

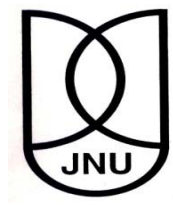
BRITISH INDIA'S POLICY TOWARDS THE PERSIAN GULF
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BAHRAIN AND QATAR,
1873-1914

Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University

for award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "BRITISH INDIA'S POLICY TOWARDS THE PERSIAN GULF WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BAHRAIN AND QATAR, 1873-1914" submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

BG - British Government

BL - British Library, London

CAB - Great Britain Public Record Office, Cabinet files

CAEd. - Cambridge Archive Editions

FD - Foreign Department

FO - Foreign Office

FSI - Foreign Secretary, India

GG - Governor-General

GOI – Government of India

H.B.M. - Her/His Britannic Majesty's

HM - His Majesty/ Her Majesty

HMG - Her/His Majesty's Government

IO - India Office

IOR - India Office Records

K.W. - Keep-Withs

MSA- Maharashtra State Archive

NAI- National Archives of India

NALondon/Public Record Office (POR) - National Archives at London, Kew Gardens

Nos. - Numbers

PRPG - Political Resident of the Persian Gulf .

SSI- Secretary of State for India

Vol. – Volume

Prog. – Programmes

GLOSSARY

Jannissaries - Household infantry units of the Ottoman Sultan

Kaim Makam - Deputy Governor

Kaza - District

Mazbatt - Declaration

Mudir - Local governor

Mutasallim/Mutasserrif - Ottoman governor of *Sanjak*

Nakhoda/ Nakhuda - Captain (of a ship for pearl diving)

Sanjak - Ottoman Sub-division of a *Vilayet*

Vilayet/Pashaliq - Province in Ottoman administration

Vali/Wali - Ottoman Governor-General

Introduction

The Gulf of Persia – or as the natives termed it at one time as *Khalij-al-Fars* was a region of interest and importance.¹ If for the Ottomans it was at one time the Gulf of Basra, it was also known as ‘the lower sea’ or ‘the sea of the rising sun’.² Today, it is more often referred to as the Persian Gulf region in the international community, a region rich for its hydrocarbon resources.³

In the annals of maritime history, the Persian Gulf was looked upon as a bridge connecting India and the Mediterranean and a region that joined the trade and commerce of Indian Ocean with the western parts of Asia and Europe. Its importance was rarely doubted and its presence acknowledged enough by those who traversed the waters. Along with Red Sea, the Gulf formed an important waterway that defined the movement of people and trade and over centuries, the region contributed to the rich heritage of different cultures that prospered with its contact and promised prospects for those who valiantly set to define their position in it.

Ancient civilizations flourished in the Gulf region. The Magan civilization that flourished around 2300 B.C.E. is associated with parts of Oman and coastal southeastern Iran and was especially referred as a source of copper. The civilization of Dilmun that flourished in c 2100 B.C.E is associated with the modern day Bahrain and the adjacent coast of Arabia. “Magan was a place that passed products from Meluhha on to Dilmun and/or

¹ Keep Withs, No. 3, NAI, FD, Secret E, June 1890, Nos. 155-159, p.2.

² Georges Roux (1964), *Ancient Iraq*, Great Britain: George Allen and Unwin, p.30.

³ Henceforth, the Gulf. The Gulf region today comprises of eight countries Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Oman.

Mesopotamia”.⁴ Meluhha as the Harappan civilization along with Magan and Dilmun were trade partners of the ancient Sumerian civilization that flourished around 4000 B.C.E. and the Mesopotamian corresponding to modern Iraq.

As a key international trade route, the Gulf connected the West Asian region to India, East Africa, Southern Asia and China.⁵ As noted, “The peoples and the countries of the Persian Gulf ...provided a link between the ancient civilizations which had emerged in the basins of the Yangtze, Indus, Tigris, Euphrates and the Nile. They were incorporated in the likedominions of the Sumerians and Babylonia, the Archimedian (sic) Empire, the State of Alexander the Great of Macedonia and the Khilafat of the Omanids and the Abbasids, the Empire of Suleiman the Magnificent and Abbas the First.”⁶ The Gulf had been a great highways of trade “between the Far East and the Middle East, and beyond that, Europe; westward flowed the products of India, China and the Malay archipelago; east ward the merchandise of Iran, the Arab countries and Europe”.⁷

