me an apology from Your *kavas*”.⁶³ Such ‘diplomacy’ was without personal apologies and no concessions. The ending, as before, was symbolic: “Compliments. Signed /Nikolsky”.

59 Ibid., p. 48 & 48 rev.

60 Ibid. p. 49 rev.

61 Ibid., p. 49 rev. & 50.

62 Ibid., p. 50 & 50 rev.

63 Ibid., p. 51.

Study of the Domestic Political Situation in the Hejaz

This direction was also important in the work of diplomats, and the Chargé d'Affaires of the Consulate here tried his best to show himself. On 1 May 1905 (No. 243), he informed Hartwig that the soldiers of the Mecca garrison had refused to accompany the pilgrim caravans daily because they were overtired and in need of rest, and now these caravans had begun to depart only once a week. Interpreting this fact, the diplomat regarded it as “disobedience and indignation” by the soldiers, testifying to the unreliability of the troops. The attitude of the higher ranks toward the soldiers was given the most negative characterization: “They either deal roughly with the soldiers, causing them to starve, or hearing accusations and threats they move to enhanced courtesies, reaching to sleazy behavior”.⁶⁴

Nikolsky made a rather bold conclusion that in the Hejaz the ground was already ready “for all sorts of unrest and upheavals”. To this was added the fact that the Bedouins, who were well armed, “were displeased with both the Vali and the Sharif for their extortion and oppression; the townspeople were no less displeased”.⁶⁵

The situation in the eyes of the diplomat looked even more alarming, because “the Arabs hate the Turks, the Turks are careless, lazy and, together with the Arabs, the main purpose of their existence is to satisfy their insatiable greed”.⁶⁶ If this was indeed the case, and the diplomat did not exaggerate (which cannot be fully excluded, given the general propensity of consular officers to a certain alarmism), what kind of “reliability of the troops” could be affirmed! From other sources we know that hostility to the Turks among the Arabs, indeed, existed and gradually grew, although until their great anti-Turkish uprising, as we know, more than a decade would pass.⁶⁷ And the local population was critical of their own Arab Sharifs, i.e. the Hashemites. Nevertheless, Nikolsky sounded the alarm; but just in case, he made a reservation, admitting that his assessment may be inaccurate:

“The question is so serious that, considering it my duty to inform Your Excellency about the facts of current life, I do not find it possible at this time for myself to finally express my views to you, not yet being acquainted with all the details. Much prevents me from working in this area, especially the prohibition to leave the city without the Turkish spies”.⁶⁸

At the same time, Nikolsky continued to promote ideas to the effect of strengthening control over the pilgrims and protecting their rights. In the dispatch of 9 July 1905 (No. 569), aimed in the First Department (copy to the Embassy), he requested permission “to carry out the idea of Mr. Tukholka⁶⁹ and form, to the extent possible, out of companies of Russian citizens traveling to Mecca, small units for protection outside of Jeddah of the property of Hajji dead, but without legal responsibility, except for crimes of general character”.⁷⁰

As we remember, initiatives to protect the rights of Russian citizens and prevent the looting of the property of those who died during the Hajj, were put forward by consulate staff from the moment

64 Ibid., p. 21.

65 Ibid., p. 20 rev.

66 Ibid., p. 21.

67 This refers to the British-inspired Arab uprising against the Turks that began in the Hejaz on 8 June 1916.

68 Ibid., p. 21 & 21 rev.

69 Tukholka, Sergei Vladimirovich was Nikolsky's predecessor as Secretary of the Consulate.

70 *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii. 1905. Fund: Politicheskij arkhiv* [Political Archive], p. 64 & 64 rev.

of its establishment, but always went into the sand, and the number of dead pilgrims grew and, accordingly, more and more property was lost. The Secretary of the Consulate gave alarming figures, which the consul had previously reported to the Foreign Ministry:

