

**THE IMPACT OF THE INDO-PAKISTANI CONFLICT ON  
INDO-SAUDI RELATIONS, 1947-1974**

Magali Grolleau-Couton

University of Nantes

India is the non-Muslim country that most supported the Palestinian cause, to the detriment of Israel. Even before independence, the Indian National Congress was opposed to Zionism's intrusion into the Arab world. After the painful partition of 1947, Nehru's India could only be distrustful of a State created on a religious basis. Besides, in the context of the Kashmir issue, Nehru dreaded the formation of a Muslim coalition that would be likely to support the Pakistani rival. To counter the Pakistani influence in the Middle East, he kept his distance from Israel and wooed the Arab countries. But if Nehru and his successors managed to forge close ties with Egypt, they failed to win the favours of the powerful Saudi Kingdom. After a short-lived and pragmatic rapprochement in the middle of the fifties, Indo-Saudi relations became strained if not hostile until a slight improvement from 1973-1974.

**Laborious beginnings, 1947-1954**

*The main factors of India's policy towards Saudi Arabia*

Soon after India's independence, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Indian Prime Minister, tried hard to establish close ties with the Arab-Muslim states. Various reasons drove him to initiate a strong pro-Arab policy: India's historical ties with the people of West Asia, Indian regional security interests, oil and trade, etc. But the most important factors were probably connected with the partition of 1947.

The independence of the subcontinent gave birth to two sovereign states: secular India and Muslim Pakistan, the fruit of the Muslim League's demand for a separate Muslim state since the beginning of the thirties. Despite the creation of Pakistan, a large number of Muslims chose to stay in India. In 1947 this population of about thirty-five million people represented India's largest religious minority and the third largest Muslim community in the world after Indonesia and Pakistan<sup>1</sup>. This demographic reality contributed to shape Nehru's Arab policy: the democratic Indian Government could not ignore the feelings of its thirty-five million Muslim minority. By consistently advocating his secular nature and by forging friendly relations with Arab-Muslim countries, the Government of India aimed to reassure the Indian Muslims. Immediately after the slaughters of the partition, they needed to know that the Indo-Pakistani conflict was not «anti-Muslim»<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the ruling Congress party regarded the Muslim votes as an essential part of its electoral base<sup>3</sup>.

The Indian Muslim minority was a major influence on India's attitude towards the Middle East. The custody of the Holy Places imparted a particular importance to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia<sup>4</sup>. Thousands of Indian pilgrims performed an annual pilgrimage to Mecca<sup>5</sup>: it was necessary for the Indian Government to keep good relations with the Hejaz in order not to jeopardize the Hajj pilgrimage.

---

<sup>1</sup> KUMARASWAMY, P. R.: *India's Israel Policy*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> WARD, R. E.: *India's pro-Arab Policy. A study in continuity*, Westport, New York, Praeger, 1992, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43; 72.

<sup>4</sup> National Archives of the United Kingdom (below NAUK), FO 371/120763: confidential letter 54 dated August 9, 1956, from R.W. Parkes, British Embassy in Jeddah, to the Foreign Office.

<sup>5</sup> National Archives of India (below NAI), Ministry of External Affairs (below MEA), F. T/54/1722/21(S): extract from a note dated September 24, 1953.

The Indo-Pakistan conflict was also a determining factor in India's Arab-Muslim policy. Apart from his desire to give the Indian Muslims a feeling of security, Nehru was obsessed with the fear of «Islamic encirclement»<sup>6</sup>.

At the time of partition in 1947 arose an issue that would have far-reaching consequences on India's foreign policy, and especially on India's West Asian policy. Princely states, which benefited from a protectorate regime under the British rule, were given the option of joining India or Pakistan. The state of Jammu and Kashmir was a predominantly Muslim state governed by a Hindu maharajah, who was reluctant to join either country. This state, situated in the northwest of the subcontinent, borders both India and Pakistan. Its location, where Afghanistan, China and the Soviet Union converge, makes it one of the most geostrategic regions of the world. According to Pakistan, Kashmir, because of its Muslim majority, should join Pakistan; India claimed that Kashmir was a natural part of secular India... The first Indo-Pakistan war broke out in October 1947. Since January 1, 1949, Kashmir had been divided by the ceasefire line imposed by the United Nations.

As the Kashmir issue became internationalized, it started to shape India's policy towards the Arab-Muslim countries. Delhi's considerable diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan, Iran and the Arab states were an attempt to counter Pakistan's claim for pan-Islamic solidarity<sup>7</sup>. It was a necessity for the Indian Government to tackle the relentless Pakistani propaganda against India in the Middle East and the Pakistani plan for the creation of a Pan-Islamic alliance<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*: extract from a note dated September 24, 1953.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> APPADORAI, A.: *Domestic Roots of India's Foreign Policy, 1947-1972*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 148.

India's Muslim population and the Indo-Pakistani conflict were the dominant forces shaping Nehru's policy towards West Asia - and Saudi Arabia - immediately after independence.