The products of the Indian Ocean countries differed from that of the Mediterranean basin and an exchange was an established norm.⁸ Until the medieval times, trade remained with the Muslim traders in the Gulf region. Oman produced dates, fish and fruits for export apart from copper, arsenic and horses and exported mainly to India. Rice, sugar, timber, sandalwood, cotton, china ware, metals were what they got in return. The Arab merchants were partners in the spice trade, like cinnamon, cassia, cardamom, ginger and turmeric

⁴ Gregory L. Possehl (2002), *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective*, Oxford: Altamira Press, p. 220. Also Shereen Ratnagar (1981), for reference to Magan in *Encounters: The Westerly Trade of the Harappan Civilization*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 80-85.

⁵ Lawrence G. Potter (ed.) (2009) *The Persian Gulf in History*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 1.

⁶ G. Bondarevsky (1987), “Turning the Persian Gulf into a British Lake: British Domination in the Indian Ocean in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” in Satish Chandra (Ed.), *The Indian Ocean, Explorations in History, Commerce and Politics*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 317.

⁷ Roger M Savory (1981), “The History of the Persian Gulf: 600-1800”, in Alvin J. Cottrell, (Gen. ed.) (1981), *The Persian Gulf States: A General Survey*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, p. 20.

⁸ Sir John Baggot Glubb (1959), *Britain and the Arabs, A Study of Fifty Years 1908-1958*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, p.19.

from India to the west. They also exported southern Arabian products as frankincense and myrrh.⁹

In 1453, the Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople thus blocking the trade routes for the Europeans in the East. It was a turning point in the relations between the Europeans and the Asians. The situation soon changed with Vasco da Gama's discovery of the new sea route to east via the Cape of Good Hope (1498) and the subsequent entry of the Europeans in a big way into the Indian Ocean area as the Portuguese established their stronghold from India in Gulf. Ahmad Ibn Majid, the Arab navigator and cartographer guided from the coast of Oman Vasco d Gama who was able to reach the shores of India in May 1498.

The entry of Europeans into the Indian Ocean led to violence, flags and forts. Local traders were excluded who had thrived on a lucrative business earlier. Arab, Persian and other merchants were replaced by commission agents who were willing to trade European goods. This opened a new chapter in the history of the region as the European presence interrupted the age old contacts India had with the Gulf and the Red Sea region. The Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British dominated the Gulf. Soon the British clashed with three major European powers- the Portuguese, the Dutch and the French. None of them though, proved a match to the British. It was the consolidation of British power in India that dictated the change in the region. The Gulf no longer remained the same. This was a region that was to maintain the British position in India intact. This brings us to the role of British power from India.

In the early nineteenth century British control of India was complete. In the Gulf, it had entered into treaty relations (1820) with the local Shaikhs on the eastern Arabia. By the late 1850s India was administered under the British crown. It was around the same time, that the Perpetual Maritime Truce (1853) imposed on the local chieftains of the Persian Gulf formalized the earlier temporary Truces and confirmed British dominance in the Persian Gulf. In the post 1857 period the British power had to be exercised by the Secretary

⁹ J. E. Peterson (2002), "The Historical Pattern of Gulf Security" in Lawrence G Potter and Gary G. Sick (eds.), *Security in the Persian Gulf, Origins, Obstacles and the search for Consensus*, New York: Palgrave, p. 7.

of State for India that was now divided in three presidencies for administrative purpose – Madras, Bengal and Bombay. Thus, interests of the British became paramount in the governance of India.

It was the British Indian authorities who, in an effort to secure India's position in the larger British Empire established an 'informal empire' in the Gulf. They administered the Gulf from India and set up a Residency system there for the similar purpose. Their responsibility was rarely questioned but their decisions often were. The Home government in London approached the Gulf and the other players therein with difference than that of their Indian counterparts. As the nineteenth century drew to its closure the matters of international interference in the Gulf, the role of regional powers and the British response to them engaged the policy concerns of the British Indian authorities. Their focus on the region and evolving policies did not emanate equal response from London often leading to a clash between the two.