'In Mecca, without a doubt, a huge number of legacies are lost. Consul Zimmerman in his report of 16 July 1903, (to the Embassy) finds that during the Hajj of the year 1902-1903, the actual number of dead Russian citizens in Hejaz was not less than 2,000, whereas in the official list of the dead, presented to them during this time, only a little more than 200 were reported dead. Even if we assume that the Hajj of the year 1902-1903 was exceptional for the mass beating by the Bedouins of pilgrims, still a lot of legacies are lost or are half-robbed'.⁷¹

Thus, the pilgrims died both from natural causes and at the hands of the Bedouins, who made a business of robberies. Nikolsky again suggested: "I dare remind you that I informed you about the desirability of having a Muslim Secretary in Jeddah, who, performing the Hajj, would protect the inheritance and protect the Russian subjects, as does the English Vice-Consul".⁷²

The increasing attacks by local Bedouin robbers on caravans during this period were of particular concern to the Consulate. Consular officials suspected that the Ottoman Vali himself was involved in the high-profile robbery of the Egyptian caravan that was taking *Mahmal* to Mecca. According to this version, he set a caravan of Bedouins to harm the Egyptians, and Russian diplomats did not exclude that the British were behind it. On 1 May 1905, Nikolsky wrote to Hartwig (No. 246):

'It is said that the attack of the Bedouins on the sacred Egyptian caravan (my telegram of 13 April, a. c.) did not happen without the knowledge or even with the participation of Vali. Relations between the Egyptians and the Turks after the Anglo-French agreement became even more acute, and the latter are ready to do tricks to the Egyptians at every step'.⁷³

And further:

'It is unlikely that these established bad relations (as well as the story of the Bedouin attack on Mahmal) are not supported by the British themselves. For the time being, they are able to contain this growing hatred, but if the opportunity presented itself, they would be able to produce the desired outbreak and create a favorable incident for intervention. So far, the agreement is not so firmly established, and in the Hejaz not everything is going the way the Messrs. Englishmen would like'.⁷⁴

The chargé d'affaires drew the attention of the Department's leadership to the fact that the Turkish administration did not show "desirable energy" in this case. The convoy had taken too long to assemble for Mahmal, and it still did not provide reliable protection, which could also be explained by the fact that in Mecca, and especially in Medina, there were not "enough troops".

Continuing to inform the Foreign Ministry about the growing influence of Great Britain in the Hejaz, the diplomat in his report for number 576 of 9 July 1906, under the heading "Top Secret", expressed indignation about the article on the subject, published in the "New Time" magazine, in which Russia was given advice to conclude a treaty with Turkey to guarantee the inviolability of the

71 Ibid., p. 64 rev.

72 Ibid., p. 64 rev. & 65.

73 *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii. 1905. Fund: Politicheskij arkhiv* [Political Archive], 482-779, p. 22 & 22 rev.

74 Ibid., p. 22 rev. & 23.

Holy Muslim cities. Speaking in his usual figurative language, Nikolsky reasoned:

‘Well, what can an alliance with Turkey give, existing as it does only thanks to the birth of the Eastern question? Let us suppose that we form an alliance with Turkey, and shortly afterwards an Arab revolt ensues. If England supports them openly, will we dare to go to war with her even in alliance with Turkey? The proverbial ease of invading India was not worse than ‘some...’, as we called our enemy before the war with Japan. Elsewhere perhaps England is vulnerable to us, but it is impossible for us to compete with her in Arabia. It is scarcely possible for a large army to reach Arabia by land, and England will not allow it by sea.’⁷⁵

The author of the report considered another hypothetical scenario: when England will not intervene in the conflict openly, but will support the uprising secretly, as she did at the time in Yemen. “Let’s say that we, according to the agreement with Turkey, will send our troops to the Hejaz, thought Nikolsky, could the Ottoman Porte, with whom we will be allied, compel England not to send her troops to Arabia? Were England to send troops, then others will as well. There is nothing to divide, but perhaps we will have one bone left, given our present situation”⁷⁶. The Secretary conceded a third scenario, in which Russia’s alliance with Turkey would keep England from intervening:

‘We will not send troops, England will not send them, and other powers will not send them. Then the Arabs will drive the Turks out of here, and then, when it is necessary to appease their willfulness, England will find a convenient pretext to intervene. In all three cases an alliance with Turkey for the preservation of the Hejaz is useless.’⁷⁷

But these three scenarios did not exhaust the options for the possible development of the situation in the case of an alliance between Russia and Turkey:

‘Would it be impossible for an international force to take the Hejaz, and organize a neutral state, as some people assume?...It is possible even to build a community of wolves, but only under the condition that three or four wolves bring in the lion, the guardian of order. And who is going to maintain order in a neutral state of the Hejaz? Turkey, who is unacceptable because of her intrigues, would then have to be offered to leave from here, with its troops. Without solid protection, the force of which would be felt by the robbers, the Bedouins, order in the Hejaz is unthinkable.’⁷⁸

And all troops and the entire administration in the Hejaz can be only Muslim, rightly considered Nikolsky: “for the explanation why especially the Holy city of Mecca is a place of sanctity is that its sacred lands have not been defiled by unbelievers (of course, there is no reason to count the Europeans who are not Muslims, but have penetrated Mecca in the guise of the faithful)”. It seems easy to create such armed forces and such an administration here, the diplomat reasoned: “the British Muslims are Hindus, the French – Algerians and Tunisians, the Dutch – Javanese, the Austrians – Bosnians, we also have a lot of Muslims there”⁷⁹.

The diplomat continued to ponder; it is still unclear what will happen if the Muslim troops of all countries, with Muslim officers, are sent to Mecca. They have more faith and more religious feelings:

75 Ibid., p. 70 rev. & 71.

76 Ibid., p. 71 & 71 rev.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid., p. 71 rev. & 72.

79 Ibid., p. 72 rev.

‘But what if a call for Jihad is made, with the stirring of the green banner of the prophet, by the Sharif of Mecca, the Holy descendant of Mahomet, limited in his religious and financial operations of fleecing pilgrims? Is this not a dangerous attempt, and will we, in the interest of a neutral state, drag chestnuts out of the fire for others? This idea of a neutral state sounds so easy, but at the same time, not so easy.’⁸⁰

What else can happen in this case, according to the diplomat? “How many quarrels will there be over primacy, and as a result, enmity may even break out between individual nations of Muslims”.⁸¹ And such hostility doesn’t correspond in any way to the interests of Russia. But, alas, here Nikolsky was right. As we know today, more than 115 years after the time to which this diplomatic correspondence refers, quarrels, struggles for supremacy, and enmity between “individual Muslim nations” have, to our great regret, become the norm. Was Mikhail Erastovich right when thinking about the dangers of intervention by external forces with the goal of pushing Muslims against each other and to subordinate them to outside influence? As already mentioned, the main such force he saw everywhere was Britain.

‘How else would England leave the Indians with Russian subjects without the supervision of the British? But the English, however, have a lot of fellow Muslims, and if the Hejaz is neutralized, there probably would be a lot of other hunters too, once again all will be subject to English influence, if not in English hands...Finally, how will the Arabs and Bedouins react to the new order? Currently, the Arabs hate the Turks. But why? Not for their severity, but because the Turks in one way or another take away from them more than half of their income from the pilgrims.’⁸²

The Russian Diplomat Reveals the Vices of the Hejaz Society

Nikolsky understood the extent of corruption that had plagued the Hejaz administrative system, which predetermined its downfall after only two decades under the onslaught of that orderly, although brutal, cleansing carried by Abdul Aziz bin Saud’s troops. Both the local Hejaz administration and Turkish officials were involved in the corrupt system, fueled by subsidies from the Ottoman center and revenues from pilgrims. The Bedouin tribes, whose attacks were so feared by foreign diplomats, were in such dire straits that they often found no other means of subsistence than plunder. However, plundering caravans was easier, and the occupation existed in Arabia for centuries. “The Bedouins, who fail to receive nearly all the subsidies sent by the government,” wrote the chargé d’affaires, “as most of the money melts into the pockets of the administration, also hate the latter. The Turks are afraid of the Arabs, feeling that every minute they may be expelled from the Hejaz where they are aliens, who seized power by force and are hated by the people.”⁸³