### *The Pakistani advantage*

From 1948 the political competition between India and Pakistan for Arab support on the Kashmir issue raged. In Saudi Arabia, Pakistan gained the upper hand over India.

The Indo-Pakistan diplomatic rivalry appeared clearly in August 1948. The anniversary of the independence of Pakistan and India was marked in Jeddah by receptions held by the Pakistan Vice-Consul, Shah Jehan Amir Kebir<sup>9</sup>, and the Indian Consul, Professor Abdul Magid Khan, on August 14 and 15 respectively. The Pakistan reception was attended by Saudi Arabian Government officials, the heads of diplomatic missions in Jeddah, and members of the Indian community. Abdul Magid Khan, the Consul recently appointed to Jeddah by the Government of India, was also present. According to the British Embassy, the speech delivered by Shah Jehan Amir Kebir was «in very poor taste» and «undoubtedly revealed an attitude of unrelenting bitterness and hostility to the Indian Dominion»<sup>10</sup>. The Indian reception took place the following day. The Indian Consul had intended to hold it in Mecca, but there was a good deal of resentment by Pakistani residents at this proposal. Finally the Saudi Arabian authorities themselves persuaded Abdul Magid Khan to hold his reception in Jeddah, on the

---

<sup>9</sup> Shah Jehan Amir Kebir was the Vice-Consul appointed at Jeddah by the former Central Government of India. At the time of partition he chose to serve Pakistan.

<sup>10</sup> NAUK, FO 371/69738 B: restricted letter 140 dated August 17, 1948, from A.C. Trott, British Embassy in Jeddah, to the Foreign Office.

grounds that «no political meeting of any sort were permissible in the Holy City»<sup>11</sup>. The reception was attended by much the same company as the Pakistan reception on the previous day, including Shah Jehan Amir Kebir and his staff. Unlike the Pakistan Vice-Consul's speech, the Indian Consul's one was «of considerable tact and discretion»<sup>12</sup>, deploring communal strife. The only adverse comments upon this speech were made by the Pakistan Vice-Consul, who complained that Abdul Magid Khan «mentioned Pakistan too often in the course of his remarks»<sup>13</sup>. This insincere attitude illustrated the Pakistani determination: every opportunity to denigrate India had to be taken.

As a reaction against the Pakistani offensive, India tried to develop its own propaganda. Thus, Nehru, in a note dated July 23, 1948, stressed the need to reorganise the information and directives sent for external publicity. He explained that «for the Arab or Muslim countries, [the Indian] approach [would] be somewhat different, emphasising the Pakistan or Hyderabad or Kashmir problem, more specially giving facts about the large Muslim population at present in India»<sup>14</sup>. In another note of November 16, 1948, the Indian Prime Minister remarked that «the Hajj pilgrimage [was] an ideal occasion for propaganda and publicity among Muslims of all nations» and that «it [was] desirable for [the Indians] to send two or three competent persons with the pilgrims or just before to undertake this work»<sup>15</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: restricted letter 140 dated August 17, 1948, from A.C. Trott, British Embassy in Jeddah, to the Foreign Office.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> NEHRU, J.: *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Vol. 7, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 609.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*: *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Vol. 8, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 410.

However, the Indian diplomacy lagged behind in Saudi Arabia. On November 25, 1951, a treaty of friendship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia was signed<sup>16</sup>. Three years later, when King Saud visited Pakistan for ten days from April 20, 1954<sup>17</sup>, he extended Riyadh's support to Pakistan on the Kashmir issue<sup>18</sup>. At the same time, during the years 1952-1954, the question of the Indian representation in Saudi Arabia arose in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. Since 1948 India only had a Consulate General in Jeddah. In repeated notes, the Indian Consul, M.K. Kidwai, strongly urged the upgrading of the Consulate General, putting forward the fact that «countries much smaller than [India] [were] better represented in this country»<sup>19</sup>. Budgetary considerations seemed to be the main explanation for the Indian weak representation in the Middle East: in 1947, India's resident missions in that area were confined to Cairo, Tehran, and Istanbul!<sup>20</sup> Both K.M. Panikkar, Ambassador to Egypt, and Maulana A.K. Azad, Education Minister and Muslim key member of the Indian Cabinet, agreed with Kidwai and stressed the great economic and political importance of Saudi Arabia and its growing influence on other countries of the Middle East<sup>21</sup>. But Panikkar suggested that he should be concurrently accredited to Jeddah<sup>22</sup>, while Azad firmly thought that it would be better to have an independent representative there. According to him, «the fact that the Indian Legation there [would] become a subordinate branch of the Indian

---

<sup>16</sup> Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (below AMAE), Afrique-Levant, Arabie Saoudite, 461: letter 1303/AS dated November 27, 1951, from M.P. Augé, French Ambassador to Pakistan, to R. Schuman, French Minister of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>17</sup> NEHRU, J.: *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Vol. 25, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 562.