The research work is an attempt at understanding and examining the policy of British Indian authorities towards the Persian Gulf region during 1873-1914. Oman, the 'Trucial states', Kuwait and Saudi Arabia kept the Indian authorities busy at various times with their interests often conflicting with the other powers' intentions. Bahrain and Qatar however are the regions selected for the present study to understand British India's approach towards the Gulf. The differences between the policies of the GOI and London were sharply brought out in these two states. The focus of the proposed work is on the British Indian decisions, policies and strategies towards the Persian Gulf region and a special reference is made to, Bahrain and Qatar. Before looking into the policy issues, particularly those in relation to Bahrain and Qatar, it is essential to understand the Gulf region *per se*, its strategic importance, the historical aspects of the European involvement and the reasons for increasing British diplomatic interests in the nineteenth and the twentieth century.

1.1. Strategic Importance

The Gulf has been an area of geo-political importance and has served as an arena of international interest, strategy and rivalry. A region that boasts of the presence of ancient civilizations, the Gulf is a bridge across the three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe. As mentioned above, the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf was recognized for long as it formed one of the important trade routes between the east and the west across the Mediterranean along with the two other routes- Red Sea and the Cape of Good Hope. The transport of goods was an important dimension of the identity of the region. The entry of the Europeans increased the prospects of the trade in the east thereby increasing the strategic importance of Gulf. The Ottoman Empire had held a sway over the Arabian territories in Gulf. It thus became an important regional player. The location of Gulf engaged British policy makers who judged its strategic position *vis-a-vis* its growing empire in India and the east. Earlier when the trade was limited to the Mediterranean, Gulf was nowhere a British concern however with the rise of its trade in the east and particularly with its increasing command over the Indian sub-continent, the strategic importance of the Gulf grew out of its anxiety to control the route to India and maintain communication lines safe.¹⁰ The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 linking Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean facilitated the transport of goods between Europe and Asia without navigating around Africa. The opening of the Suez Canal had a tremendous impact on the transport of trade as time was reduced. Britain viewed it as significant and strategic as it connected Britain to its colonies in Asia and Africa with better and quicker access. To monopolize the control the Suez, Britain first acquired shares from the Egyptian ruler Ismail Pasha while still in joint Anglo-French control of the Suez shares. It occupied Egypt in 1882 and made it a part of its empire. India likewise became a colony of the British and from India Britain gained control over the Gulf.

¹⁰ Halford L. Hoskins, (1928), *British Routes to India*, New York: Longman's Green and Co., pp.88-89.

The territorial gains of Russia and its ever increasing appetite for large land gain and French influence in Persia and Oman later German interests in the region with the help of the Ottoman Empire kept the British busy with matters of strategic interests in the Gulf.

1.2. India and the Gulf

“The Gulf cannot be understood without discussing the influence of India, either in times past or now.”¹¹ One thing that distinguishes the Gulf from the rest of West Asia in relation to India is its continuous historic ties. Maritime contacts existed between India and the Gulf region since ancient times. Trade was encouraged by the proximity of Iran along the northern shore of the Gulf and of East Africa. The coast of Iran eastward reached India. The Sumerian and the Akkadian records between 3000 and 2000 B.C.E. reflect on the trade relations between the Tigri-Euphrates delta and the Dilmun, Magan and the Melukhha (Meluha). Dilmun as mentioned earlier is today identified as Bahrain, Magan as Oman and Meluha as the north shore of the Gulf and the coast of Iran and India east to the Indus valley. The Arabs as sailors often imported teak from India for shipbuilding.¹² Trade remained an important dimension of a vibrant maritime culture developed through contacts for the same as there existed considerable trade through the land route via Iran, Babylonia, Oman, Aden and Palestine.¹³

The western part of the Indian sub-continent played an important role in the maritime commerce of Mesopotamia. The contacts between the Harappa and the Mesopotamian civilization were also via the Persian Gulf apart from the overland trade route.¹⁴ Dilmun civilization of the ancient period and one of the main centers of copper trade in c 2000

¹¹ Paul Rich (2009), *Creating the Arabian Gulf, British Raj and Invasions of the Gulf*, Plymouth: Lexington Books, p.61.

¹² N. 7, pp. 7-8.

¹³ A. K. Pasha (2007), “India’s Cultural Diplomacy in West Asia” in M.H. Ilias and P. J. Vincent (eds.), *India-West Asia Relations, Understanding Cultural Interplays*, New Delhi: New Century Publications, p. 20.

¹⁴ Romila Thapar (2000), *Cultural Pasts, Essays in Early Indian History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 274.