Although Nikolsky in his assessments always exaggerated, he in principle correctly predicted the rise of Arab nationalism and the explosion of anti-Turkish feelings (still often latent) in the region. He spared no words in describing the moral decay, the slave trade, and the shameless business derived from the Holy pilgrimage, the overall discontent that would in the near future lead to the defeat of the

80 Ibid., p. 73.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid., p. 73 & 73 rev.

83 Ibid., p. 73 rev. & 74.

Turks and the Hashemite elite. "Let us suppose that a Muslim peoples' government is introduced," he wrote in the same report No. 576:

'... what will it benefit the country if all the old giant ugliness will not change? And if you start to change this, will it not cause outrage? All those living here depend on income from worshippers, these incomes come mainly from robbing pilgrims, from deceptions and theft of their things, in the desert and, in general, from the Bedouins, and often in the cities – robberies and plunder.'⁸⁴

Attempts to do away with these vices, Nikolsky believed, could cause "great displeasure". Of course, the Turks took a lot for themselves, but did not prevent others from "robbing pilgrims as they like". Indignant at the slavery still existing in the Hejaz, the diplomat exclaimed:

'And the question of slavery? In Mecca now, 7-8 shops openly sell slaves, and slaves in Medina, too. How can this shameful bargaining be destroyed without a popular uprising? The Muslim troops themselves could be on the side of the instigators of disorder, yet should non-Islamic troops be permitted in the Hejaz, 200 million Muslims will rise worldwide to protect the desecrated shrines. It is not so easy to arrange this international state.'⁸⁵

Despite the fact that Nikolsky did not spend much time in Jeddah, thanks to his enormous activity he was able to understand many of the intricacies of local political life, even if his many dispatches are not devoid of superficiality and speculation.

While being temporarily in charge of the consulate affairs, the stubborn collegiate secretary was not afraid to give sharp and often merciless characteristics to high-ranking local dignitaries, boldly invaded the system of clan and tribal ties closed to outsiders, and worked out and immediately reported to his superiors not always carefully thought-out recommendations, including on very sensitive issues. It is surprising how, being actually the only diplomat in the consulate and working in the terrible climatic and living conditions of Jeddah, he managed to collect such a large amount of information, conducting the necessary number of meetings, having time to analyze it, and regularly send to the Foreign Ministry and the Embassy in Constantinople quite voluminous dispatches handwritten (!) in the calligraphic handwriting. Whether there was a technical officer on the staff of the consulate to whom the diplomat could dictate his reports, we do not know for sure, but for this he would certainly need to have access to secret documentation, which is difficult to imagine. Apparently, the *chargé d'affaires* wrote himself, and the handwriting in dispatches is always the same, his. And the downside of his information work was that often the diplomat simply retold numerous rumors.

In the autumn of the same year, the struggle for the post of Grand Sharif escalated in the Hejaz after the death of the former. In report No. 902, sent "Classified" on 30 September 1905 to Hartwig, Nikolsky wrote:

'Between Turkish officials in Jeddah there runs the following rumor: the current Vali of Hejaz, when Abdulla Pasha was appointed Sharif supposedly wrote to Constantinople: "If you leave Sharif Abdullah in place, you should not count on the huge amount of income that you get now from the Hejaz. Abdullah will not continue the old order' (one could say: extortion and brute

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid., p. 74 rev.

tyranny). If you want to keep him, you must take a receipt from him that he undertakes to deliver you a certain amount annually. It is best to leave Ali Pasha (*Vakil*),⁸⁶ who will do nothing". How far this is true is difficult to judge, but everyone is repeating it'.⁸⁷

Next, Mikhail Erastovich proposed a very bold, although difficult to verify, analysis of the balance of forces in the leadership of the Hejaz: "On the one hand, it is generally believed that Abdullah Pasha will disagree with the present gang of robbers, but Ali Pasha, according to the stories of the Meccans, also seems to be not inclined to harassment and extortion. Let me cite a somewhat delicate, but very characteristic fact".⁸⁸

