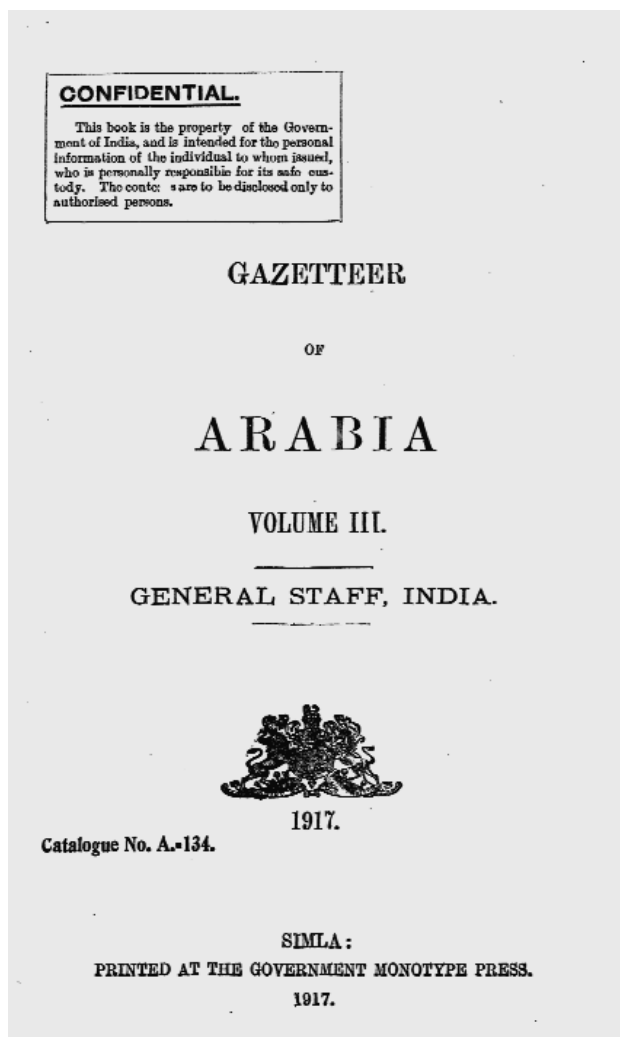


# The Creation of Modern Saudi Arabia

India Office Political and Secret Files, c. 1914-1939



- Outstanding source on the emergence of the Saudi state
- This is the first time the major files have been made available in their entirety in one series
- Including many letters from King 'Abd al-'Aziz and other regional rulers
- Including wide ranging and unique information on central government, infrastructure, topography, social and religious life, and major personalities

Online Finding Aid at [www.idc.nl](http://www.idc.nl)

Editor: Penelope Tuson, Former Curator of Middle East Archives, Oriental & India Office Collections (OIOC, now part of the Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections), British Library

# The Creation of Modern Saudi Arabia

The archives of the Political and Secret Department of the India Office are an outstanding source for the history of the Saudi state. This is the first time the major files have been made available in their entirety in one series. The material in this collection consists of confidential printed reports, maps, memoranda, and handbooks, together with Political and Secret Department policy files describing the wider context of international relations, as well as the practical details of an expanding political administration and social and economic infrastructure.

## Historical background

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was formally created in 1932 by King `Abd al-`Aziz b. `Abd al-Rahman b. Faysal Al Sa`ud (Ibn Sa`ud). From the Saudi capture of Riyadh in 1902 till the development and exploitation of Saudi oil resources in the 1930s, the British maintained close relations with the Saudi ruling family, and they recorded in great detail the development of the Kingdom from a small sultanate in central Arabia in the early 1900s, to an economically powerful modern state on the eve of the Second World War.