B.C., though not actually producing it, is identified with the island of Bahrain of the modern times. Harappa and Lothal, had remains of copper smithies. Similarly Dilmun standard of weight was close to the standards of weight found in Harappan cities rather than to Mesopotamia.¹⁵ In fact “[t]he Harappan weight standard occurring at Bahrain could suggest that Bahrain was an intermediary point in the overall trade”, between Harappa and Mesopotamia, and the style of seals suggesting “strong Indian influence in the Persian Gulf”.¹⁶ One of the arguments put forth to explain the closeness of the weights in Dilmun with that of the Indus valley civilization was if the commercial impulses to have reached Dilmun must have come from not from Mesopotamia but from India or else India had far more important commercial connection with Dilmun than Mesopotamia had.¹⁷ There are references to ‘Dilmun seals’ found in Bahrain that have depiction of humped bull, a figure found on Indus seals.¹⁸

In 521 B.C.E. Darius the Great, the Achaemenid emperor took steps to consolidate the sea power and by the construction of a channel, linking Nile with Red Sea, a predecessor of the present Suez, opened a cheaper route from Egypt to India and the Persian Gulf.¹⁹ Sometime during the first century B.C., the Greek navigator Hippalus developed the direct sea route from Red Sea to India taking advantage of the southwest monsoon and is believed to have brought back cargo of gems, ebony and sandalwood, spices and pepper though even before him the Arab seafarers were used to visit the Indian coast somewhere between the mouth of Indus and Barygaza that can be associated with modern times Bharuch on the Gulf of Cambay.²⁰

¹⁵ Geoffrey Bibby (1970), *Looking for Dilmun*, London: Collins, pp 192-193.

¹⁶ N. 14, p. 295 & 297.

¹⁷ N. 15, p. 355.

¹⁸ Prof. Dr. Abdul Rahman T. Al-Ansary (1992), *Pre History and Proto History of the Arabian Peninsula*, Vol. II, *Bahrain*, Hyderabad: Hyderabad Publishers, p. 268.

¹⁹ N. 7, p. 9.

²⁰ N. 7, pp. 10-11.

In the later period, exchanges between the two regions were mainly in the field of commerce, culture, religion and science. Along with spices most of the essential commodities as also luxury items were exported from India to the Gulf region. India was one of the main markets of pearls from Gulf. The Arab-Indian interaction was widely recognized and mutually beneficial. In fact commerce provided a continuous link between Gulf and India over the centuries, as ports of Indian coastline conducted commerce with ports of the Gulf. The Gulf region had a significant demand for products from India such as timber for shipbuilding, cotton, rice and grains and iron. India was a market for Arabian horses, Iranian silk and palm dates.²¹

In early fourteenth century the port of Hormuz was unchallenged as an important commercial centre in the Gulf. In 1331 Ibn Batuta described it as, “a fine large city, with magnificent bazaars, as it is the port of India and Sind, from which the wares of India are exported to the two Iraqs, Fars and Khurasan”.²²

Apart from the goods and products, traders from both the regions were settled in either regions as a significant number of Indian traders, merchants and commercial agents from India were settled in various ports in Gulf, similarly Arab and Persian merchants and agents from Gulf region were settled in Indian ports.²³ The merchants carried a considerable proportion of spices and pepper destined for Europe by the overland route to their ports and then transshipped them on to Red Sea or the Gulf. In return they supplied the Gulf with Indian cotton and silk. There were two Indian regions that were heavily involved in this trade – Gujarat on west coast and Coromandal coast on the south east.²⁴ The Arabs had trade contacts with the Malabar Coast. The Indian merchants were important trade partners of Hormuz, one of the most famous and prosperous trade centres in Asia and particularly

²¹ Patricia Risso (2009), “India and the Gulf: Encounters from the Mid-Sixteenth to the Mid Twentieth Centuries” in Lawrence G. Potter (ed.) *The Persian Gulf in History*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.190.

²² Sir Hamilton Gibb, Hakluyat society second series, no. 117 in Roger M Savory(1981), pp. 19.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Micholan Camey (1998), *Oxford History British Empire*, Vol. I, *The Origins of Empire, British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of Seventeenth Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 269-270.

the Gulf. The trade was varied and included precious stones, gold, elephants' teeth, spices and herbal medicines, that they sold to the merchants of Hormuz and which in turn was carried all over the world. The important export to India was horses for which the Bahamanis of Deccan and Kings of Vijaynagara were regular customers.²⁵ The Kuwaiti sailors used to sail annually from southern Iraq carrying dates from Shatt-al-Arab groves to the western ports of India apart from the fine pedigree horses that were also exported later to the British India Government. Good horses were bought and sold in Bombay at high cost. Kuwaiti pearl merchants also traded in pearls with India selling them at Bombay and Surat.²⁶