<sup>18</sup> PASHA, A. K.: «Indo-Saudi Relations. Past and Emerging Challenges» in DIETL, G., PANT, G., PASHA, A. K. and JAIN, P. C. (ed.): *Contemporary Saudi Arabia and the Emerging Indo-Saudi Relations*, Delhi, Shipra Publications, 2007, p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> NAI, MEA, F. T/54/1722/21(S): extracts from the Indian Consulate General Jeddah's annual report for the year 1952.

<sup>20</sup> KUMARASWAMY, P. R.: *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124.

<sup>21</sup> NAI, MEA, F. T/54/1722/21(S): extract from note without reference dated September 24, 1953.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*: letter 671-FS/53 dated October 15, 1953, from R.K. Nehru, Foreign Secretary, to K.M. Panikkar, Indian Ambassador to Egypt.

Embassy in Egypt [would] be interpreted by Hejaz as evidence that the Indian Government [was] indifferent to the importance of Hejaz»»<sup>23</sup>. After lengthy debate, Azad persuaded Nehru, who decided in October 1953 that the Legation in Jeddah should be in charge of a separate Minister<sup>24</sup>.

From 1948 to 1954, Pakistan strengthened its relations with Saudi Arabia. India forged ties with Egypt, Syria, Iraq, as well as Afghanistan and Iran. Its unequivocal support for the Palestinian cause had a part in this success. But Delhi had difficulty countering the Pakistani propaganda in Saudi Arabia, partly because of the weakness of its diplomatic representation there.

#### *The beginning of an evolution*

The end of the year 1954 was marked by an improvement in Indo-Saudi relations. On October 1, 1954, the Consulate general of India in Jeddah was finally raised to the status of a Legation and Kidwai became Ambassador.

A few days later, the Saudi Foreign Minister urgently called Kidwai to the Foreign Ministry and told him that he had an important request to convey to the Government of India. The United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia had agreed to refer their dispute over the Buraimi Oasis to arbitration; the arbitration tribunal was to consist of five members of whom one would be nominated by the United Kingdom and one by the Saudi Government. These two would then choose the three neutrals. The Saudi Minister explained to Kidwai that «having regards to the friendly relations between India and Saudi Arabia and the independent attitude that India had been taking on international questions, Saudi Government would like to put up the name of some eminent Indian

---

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, F. T/54/1722/21(S): note dated July 30, 1953, from A. K. Azad.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*: letter 671-FS/53 dated October 15, 1953, from R. K. Nehru to K. M. Panikkar.

with experience of International arbitrations on border disputes for the membership of the tribunal»<sup>25</sup>. He asked for a list of three or five Indians, specifying that under the terms of the agreement, the name must be acceptable to the representative of the United Kingdom. In Kidwai's opinion, in view of the recent close contacts between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, it seemed obvious that a Pakistani member would not be readily acceptable to the British. So the Saudis turned to India... Nevertheless, the Indian diplomat thought that «it would add to [the Indian] prestige in Saudi Arabia in particular and the Middle East in general if an Indian national [was] appointed on this very important tribunal»<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs hastened to send a list of three names<sup>27</sup>.

Yet, on November 13, India learned from its Embassy in Cairo that the three neutrals who would form the arbitration tribunal along with a Saudi and a British citizen, were a Belgian, a Cuban and... a Pakistani<sup>28</sup>! The Ministry of External Affairs, deeply disappointed, then asked Kidwai to make discreet inquiries to find out whether it was the British who did not agree to have an Indian or whether the Saudis were not agreeable to have an Indian who may have been acceptable to the British<sup>29</sup>. Kidwai did his best, but the officials of the Saudi Foreign Ministry «[did] not know anything about it» and the Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister was «hardly communicative»<sup>30</sup> when the matter was raised. Kidwai's conclusion was that the Saudi representative had sponsored

---

<sup>25</sup> NAI, MEA, F. T/54/1816/21(S): secret letter ICJ-53(89)/54 dated October 13, 1954, from M. K. Kidwai to C.S. Jha, Joint Secretary, MEA.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>27</sup> NAI, MEA, F. T/54/1816/21(S): secret letter ICJ-53(93)/54.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*: secret letter 2-C.S/53 dated November 13, 1954, from R. G. Rajwade, Embassy of India in Egypt, to C. S. Jha.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*: secret letter T/54/1816/21 dated December 8, 1954, from M. Singh, MEA, to M. K. Kidwai.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*: secret letter ICJ-53(139)/54 dated December 19, 1954, from M. K. Kidwai to C. S. Jha.



the name of an Indian, but «the name was not such which the other party could agree to»<sup>31</sup>. It is difficult to establish to what extent this hypothesis was correct.

Nevertheless, both the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Saudi Arabia at Legation level and the Saudi request to the Government of India revealed a favourable evolution.