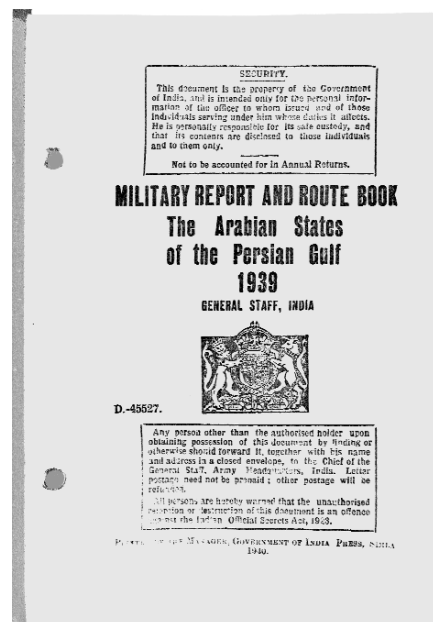
## British relations with Saudi Arabia

British interests in Arabia and the Gulf date back to the earliest East India Company contacts in the seventeenth century. Subsequently, for both economic and strategic reasons, the region was drawn into the wider political and economic sphere of the British Empire in India. British relations with Arab rulers were generally managed by Political Residents and Agents in the Gulf, who reported directly to the imperial administrations in Bombay, Calcutta, or Delhi, and, ultimately, to the India Office in London. British Government policy toward the region was formulated in the India Office, where the department responsible for the conduct and supervision of relations with areas outside the Indian subcontinent was the Political and Secret Department. After the First World War, the involvement of the Foreign Office and Colonial Office in Arabian affairs increased and departmental responsibilities became more complicated. However, the India Office continued to play an important role in British relations with the region until the Second World War.

## The emergence of the Saudi State

From 1902, when the future King `Abd al-`Aziz Al Sa`ud (who was known to the British as "Ibn Sa`ud") captured the city of Riyadh from the rival forces of Ibn Rashid of Hayl, the British took an increasing interest in the rapidly changing affairs of central Arabia.\*

By 1914 they had already set up a series of meetings with Ibn Sa`ud, undertaken by the British Political Agent in Kuwait, Captain W.H.I. Shakespear\*\*. After the Anglo-Saudi Treaty of Darin was signed in December 1915, Britain gradually abandoned its previous policy of non-involvement in inland Arabian politics.



Military Report and Route Book. *The Arabian States of the Persian Gulf*, 1939  
Simla: General Staff India, 1940 Security L/P&S/20/C252 (microfiche 59)

For the next twenty-five years, British officials in the Gulf, London, and India observed, recorded, and assessed the changing face of Arabian politics. Local British agents reported on the shifting balance of power in south-west Arabia during the First World War, as well as on the struggle between Saudi and Yemeni interests, which culminated in the Saudi absorption of Asir in 1930 and the delineation of the Saudi-Yemen boundary in the 1934 Treaty of Taif. British economic and strategic concerns were involved in the development of the Saudi oil industry and the closely related evolution of Saudi Arabia's northern, eastern, and south-eastern boundaries, as well as the southern Saudi boundary with

Britain's Aden colony and protectorate in south Yemen. At the same time, in parallel, the extraordinary development of a modern Saudi government administration and infrastructure was recorded and occasionally advised on by British officials and technical experts. The British records, by definition, present events from a mainly British perspective. However, the knowledge and accomplishment of the civil servants and military officers, combined with the British thirst for information and the occasionally divided loyalties of such adventurers-cum-officials as Captain Shakespear, Gertrude Bell, and H. St. J.B. Philby, produced a meticulous and surprisingly balanced account of the emergence of the modern Saudi State.

## Provenance and archival background

The India Office Political and Secret Department archives now form part of the Oriental and India Office Collections (OIOC, now part of the Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections), at the British Library. From 1902 the most important of the Political and Secret Department's correspondence and papers accumulated in London were registered, indexed, and arranged in files according to subject. At the same time, the department maintained its own reference library of confidential handbooks for the restricted use of its own officials, as did the Military and other India Office departments. The Political and Secret Department papers have now been catalogued under the OIOC reference L/PS. From 1902 to 1930 the subject files are located under the reference L/P&S/10. Around 1930/1931 the department replaced its subject file system with a new series of "Collections," arranged according to geographical area. They are now to be found under the reference L/P&S/12. Material in this IDC Publishers' series is drawn mainly from "Collection" 1 (Arabia), with some relevant additional material from Collection 30 (Persian Gulf).