Bandar Abbas, and later Basra (sometimes together with smaller ports like Bandar Bushire) attracted a stream of ships mainly from Bombay and Surat in the West, and from Calcutta and other towns in Bengal. In fact two principal ports in the Gulf frequented by the Calcutta shipping in the eighteenth century were Gombroon (Bandar Abbas) in Persia and Basra in Iraq.²⁷ Basra developed as an important port whose, "strongest commercial pull came from India".²⁸ Its trade was directly connected from Sind to Gujarat to Malabar and rest of Kerala. Pepper and other spices, indigo, gumlac, cloth and textiles were exported from India and in return Basra provided dates, horses, and precious metals in form of minted coins as well as bullion.²⁹ The main articles shipped from Surat were textile goods produced in Gujrat, spices, sandalwood and luxury articles like chinaware. Those from Bengal carried a wide variety of locally produced piece-goods such as blue and white *garas* and *cassas* of Jagdia and Manipur as well as plenty of sugar. Basra's position as an important link between Europe and Western Asia turned her into an important entrepot on

²⁵ Mohammad Bagher Vosoughi (2009), "The Kings of Hormuz: From the Beginning until the arrival of the Portuguese", in Lawrance G. Potter (ed.), *The Persian Gulf in History*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 96-97.

²⁶ Prof Abdullah Y Al-Ghunaim (2006), *Kuwait and India*, Kuwait: Centre for Research Studies on Kuwait, p. 9.

²⁷ Om Prakash (1998), *The New Cambridge History Of India, European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 250.

²⁸ Rudi Matthee (2009), "Boom and Bust: The Port of Basra in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", in Lawrance G. Potter (ed), *The Persian Gulf in History*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 108.

²⁹ Ibid.

the Aleppo-Baghdad-Hormuz route in the sixteenth century which the rise of Bandar Abbas in the seventeenth century did not reduce. However with the decline of the Safavid Empire (1501-1722) the importance of Bandar Abbas was reduced and that of Basra increased.³⁰ Also the importance of Hormuz was recognized by the Portuguese when they took it over. Persian horses, wine and dried fruits were demanded for the tastes of wealthy Indians. “Stable trade relations with the Persian Gulf was one prerequisite of Surat’s commercial prosperity”.³¹ Bushire was known as the *darvaza-yi Hind* or the Gateway of India and there were more Persian speakers in India than in Persia or the Gulf.³² The Mughals used the Persian language and patronized Persian culture. Akbar’s conquest of Gujarat in 1576 brought the Mughals closer to the Arabian Sea. Surat’s trade with the Gulf continued. Besides the flow of Indian pilgrims to Mecca from Gujarat was also one of the reasons for Akbar to maintain control over Gujarat

In the eighteenth century, Hyder Ali, the ruler of Mysore had resisted British attempts of dethroning him. After his death in 1782, his son Tipu Sultan continued the struggle with British. With the Nizam and Marathas against him, Tipu chose to gain support from powers beyond. He attempted to seek friendship with the Sultan of Oman, apart from the Ottoman Sultan, Persia, French and other Gulf countries. When the British refused to recognize him a ruler of Mysore, he approached the Ottoman Sultan for acknowledgment of his independent status, to strike coins and have the Khutba read in his name.³³ Oman had a history of trade and defiance. It was its location and trade that had attracted the Portuguese who occupied Muscat (1507) for almost a century. In 1624 the change was signaled with the Yaariba dynasty in power who challenged the Portuguese occupation and controlled the trade in the Gulf briefly. However it was to the Al Busaids that Tipu appealed years later. He encouraged diplomatic activity with the Imam of Muscat and Oman and considered him

³⁰ Lakshmi Subramanian (ed.)(1999), *The French East India Company and the Trade of the Indian Ocean, A collection of Essays by Indrani Ray*, Calcutta: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, p. 204.

³¹ Ibid.

³² N. 5, p. 13.