Another fact confirmed this tendency: after the creation of the Indo-Arab Society in Bombay on October 7, 1954, Mohamed A. Alireza, Saudi Minister of Commerce and Industry, wrote to Nehru. Keeping in view the objectives of the recently formed Indo-Arab Society, Alireza proposed setting up joint ventures to invest the Saudi Arabian capital in India. In his answer, Nehru affirmed that «any closer contact between the Government and people of Saudi Arabia and the Government and people of India would be welcomed» and «[welcomed] the association of [the Saudi] Government in [the] major enterprises in India»<sup>32</sup>.

During the first years following India's independence, Indo-Saudi ties remained hesitant, whereas Pakistan seemed to have gained the Saudis' favour. The change begun at the end of 1954 accelerated in the following months due to the particular context of the Cold War.

### **1955-1956: An Indo-Saudi honeymoon?**

In 1955, the establishment of the Baghdad Pact opened up a new chapter in Indo-Saudi relations.

---

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> NEHRU, J.: *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Vol. 27, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 198-200.

*The intrusion of the Cold War in the Middle East and its implications*

By the end of 1952, Pakistan's attempt to create a Pan-Islamic bloc which would support its claims on Kashmir was definitely a failure, mainly because of the Arabs disliking the idea of being led by a non-Muslim state<sup>33</sup>. Then Pakistan turned towards the West. On September 8, 1954, Pakistan joined the South East Asia Treaty Organisation. The following year, it became a member of the Western sponsored Baghdad Pact along with Iran and Turkey. India, which had chosen nonalignment, rapidly denounced bloc membership and perceived Pakistan's move to the West as a threat<sup>34</sup>. In the Arab world dominated by neutralism, the Baghdad Pact got a poor welcome. Only Iraq joined the military pact<sup>35</sup>.

Egypt's President Nasser strongly opposed the Baghdad Pact. Nonalignment provided an ideological framework within which India could make common cause with Egypt. A strong friendship arose between Nehru and Nasser, who held several meetings in 1955<sup>36</sup>. At that time, Saudi Arabia was Egypt's ally. In fact, the Saudis considered the Hashemite rulers of Jordan and Iraq as their sworn enemies and tried to counter the Hashemite ambitions by siding with the non-aligned Egypt<sup>37</sup>. Saudi Arabia rejected the Baghdad Pact and expressed disapproval of Pakistan's membership. Riyadh was «astonished to find that the Islamic state of Pakistan should accede to those who have

---

<sup>33</sup> Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes (below CADN), Londres, 632 : letter 654/AS dated September 1, 1952, from M. Laforge, French Chargé d'Affaires at Karachi, to R. Schuman.

<sup>34</sup> CADN, New Delhi, 253: Annual report of the French Embassy in India, pp. 86-87.

<sup>35</sup> Iraq withdrew from the Baghdad Pact after the July 1958 revolution.

<sup>36</sup> WARD, R. E.: *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> CADN, New Delhi, 172: telegram 322-323 dated May 3, 1955, from S. Ostrorog, French Ambassador to India, to A. Pinay, French Minister of Foreign Affairs.

joined hands with the Zionist Jews»<sup>38</sup>. Consequently the Indo-Egyptian rapprochement and the Baghdad Pact brought India and Saudi Arabia closer to each other politically.

### *Significant visits*

The Asian-African Conference held in Bandung in April 1955 provided an ideal forum for Nehru to denounce the military pacts and to establish personal contacts with the Arab leaders, especially Amir Faisal, Crown Prince and Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia<sup>39</sup>. On his way back to Saudi Arabia, Faisal stopped three days at New Delhi, from 2 to 5 May. During his talks with Nehru, Faisal remained reserved towards his Indian host. About India's policy, he said that «other people» told him «that India [...] was encouraging the spread of communism», whereas «the Arab countries [...] were religious and did not approve of communist atheism». Furthermore, the Saudi Crown Prince adds that «it [was] alleged that India [...] was opposed to the Arabs and their interests»<sup>40</sup>. These «other people» probably included some representatives of Pakistan: Saudi Arabia was still the target of the Pakistani propaganda. Nevertheless, Faisal created a favourable impression upon Nehru<sup>41</sup> and his visit aroused enthusiasm among the Indian journalists. For instance, *The Hindustan Times* described this visit as «fruitful politically»<sup>42</sup>.

The State visit of King Saud to India between November 26 and December 12, 1955 confirmed the new Indo-Saudi friendship. The Saudi King made it plain early that

---

<sup>38</sup> JHA, A. N.: «Pakistan as a factor in Indo-Saudi relations», in GROVER V. (ed.): *International Relations and Foreign Policy of India*, Vol. 4: *West Asia and India's Foreign Policy*, New Delhi, Deep and Deep Publications, 1992, p. 315.

<sup>39</sup> CADN, New Delhi, 172: letter 547/AS dated May 10, 1955, from S. Ostrorog to A. Pinay.

<sup>40</sup> NEHRU, J.: *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Vol. 28, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 224.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 223.