Here the Governor of the Consulate touched upon a subject which was well known, but which was not customary to speak aloud: the prostitution that flourished in the Hejaz. At the same time, the diplomat, condemning some local residents, spoke very respectfully about the mass of pilgrims:

'As you know, prostitution in the Holy city is very well developed. It is necessary to give honor to the Hajj pilgrims, most of them, strictly following the Quran, do not provide income to the courtesans of Mecca. But the Arabs during the Hajj, on the contrary, lead a particularly intemperate life, having at their disposal a golden shower of the Hajj money'.⁸⁹

By these people the diplomat meant, of course, not the Arabs at all, but the depraved local elite.

'The authorities are willing to allow prostitution but under the late Sharif, it was taxed in his favor through such big fees that only the most famous damsels could satisfy the greedy self-interest of a descendant of Mahomed and his clique. Most of the *donzelle*⁹⁰ had fled to Jeddah, where the profits might not be so great, but they were more certain. At the first news of the Sharif's death, all these ladies went to Mecca and openly rejoiced. Months have passed, but Jeddah sees no mass or single arrivals. This is a clear indicator that now even they are not subjected to large extortions'.⁹¹

Nikolsky spoke very positively about the *Vakil* (deputy) of the late great Sharif Ali Pasha, who performed his duties after his death and was distinguished by "justice and honesty". He reported that after the looting of the houses of the former Grand Sharif's favorites, the whole of Mecca breathed freely. At the same time, it was not clear whether *Vakil* would fight Vali if he remained in office, "but Vali is at any rate more agreeable to his brother, if only in the sense that under Ali Pasha he may be able to keep his place, and Abdullah Pasha hates him and will survive".⁹²

The most unexpected news was persistent rumors about the possible abolition of the Emirate institution by the Turkish government, which the diplomat gladly retold. The great Sharif of Mecca, in accordance with the laws of the Porte, was considered the Emir, i.e. the ruler of Mecca, although not quite ordinary, since the population considered him, above all, as the spiritual head of the Muslim community

86 Deputy.

87 *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii. 1905. Fund: Politicheskij arkhiv* [Political Archive], 482-779, p. 85 & 85 rev.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid., p. 85 rev. & 86.

90 French word meaning a "woman of light morals".

91 *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii. 1905. Fund: Politicheskij arkhiv* [Political Archive], 482-779, p. 86 & 86 rev.

92 Ibid.

of the entire Hejaz. Nikolsky, according to his custom, asked a question: Is the abolition of “governance” in the Hejaz beneficial to us? On this occasion, he expressed the following considerations to his superiors:

‘First of all, is it profitable for us, even from a political point of view, not taking into account the Hajj to the Hejaz, if there were riots? Having in mind broad historical trends, as I have already considered in detail, England will not fail to make use of them under one pretext or another, taking advantage, perhaps, of the restoration of the violated rights of Egypt, whose pilgrims may very easily suffer from the general turmoil.’⁹³

But not everything was so clear. “On the other hand, it is hardly advantageous for us that full harmony should be restored between the Arabs and the Turks. Let Arabia, with its restless element, take a certain part of Turkey’s strength and attention.”⁹⁴ In other words, the authorities were asked to decide what is more profitable in the Hejaz for Russia: order, the status quo or some chaos that could weaken Turkey.