³³ A. K. Pasha (1999), “Tipu Sultan’s Relations with Oman”, in A.K. Pasha (ed), *India and Oman, History, State, Economy and Foreign Policy*, Delhi: Gyan Sagar Publications, pp. 10-11.

as an important ally to neutralize the British threat. French had interests in Oman that clashed with British interests. Tipu interacted with the French in Oman causing further suspicion to the British.³⁴ He maintained a large staff at Muscat to manage Mysore's trade interests there. He also had a *wakil* at Muscat and the ruler of Muscat had an agent at Mysore.³⁵ Focusing on Mysore's trade with the Gulf, Tipu Sultan also maintained factories at Muscat, Hormuz, Basra, Bushire, Bahrain and Jeddah.³⁶ India's links with the Gulf thus went beyond the aspects of mere trade and commerce though which continued to remain the most important feature.

Taking a course to the earlier couple of centuries, before the British made their presence and power felt, Gulf was set to encounter an era that was to change the course of its history forever. If twentieth century brought in an era of oil exploration that defined the course of events and continues to do so, five centuries earlier the entry of Europeans in the Indian Ocean, and especially the Gulf, marked a catalytic change for the region. By the end of the fifteenth century the Europeans came as explorers, invaders, conquerors and exploiters. The European presence interrupted the age old contacts India had with the Gulf region. Starting with Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British followed and though late to mark their presence and at times no match to the Portuguese and the Dutch powers in its early period, by the nineteenth century British had marked the Gulf as 'British lake'. Before moving ahead it will be necessary to understand the presence of the Portuguese and other European powers in the Gulf.

1.4. Early European presence in the Gulf

The Portuguese discovered the Cape route. They promptly monopolized it and even asked the Pope to legitimize the arrangement which lasted for a whole of century till it was

³⁴ Ibid. pp. 12-13.

³⁵ A. K. Pasha (2003), "South India and the Gulf, Trade and Diplomacy During the Late Eighteenth Century", in N. N. Vohra (ed.) *History, Culture and Society in India and West Asia*, Delhi: Shipra publications, p. 244.

³⁶ Ibid.

successfully challenged by the Dutch and the English in the 1590s.³⁷ During the sixteenth and the seventeenth century the long distance trade between Asia and Europe grew in scale. European trade with Asia required the support of governments or large trading groups that could mobilize the resources. The first attempt was made by Portuguese crown through its *Estado da India*, a department of state responsible for shipping out cargoes to Asia, obtaining Asian goods and disposing them in Europe.³⁸ The trade was largely built up on European demands for certain Asian goods as spices, silk, porcelain and few other products. In the sixteenth century, Asian commodities reached England either overland through West Asia to the eastern Mediterranean ports where they were mostly handled by Venetians or from Portuguese shipments round the Cape of Good Hope. In the 1620s Europe's annual consumption of Asian goods has been put at 5 million pounds of pepper, approximately one million pounds of rare spices like cloves, nutmeg, mace, more than 350,000 pounds of indigo and 50,00,000 pounds of silk.³⁹ The opening of the trade route from the Cape of Good Hope had enabled an ever increasing supply of Asian goods to Europe at reduced cost and reasonable reliability. Among the European merchants who used the Gulf route and its bottleneck through Hormuz in the sixteenth century, the Venetians were outstanding with their business flourishing about 1550. By 1590s onwards the previously overwhelming dominance of the Venetians at Aleppo progressively declined as the competition from merchants of other nations grew.⁴⁰

The Portuguese Presence in the Gulf

The Portuguese had established themselves in the Gulf region since 1507, after having battled with a huge fleet of the Shaikh of Hormuz, Shaikh Sai-ud-Din, and gained a

³⁷ N. 27, p. 23.

³⁸ Micholan Camey (1998) *Oxford History British Empire*, Vol I, *The Origins of Empire, British overseas enterprise to the Close of Seventeenth Oentury*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 266.

³⁹ Niels Steensgaard (1973), *Carracks, caravans and Companies: The Structural Crises in the European-Asian Trade in the Early 17th Century*, Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series no 17, Copenhagen: Studentlitteratur, pp. 155-162.