<sup>42</sup> *The Hindustan Times*, May 10, 1955.

he was anxious to see for himself how the Indian Muslims were being treated in the secular Indian state, and the Indian authorities wisely gave him a reasonable opportunity to do so<sup>43</sup>. They also attached to him for parts of his tour, as interpreters of the Indian scene, Syed Mahmud, Minister in the Ministry of External Affairs, and Maulana Mohammad Faruqi, a Muslim member of the Indian Parliament<sup>44</sup>. Although the King changed his mind and decided not to go to Kashmir to humour Pakistan<sup>45</sup>, the Indian efforts were amply rewarded by Saud's speech to the Indo-Arab Society in Bombay on December 10:

I desire to say to my Muslim brethren all over the world with satisfaction that the fate of the Indian Muslims is in safe hands. In my capacity as the guardian of Muslim holy places, I desire to express my gratitude to the great Indian leader, Mr. Nehru, and all those lieutenants of his, through whom he executes this policy of equality and equity<sup>46</sup>.

This was a setback for Pakistan, which had launched a campaign against India on the issue of the treatment of Indian Muslims. The Saudi King's statement greatly piqued the Pakistani public opinion and press<sup>47</sup>.

Saud's visit to India was certainly a success for the Indian diplomacy. While the Indian Government and press discovered a reassuring community of views with the Saudi guest on most international issues, they were unable however to entirely conceal

---

<sup>43</sup> CADN, Londres, 987: letter 1447/AS dated December 16, 1955, from S. Ostrorog to Antoine Pinay.

<sup>44</sup> NAUK, PREM 11/1572: confidential letter 169 dated December 22, 1955, from G.H. Middleton, Acting United Kingdom High Commissioner in India, to the Commonwealth Relations Office.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, FO 371/115886: secret telegram 1660 dated November 27, 1955, from the United Kingdom High Commissioner in Pakistan to the Commonwealth Relations Office.

<sup>46</sup> PASHA, A. K.: *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>47</sup> CADN, New Delhi, 172: letter 648/AS dated December 15, 1955, from J. Serres, French Ambassador to Pakistan, to A. Pinay.

their surprise at «the evidence of the feudal and autocratic structure of Saudi society which the nature and behaviour of the delegation itself gave to them»<sup>48</sup>. Nehru then realised the very considerable differences that existed between his country and Saudi Arabia. The Saudi requirements (requests for an Indian warship to escort the Saudi King from Jeddah to Bombay and a delegation to escort him from India to Saudi Arabia, etc.<sup>49</sup>) irritated the Indian leader<sup>50</sup>.

The Indo-Saudi rapprochement begun in 1955 was evidently only dictated by the circumstances and the national interests of both countries. There was no real affinity between them.

#### *The persistent Indo-Pakistan rivalry for Saudi friendship*

Of all the Arab countries outside the Baghdad Pact, Saudi Arabia claimed Pakistan's close attention the most and its diplomatic representation in Jeddah was one of the strongest<sup>51</sup>. In response to the setback suffered in December 1955, the Pakistan Prime Minister, Mohammad Ali, and the Pakistan Chief of General Staff, Major-General Nawabzada Sher Ali Khan paid a visit to Saudi Arabia in July 1956. According to the British Embassy in Jeddah, this short stay was a success. Mohammad Ali managed to «extract from the King Saud, who [was] strongly opposed to the Baghdad Pact, an admission - on oath - that he accepted Pakistan's position in the Pact» which was «a noteworthy achievement»<sup>52</sup>. Besides, the King's promise of full support to

---

<sup>48</sup> NAUK, PREM 11/1572: confidential letter 169 dated December 22, 1955, from G.H. Middleton, Acting United Kingdom High Commissioner in India, to the Commonwealth Relations Office.

<sup>49</sup> NEHRU, J.: *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Vol. 30, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 445-446.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 450.

<sup>51</sup> NAUK, FO 371/120763: confidential letter 54 dated August 9, 1956, from R.W. Parkes, British Embassy in Jeddah, to the Foreign Office.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

Pakistan over Kashmir naturally satisfied Mohammad Ali. Lastly, the Pakistan Prime Minister referred to the military field, explaining to the King the training facilities offered by Pakistan<sup>53</sup>. This Pakistani initiative was backed by the British, who considered that «if anyone [could] influence the Saudis towards a more responsible Middle East policy, and displace the numerous Egyptian experts at present in the country, it [was] Pakistan»<sup>54</sup>. The Indo-Pakistani rivalry and the Western strategies in the Middle East became closely linked.