The diplomat considered in detail various aspects of the influence of the Emirate institution or its destruction on the course of affairs in the Hejaz. He summed up his reasoning as follows:

- ‘1) A good Emir will pick a good Vali. Everything will be quiet, peaceful and calm, but the very existence of the Emirate, serving as an eternal, though implicit, rebuke of Islam to the secular power of the Turks, who destroyed the Caliphate,⁹⁵ in itself is a guarantee that the discord and hatred that exists between the Turks and the Arabs, will not weaken.
- 2) A good Vali, one without the Sharif, will not establish order. All his good undertakings will be broken through the increased hatred, in revenge for the destruction of governance that would incite the fanatics, (I understand, of course, that *Vakils* of the Sharif are only puppets in Turkish hands, which should eventually disappear).
- 3) This hatred that can be controlled by a good Vali will break out with a bad Vali, who will extort money. And we must assume that for the sake of large revenues, the Turkish government will prefer, perhaps, a bad Vali to a good one who does not know how to extort money.’⁹⁶

Nikolsky claimed that the former Sharif and Vali “robbed together”. But the memory of this will fade, and “fanatics will not cease to extol the idea of *emirship*, attributing all good to the former Sharifs. Major disturbances can easily arise”. And further:

- ‘(4) In the case of a bad Emir, of course, things lose. But on the other hand, where is the guarantee that we will gain anything from the destruction of the Emirate? The truth is that Turks, when riots and robbery of Bedouins break out, blame the Sharif, but it is only a pretext. Sharif or not, the Bedouins would remain, and the authorities would have to reckon with them even more than before, until this system of greed and extortion was changed. And if the system changes, if the Bedouins will be given the money they are owed and not steal the bread sent to them, they will help the Turks against the Sharif, whose caravans they do not hesitate to rob now.’⁹⁷

93 Ibid., p. 86 rev. & 87.

94 Ibid.

95 Here Nikolsky was wrong. The Turkish Sultan at the same time, as before, was also the Caliph. The Caliphate was abolished only under Atatürk in 1924.

96 *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii. 1905. Fund: Politicheskij arkhiv* [Political Archive], 482-779, p. 87 & 87 rev.

97 Ibid., p. 88.

In conclusion, the author of the report, although he stressed that he did not undertake to make a final conclusion, in fact did so:

‘I had little to do with the Bedouins, having received orders not to insist on the right to free exit from the city and not to enter into relations with the nomads. However, it seems to me that the Sharif Abdullah Pasha, so respected by all, will be better than any Vali similar to the present one, who will not hesitate to rob his own father.’⁹⁸

Conclusion

Analysis of the reports and records of the Secretary of the Consulate of the Russian Empire in Jeddah, Mkhail E. Nikolsky, as well as the instructions of the Ministry and the Embassy in Constantinople allow us to conclude the importance of the “Islamic” component of their activities, as segregated into six main areas.

1. Study of the internal political situation in the vilayet, including the balance of power in the ruling elite, the role of the Porte, relations between Turks and Arabs, the Vali and the Sharif, Bedouin tribes and authorities, the role of Bedouin tribes, the tasks and actions of the Turkish military contingent, etc.
2. Gathering information about activities of Turkish officials and representatives of foreign powers unfriendly to the interests of Russia.
3. Study of the routes by which pilgrims arrive at the Hajj. Protecting pilgrims from the influence of radical Islamist and nationalist ideas. Identification of persons who carry out indoctrination hostile to the interests of Russia, and places where it was conducted.
4. Study of the sanitary and medical situation in the main cities of the Vilayet. Immediate notification of the Center in cases of contagious infectious diseases in the Vilayet during the Hajj.
5. Work with pilgrims to protect them from unscrupulous activities of intermediaries (*dalils*, or guides, owners of camels and premises, etc.).
6. Gathering information on attacks on pilgrims, providing them with all possible assistance, and maintaining the necessary contacts with the local authorities to improve the security situation during the Hajj.

Foreign policy tasks in the work of diplomats, as follows from the documents, were closely linked to the internal situation in Russia, where ensuring the loyalty of the Muslim population to the authorities in a difficult period was one of the imperatives for all departments in charge of Islamic issues.

In correspondence with the Center, the Secretary who temporarily managed the Consulate actively used the opportunity to express his assessments of the internal political situation in the vilayet and draft bold proposals for working with pilgrims. The work of diplomats was greatly influenced by their personal qualities and ambitions, and this was superimposed by relations of rivalry and even hostility between them.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 88 rev.