⁴⁰ A. R. Disney (1989), *The Portuguese in India and other Studies, 1500-1700*, Vol. II, Ashgate Varorium, varorium collected Studies Series, p. 169.

complete victory. By a treaty concluded in September 1507, Shaikh Saif-ud-Din became a vassal of Portuguese Crown as the Portuguese soon busied themselves with building a fort on the island.⁴¹

Hormuz was strategically located at the mouth of the Gulf. Linked to Iranian maritime trade and with suitable geographical conditions, from twelfth to the seventeenth century the island was “a major base and focal center of economic exchanges and marine trade in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean”.⁴² After the initial Portuguese conquest, the King of Hormuz encouraged discontent against the Portuguese resulting in Portuguese withdrawal. The capture of Hormuz formed a part of de Albuquerque’s grand desire/ design of establishing an empire in the East. Eventually in 1515 Portuguese captured Hormuz. In fact, it was not once but again on 23rd July 1523, that a treaty signed at Minab, was imposed on yet another new Shaikh of Hormuz by which the Portuguese commander placed Hormuz not only under Portuguese protection but complete control.⁴³ The Portuguese’s capture of Hormuz not only secured for them the command of the Persian Gulf but “gave increased life and animation to a commerce, which...had passed to this insular station.”⁴⁴

For a century the Portuguese monopolized the trade at Persian Gulf having captured Hormuz in order to gain command over the Gulf. Soon they had occupied the most important places in the Gulf such as Muscat, Sohar, Qatif and Bahrain and ruled supreme in the area.⁴⁵ The Portuguese Viceroy Alfonso de Albuquerque believed that dominance over the Gulf and the Red Sea was necessary for a maritime power with possessions in India.

⁴¹ J. G. Lorimer (1908-1915), *Gazetter of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, Vol. & Part I, Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing; Reprint Archive Editions, 1986, p. 5.

⁴² N. 25, p. 89.

⁴³ N. 41, p. 4.

⁴⁴ MSA, *Selections from the records of Bombay Government* (1856), No.XXIV, New Series, Bombay: Bombay Education Society’s Press p. 29.

⁴⁵ Dr. Abdul Amir Amin, (1967), *British Interests in the Persian Gulf*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, p. 2

It was around the time in 1507 when Hormuz was captured, that Omani ports were captured by the Portuguese. Before the Portuguese arrived in the Gulf, it were the Arabs particularly those from Oman and Yemen who were in complete control of the east-west trade.⁴⁶

The Portuguese became the first of the Europeans to dominate over the coast of Oman, bringing with them new arms, navigational skills and ship designs that represented western technical superiority. They were also the ones to duly recognize the importance of Muscat as a port as compared to Qalhat and Suhar which were too small and shallow to accommodate the large Portuguese vessels but Muscat was valued as a good harbour. As the Portuguese established themselves in Malacca, Mombasa and Goa, Diu and Daman in India they dominated the trade in the Indian Ocean-Gulf by forcing all the merchants to buy passes (*Cartez*).⁴⁷ The Portuguese did little to stimulate the new local trade and interfered with indigenous merchants as they trampled upon the local trade. The local rulers were hostile to Portuguese efforts at the establishment of power in Oman and tried to reassert themselves. The coming of the Portuguese changed the traditional pattern of trade as they came not just as traders but also conquerors and aimed to establish their domination not just over Gulf but the whole of Asia.⁴⁸

As the Portuguese established their power in the Gulf with the intention of taking over and controlling the East-West trade from the Muslim traders who largely operated in the Gulf region, they battled for supremacy with the Turks, whose power at sea was growing rather than diminishing, as well as the indigenous population of the Gulf, including Bahrain and the Shaikh of Hormuz.⁴⁹ Large dockyards were built in Turkey in the late fourteenth and fifteenth century and were enlarged in the sixteenth century. After Egypt and the seaboard along the Red Sea were conquered, the Ottomans effectively utilized the Mamluk shipyard in Suez (*Suveys*). They built a strong navy against the Spanish and the Portuguese ships

⁴⁶ Faud I. Khuri (1980), *Tribe and State in Bahrain, the transformation of social and political authority in an Arab State*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 16.

⁴⁷ Patricia Risso (1986), *Oman and Muscat, An Early Modern History*, Kent: Croom Helm, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁸ N. 7, p. 20.