The Egyptian nationalisation of the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956 greatly disturbed the Saudi King. As a determined opponent of Communism, Saud was suspicious of Egypt's growing entanglement with the Soviet bloc. He doubted whether the Egypt-Syria-Saudi Arabia Military Pact, signed in October 1955 in response to the Baghdad Pact, was really in his best interests<sup>55</sup>. In this context, Saud decided that Nehru should come to visit Saudi Arabia as soon as possible<sup>56</sup>. Even before the visit was officially announced, there were whispers in Jeddah that when Nehru came to Saudi Arabia, Nasser would be invited to meet him and King Saud. These rumours gained considerable currency in Egyptian and Indian newspapers<sup>57</sup>. But Nehru had no desire to go to Jeddah «for a tripartite conference»<sup>58</sup>. He arrived in Jeddah for an official four-day goodwill visit on September 24, some hours after Nasser's departure. Although the Indian Government had affirmed that this visit had nothing to do with the Suez

---

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*: minute dated August 17, 1956, from C.H. Messells, Foreign Office.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, FO 371/120762: secret telegram 2116 dated September 21, 1956, from the Commonwealth Relations Office to the United Kingdom High Commissioner in India.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, FO 371/119112: confidential telegram 252 dated August 19, 1956, from R.W. Parkes to the Foreign Office.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, FO 371/120762: confidential letter 64 dated October 3, 1956, from R.W. Parkes to the Foreign Office.

<sup>58</sup> NEHRU, J.: *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Vol. 35, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p.597.

problem<sup>59</sup>, Nehru's talks with King Saud and Prince Faisal centred mostly on it<sup>60</sup>. The Saudi King also raised the issue of the treatment of Muslims in India: shortly before Nehru's visit, members of the Pakistan Awami and Muslim Leagues had appealed to Saud to urge the Indian Prime Minister to check the current alleged persecution<sup>61</sup> of Indian Muslims<sup>62</sup>.

In undertaking this goodwill visit at a time not particularly convenient to himself, Nehru was no doubt largely motivated by a desire to counteract the effect of Mohammad Ali's visit two months earlier. India was worried about the influence of Pakistan in the Hejaz. The weakness of the Indian mission in Jeddah, compared with the strong Pakistani mission, needed attention. The British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, commenting on Nehru's visit, wrote with irony that «apart from showing the flag and impressing his personality - with conspicuous success - on a somewhat indifferent Saudi Arabia, Mr. Nehru left behind him a Deputy-Secretary of his External Affairs Department with urgent instructions to inject life into a moribund Legation»<sup>63</sup>.

Nehru's visit had an unexpected impact on Saudi-Pakistan relations. In a climate of Muslim agitation, it twisted the knife in the wound. Before his arrival, Nehru had received «a fulsome welcome from the Saudi press, which described him as a sort of Asian David who had successfully carried through a nationalist policy in the teeth of the Western Goliath»<sup>64</sup>. Moreover, the Pandit was greeted by the slogan «Rasoul as Salaam» («Welcome Messenger/Prophet of peace»), which provoked a burst of

---

<sup>59</sup> NAUK, FO 371/120762: secret telegram 1245 dated September 23, 1956, from the United Kingdom High Commissioner in India to the Commonwealth Relations Office.

<sup>60</sup> NEHRU J.: *op. cit.*, pp. 485-491.

<sup>61</sup> At this time there was a Muslim agitation in India and Pakistan in response to the Indian repression of Muslim demonstrations over the publication of the book *Religious Leaders*.

<sup>62</sup> NAUK, FO 371/120762: confidential letter 64 dated October 3, 1956, from R.W. Parkes to the Foreign Office.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

indignation among the Pakistani press and politicians<sup>65</sup>. Virulent articles against the Saudi Government and King Saud were published in Pakistani newspapers and a serious incident arose in October between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. After personal attacks on him, Saud was furious and instructed the Saudi-Arabian Ambassador to Pakistan to leave Karachi<sup>66</sup>. Saudi-Pakistan relations were on the verge of collapse. Two personal messages from Iskander Mirza, President of Pakistan, were necessary to defuse the diplomatic crisis<sup>67</sup>. The next month, Mirza flew to Riyadh to personally express his regret<sup>68</sup>.

Pakistan's membership of the Baghdad Pact led to its isolation in West Asia. But Saudi-Pakistan ties remained strong. Thus, in November 1956, Saudi Arabia entrusted its representation in England and France to Pakistan, without asking India at all or mentioning it to its Minister in Jeddah<sup>69</sup>. The Indo-Saudi rapprochement was only a temporary one dictated by the circumstances.

---

<sup>65</sup> CADN, New Delhi, 20: letter 906/AS dated October 3, 1956, from J. Serres to C. Pineau, French Minister of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>66</sup> NAUK, FO 371/120763: secret telegram 335 dated October 20, 1956, from the British Embassy in Jeddah to the Foreign Office.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*: secret telegram 347 dated October 27, 1956, from R.W. Parkes to the Foreign Office.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*: confidential telegram 1036 dated November 10, 1956, from Sir E. Burrows, Bahrain, to the Foreign Office.

<sup>69</sup> NEHRU J.: *op. cit.*, p. 495.