## Contents of files

The materials in these groups are both wide-ranging and detailed. The gazetteers and handbooks include historical, topographical, social, and economic information on all areas of the country, as well as maps, descriptions of tribes, and biographical notes on major personalities.

The Political and Secret subject files include reports and correspondence from the various British representatives in Arabia and the Gulf, as well as details of diplomatic negotiations relating to foreign relations, boundaries, and oil concessions, for example: minutes of interdepartmental meetings, correspondence and agreements with oil companies, drafts and final versions of oil concession agreements with concession maps, boundary agreements and maps, inter-governmental discussions, and diplomatic correspondence. The files also include many letters from King `Abd al-`Aziz and other regional rulers, wide-ranging and unique information on central government, infrastructure, topography, social and religious life, and major personalities. There are also files describing the background and practicalities of the creation of local administrations and of a social and economic infrastructure.

### *Penelope Tuson*

Former Curator of Middle East Archives, Oriental & India Office Collections (OIOC, now part of the Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections), British Library

**Cover illustration from** *Gazetteer of Arabia* Vol 3 [S-Z], with Glossary of Terms by Lt-Col C.C.R. Murphy Simla: General Staff India, 1917 [413]pp, map, *Confidential* L/MIL/17/16/2/3 (microfiche 46)

## Organization of the files

The material has been arranged in eight groups for the present publication. The first group (BIS-1) comprises printed gazetteers and handbooks now preserved in the departmental library of the Political and Secret Department (L/P&S/20), together with a few relevant items from the library of the India Office Military Department (L/MIL/17). The other groups (BIS-2 through BIS-8) comprise India Office Political and Secret Department subject files and collections arranged broadly according to subject.

- BIS-1 Gazetteers and handbooks
- BIS-2 Arabian politics and the First World War
- BIS-3 Arabia after the War: territorial consolidation; the conquest of the Hijaz
- BIS-4 Regional relations and boundaries: Kuwait, Iraq, and Transjordan, 1920-1932
- BIS-5 Regional relations and boundaries: Asir, Yemen, and the Red Sea, 1919-1934
- BIS-6 The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: government and infrastructure
- BIS-7 The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: international relations
- BIS-8 The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: oil, boundaries, and regional relations

Within the eight groups, the following information is provided for each item:

Section 1, fiche number; print title; date and place of publication; security classification; number of pages; and OIOC reference number  
Sections 2-8, fiche number; original file title and, where appropriate, additional summary of contents; covering dates; OIOC reference number and (in the case of files) original P&S registry number; number of pages or folios.

\* King `Abd al-`Aziz was referred to by the British as either "Bin Saud" or "Ibn Saud". In this catalogue the King's name has been standardized throughout as "Ibn Sa`ud".

\*\* IOR:L/P&S/10/384 and 397, in **BIS – 2** below.

## General information

Scope	approx. 37,800 frames
Number of fiche	778
Size of fiche	105 x 148 mm.
Film type	Positive silver halide
Reduction ratio	Varies depending on the size of the original
Internal finding aids	Eye-legible headers on every fiche
External finding aids	Printed guide with introduction and index by P. Tuson, EAD guide at <a href="http://www.idc.nl">www.idc.nl</a>



For more information please contact any of the following addresses

**■ The Netherlands**  
IDC Publishers  
P.O. Box 11205  
2301 EE Leiden  
Phone +31 (0)71 514 27 00  
Fax +31 (0)71 513 17 21  
E-mail [info@idc.nl](mailto:info@idc.nl)  
Internet <http://www.idc.nl>

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**■ North America**  
IDC Publishers Inc.  
350 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1801  
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## THE CREATION OF MODERN IRAQ