## **Political gap between India and Saudi-Arabia, 1957-1974**

From 1957, there was a significant shift in Saudi foreign policy. Because of this shift, Saudi Arabia moved much closer to Pakistan to the detriment of India.

### *U-turn in Saudi foreign policy and its effect on Indo-Saudi relations*

After the Suez Crisis and the Anglo-French bankruptcy, the United States laid down their Middle Eastern policy. The Eisenhower Doctrine aimed to fill the “power-vacuum” in the Middle East. At the same time, King Saud became aware of the Egyptian threat to his power. So he endorsed the Eisenhower Doctrine whereas Nasser’s Egypt denounced it as an imperialist attempt to dominate the Middle East<sup>70</sup>. Furthermore, in 1957, the House of Saud and the Hashemites buried the hatchet<sup>71</sup>. Gradually the Saudi-Egyptian confrontation for the Arab leadership began.

There was no real basis for friendship between the pro-West, conservative and feudal Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the one hand and the non-aligned and secular Republic of India on the other. In addition India kept up its close relationship with Egypt. According to Nehru, «politically, [Saudi Arabia] [had] some importance of course, but Egypt [was then] and [had] been for some time the premier Arab country»<sup>72</sup>. On the contrary the Pakistani hostility towards communism and Arab nationalism advocated by Nasser was appreciated by the Saudi Government<sup>73</sup>.

The saga of the Indo-Saudi treaty of friendship illustrated this situation well. Following the visit of King Saud to India in 1955, the Indian Ambassador at the time suggested in January 1956 that India should conclude a treaty of friendship with Saudi

---

<sup>70</sup> LAURENS, H.: *Paix et Guerre au Moyen-Orient. L’Orient arabe et le monde de 1945 à nos jours*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2005, p. 212.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>72</sup> NEHRU J.: *op. cit.*, p. 595.

<sup>73</sup> PASHA, A. K.: *op. cit.*, p. 131.

Arabia. The draft treaty came under discussion with the Saudi Government in March 1957. More than five years later, the treaty was still at the negotiating stage<sup>74</sup>. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs was aware that «during this period much change [had] come over the policies of Saudi Arabia and [that] the goodwill generated by her King's visit to India [had] worn off»<sup>75</sup>. They also knew that «in matters like Kashmir and other ideological issues the Saudi Government [had] aligned itself with Pakistan»<sup>76</sup>. Nonetheless, the Indian Ambassador in Jeddah remained optimistic and regarded this as «a temporary phase»<sup>77</sup>. The later events proved him wrong.

When the India-China War broke out in October 1962, Saudi Arabia gave support to the Indian contention that China was the aggressor<sup>78</sup>. But this attitude was probably only dictated by Saudi anticommunism. During the sixties, after Nehru's death, Indo-Saudi relations worsened.

#### *Strained relations, 1965-1972*

After Faisal deposed his brother in November 1964 and acceded to the throne, Indo-Saudi relations became strained if not unfriendly.

During the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965, the Saudi Government came out openly in favour of Pakistan. This pro-Pakistan attitude led to an organized campaign in support of Pakistan in the form of donations, anti-Indian editorials and comments as

---

<sup>74</sup> NAI, Transfert list records MEA, 40(1) Wana/61: letter dated March 31, 1962, from M.N. Masud, Indian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, to Shri B.F.H.B. Tyabji, MEA.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*: note dated May 5, 1962, from N.V. Rao, MEA.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*: note dated May 5, 1962, from N.V. Rao, MEA.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*: letter dated March 31, 1962, from M.N. Masud, Indian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, to Shri B.F.H.B. Tyabji, MEA.

<sup>78</sup> AMAE, Asie-Océanie, Inde, 272: letter 1786/AS dated December 6, 1962, from J.-P. Garnier, French Ambassador to India, to M. Couve de Murville, French Minister of Foreign Affairs.

well as biased coverage of the news in the Saudi papers<sup>79</sup>. It was rumoured that King Faisal had demanded in vain a collective Arab disapproval of the Indian “aggression” during the Arab Heads of States meeting in September 1965<sup>80</sup>.

King Faisal countered Nasser’s Pan-Arabism with Pan-Islamism and in 1965-1966 he paid visits to many Muslim countries, including Pakistan. But Faisal did not find «politically possible»<sup>81</sup> to visit India at the same time... The Saudi project of an Islamic Summit revived Indian fears of the creation of an Islamic bloc likely to endorse Pakistani claims on Kashmir. A statement made by the Indian Foreign Minister regarding India’s objection to the proposed Islamic Summit Conference in June 1966 triggered an anti-Indian campaign in the Saudi press. As the months went by the anti-Indian atmosphere intensified. In reply to Indian protests, King Faisal made the amazing claim that «there was a free press in Saudi Arabia»<sup>82</sup>.

The Israeli victory over Nasser in 1967 led to a decline in Egypt’s influence in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia gradually became the leading Arab State, partly because of its increasing oil revenues<sup>83</sup>. This evolution was one of major benefit for Pakistan, which developed close military relations with the Saudi Kingdom from 1967<sup>84</sup>. Pakistan, which had tried in the past to organize Islamic conferences, found in Saudi Arabia a very useful ally. The Saudi plans for Islamic unity resulted in the convening of an Islamic conference at Rabat on September 22-25, 1969. India wanted to attend the

---

<sup>79</sup> NAI, Transfert list records MEA, M.II-103(17)/65: extract from political report from the Embassy of India in Jeddah for the month of September, 1965.

<sup>80</sup> AMAE, Afrique-Levant, Arabie Saoudite, 868: letter 266/AL dated September 29, 1965, from J. Bressot, French Chargé d’Affaires to Saudi Arabia, to M. Couve de Murville.

<sup>81</sup> NAI, Transfert list records MEA, M.II-103(17)/65: extract from political report from the Embassy of India in Jeddah for the month of April, 1966.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*: secret letter JED/P/162/2/66 dated November 30, 1966, from the Indian Embassy in Jeddah to MEA.

<sup>83</sup> LAURENS, H.: *op. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>84</sup> CADN, Islamabad, 87: letter 192/AL dated August 20, 1968, from G. de Bouteiller, French Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, to M. Debré, French Minister of Foreign Affairs.

conference. The Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, was afraid Pakistan might raise the Kashmir issue and maybe put pressure on the participants to adopt an anti-Indian resolution<sup>85</sup>. India was finally invited to take part in the conference but Pakistan threatened to boycott it and the Indian delegation was excluded. Shortly after the Rabat fiasco, India recalled its Ambassador from Saudi Arabia<sup>86</sup>.

Thus the deterioration in Indo-Saudi relations and the growing Saudi-Pakistan partnership went together. During the East Pakistan crisis and the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, Saudi Arabia supported the Pakistani position that this was «an internal Pakistani matter» and condemned «the Indian aggression» and «the Indo-Soviet collusion»<sup>87</sup>. Then the Saudi Government consistently backed the call for the return of the Pakistani prisoners of war<sup>88</sup>.

#### *A slight improvement, 1973-1974*

The Simla Agreement of 1972 between India and Pakistan and the release of the Pakistani prisoners of war by India in 1973-1974 improved the atmosphere. Moreover, India's strong pro-Arab stand during the Yom Kippur War was appreciated by Saudi Arabia. Arab states treated India as a friend, excluding the Indians from the oil embargo<sup>89</sup>.

The Saudi attitude towards the Indian nuclear test of May 1974 also illustrated an improvement in Indo-Saudi relations. During the Islamic conference of Foreign

---

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 17: letter 23/DA/AS dated September 26, 1969, from M. Legendre, French Ambassador to Pakistan, to M. Schumann, French Minister of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>86</sup> WARD, R. E.: *op. cit.*, pp. 88-90.

<sup>87</sup> CADN, Tel Aviv, 24: note dated December 28, 1971, from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, Islamabad, 17: reports on Saudi-Pakistan relations dated January and February 1973.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 29: telegram 901-905 dated October 8, 1974, from the French Embassy in Jeddah.

Ministers held in June 1974 in Kuala Lumpur, the Saudi Minister refused to endorse an anti-Indian motion<sup>90</sup>.

It seemed that Saudi Arabia tried to some extent to humour New Delhi in spite of its ties with Pakistan. For instance, it was at Saudi's request that India was invited to participate in the Rabat Conference in 1969<sup>91</sup>. Actually, Saudi Arabia was very interested in the Indian markets prospects<sup>92</sup> and in an Indo-Saudi cooperation in the fields of oil industry and petrochemistry<sup>93</sup>. Despite a lack of understanding at the political level, Indo-Saudi economic ties flourished. India's trade relations with Saudi Arabia increased since Nehru's visit in 1956 and rose steadily since 1973<sup>94</sup>. Pakistan remained a favoured political partner, but Islamic solidarity was not strong enough to neglect economic interests.

## **Conclusion**

From 1947 to 1974, Indo-Saudi relations were cold, except for a short improvement in the middle of the fifties. Cold War alignments, Arab struggles and above all Saudi-Pakistani affinity were responsible for the Indo-Saudi political gap. However, while political relations were mostly strained, Indo-Saudi economic ties took a more realistic form. Since Nehru's visit, no Indian Prime Minister or prominent leader had been to Riyadh until Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, President of India, attended King Faisal's funeral in March 1975. This was the first time that an Indian President personally represented India at the funeral of another Head of State.

---

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 122: letter 486/AS dated July 4, 1974, from F. de Quirielle, French Ambassador to Malaya, to J. Sauvagnargues, French Minister of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 87: letter 239/AL dated November 11, 1969, from G. de Bouteiller to M. Schumann.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 29: telegram 901-905.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 87: letter 239/AL.

<sup>94</sup> PASHA, A. K.: *op. cit.*, pp. 135-136.