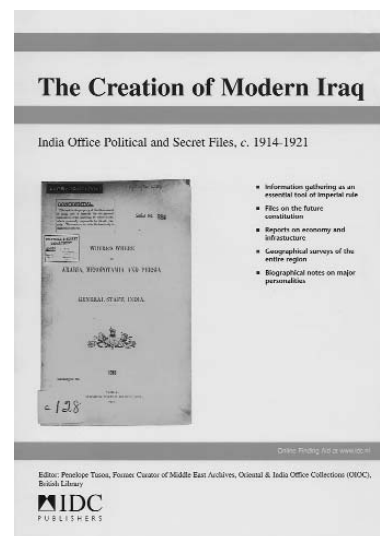
### India Office Political and Secret Files, c. 1914-1921

**Editor: Penelope Tuson**

The materials in this collection consist of India Office Political & Secret Department confidential reports, memoranda, maps and handbooks as well as policy files describing the background and practicalities of the creation of a political administration and a social and economic infrastructure.

The geopolitical identity of present-day Iraq can be traced back down to the British Military occupation of the First World War and the civil administration laid down at the beginning of the British Mandate, which lasted 1921 to independence in 1932. During the War, British officials prepared detailed intelligence reports on local personalities, tribes and political affiliations. At the same time both military and civilian experts produced geographical and topographical surveys of the entire region, from the boundaries with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in the south to Kurdistan in the north.

- 32,965 exposures
- 675 microfiche
- Printed guide by Penelope Tuson
- Free EAD guide at [www.idc.nl/EADBI](http://www.idc.nl/EADBI)



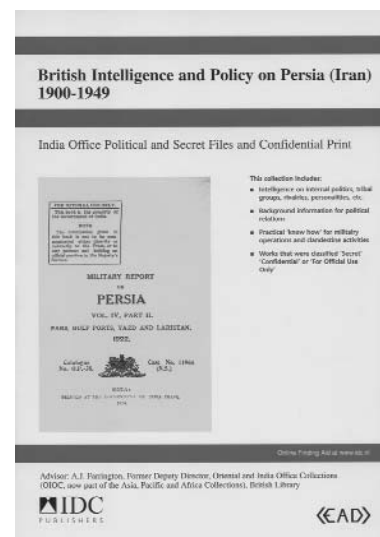
## BRITISH INTELLIGENCE AND POLICY ON PERSIA (IRAN), c. 1900-1949

### India Office Political and Secret Files and Confidential Print

**Editor: Anthony Farrington**

The dominant theme of the collection is the position of Persia between two powerful neighbors, namely Russia to the north and the British Government of India to the east. By the late nineteenth century, Persia became the playground of both interests for almost half a century, during which time the British, with their immensely valuable oil concessions in the south, emerged as the dominant (though hardly ever welcome) foreign partner. The strategic planning and policy formulation of British India and London required information to provide 'background' for political relations and practical 'know-how' for military operations and clandestine activities. The present collection from IDC Publishers brings together the product of all this activity.

- Approx. 25,250 frames
- 515 microfiche
- Printed guide by A.J. Farrington
- Free EAD guide at [www.idc.nl/EADBI](http://www.idc.nl/EADBI)



## BRITISH INTELLIGENCE ON AFGHANISTAN AND ITS FRONTIERS, c. 1888-1946

### Secret and confidential print from the British Government of India

**Editor: Anthony Farrington**

The Intelligence files concentrate on Afghanistan's internal and external affairs and trans-frontier tribes and personalities. The Intelligence Branch issued a stream of practical handbooks, route books, military reports, tribal monographs, 'who's who' compilations, and summaries of events. Sources were officers in the field and their contacts, together with local tribesmen who had been clandestinely employed. The collection, from the India Office Records in the British Library, is unique in its breadth and accessibility.

- Approx. 17,000 frames
- 410 microfiches
- Including printed guide by A.J. Farrington
- EAD guide at [www.idc.nl](http://www.idc.nl)