⁴⁹ N. 41, p. 6.

engaged in the Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman and tied this navy to a separate *Kaptan*. The Suez shipyard was given importance because of the objective of helping the Turkish states of India.⁵⁰ Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent embarked on a phase of expansion thus bringing the Portuguese and the Turks to a state of collision as far as the interests in the Gulf were concerned. Portuguese military interference in Basra was countered by Ottoman interests when in 1538 the name of Ottoman Sultan was stamped on the coinage and included in the *khutba* of Basra and when in 1546 Basra was incorporated in the Turkish Empire thereby challenging the Portuguese naval supremacy in the Gulf.⁵¹

The Portuguese authorities in India from time to time sent expeditions in the Persian Gulf as incessant struggles between Turks and the Portuguese, marked the period of 1538 onwards after Sulaiman Pasha (1541-1544), the Turkish governor of Egypt arrived on the coast of India with a huge fleet, to capture Diu from the Portuguese and failed⁵². There were also times when the local rulers sought the help of Portuguese in order to combat the pressures of Turks. For example, Ras Murad who commanded Bahrain on behalf of the Sheikh of Hormuz appealed for aid to his master and to the Portuguese when attacked by Turks in 1559.⁵³ During the sixteenth century, the struggle in the Gulf remained one between the Ottomans and the Portuguese. The Safavid political control on the Gulf was limited but the Persian factor was significant.⁵⁴

The Ottoman assertion in the Gulf and the Red Sea was strong though all in all, the Portuguese were, “the only European Nation represented in the Persian Gulf” when the British arrived in the Gulf.⁵⁵ The Ottomans finally made naval efforts to limit the

⁵⁰ Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu (ed.) (2001), *History of the Ottoman State, Society and Civilization*, Vol. I, Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), pp. 419-420.

⁵¹ N. 7, p. 24.

⁵² N. 41, p. 6

⁵³ Ibid. p. 7

⁵⁴ Ashin DasGupta (1987), “Introduction II: The Story” in Ashin DasGupta & M. N. Pearson (eds.) *India and the Indian Ocean 1500-1800*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 29.

⁵⁵ N. 41, p. 9.

Portuguese power and oust them by seizing the Gulf ports and sacked Muscat in 1551 and again in 1581. By 1600 Portuguese control over Oman's coast was sufficiently reduced and Suhar was briefly taken by the Arabs.⁵⁶ Though a series of defeats followed for the Ottomans at the hands of the Portuguese, the Ottomans continued to resist the Portuguese in the Gulf.⁵⁷

The Portuguese power however started waning by the end of the sixteenth century due to various reasons. In 1581, Portugal was annexed by Spain thus subordinating her own interests to that of Spain, including her overseas interests. Secondly, the Portuguese were very unpopular with the people of the East who despised their religion and detested their strict monopoly of trade and oppressive methods.⁵⁸ Khaldoun states few reasons that contributed to the Portuguese decline- their use of weapons and not peaceful trade relations and bribery by the officials that broke the discipline.⁵⁹ It was at this time when Shah Abbas the Great (1585-1629) of Persia turned hostile to the Portuguese as he began to undermine their position in the Gulf.

The reign of Shah Abbas almost sounded a death knell for the Portuguese power in the Gulf. The Shah established trade links with Moscow, sent ambassadors and trade representatives to Europe and began to resent Portuguese control over Hormuz which effectively dominated the entrance of the Gulf.⁶⁰ From the new capital at Isfahan, Shah Abbas and his advisers set out an elaborate strategy to combat Ottoman threat and to deal with the Portuguese. Shah Abbas realized that the access to land routes remained limited and difficult due to the Ottoman power and he received lukewarm response from Moscow, Poland, Hungary, France, Scotland, Spain, Tuscany and even Queen Elizabeth I of England

⁵⁶ N. 47, p. 12.

⁵⁷ Ottoman defeat at Qatif in 1552; near Muscat in 1552 with the ulterior aim of capturing Hormuz and Bahrain islands; and 1556 on Bahrain. N. 7, p. 24.

⁵⁸ N. 45, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Khaldoun Hasan al Naqeeb (1990), *Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula: A different Perspective*, London: Routledge. Translated by L. M. Kenny, pp. 34-35.

⁶⁰ Sanjay Subramanyam (1992), *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500-1700, A Political and Economic History*, Harlow: Longman, p. 148.

forcing him to moving against Hormuz, the only means he had of conducting external trade freely.⁶¹ The setting up of English factory at Jask in 1616 thus signaled the Anglo-Persian alliance against Portuguese. This was the time when Shah Abbas sought the help of British to oust the Portuguese from the region.

The Anglo-Persian military operation against the Portuguese that began in early 1622 ended with success for both as Hormuz was captured from the Portuguese. The advantages for the Company were great as the position of the Portuguese was seriously weakened and that of the British strengthened. Furthermore the British gained a free port that was more convenient than Jask for trade. Though it is considered that the real significance of the fall of Hormuz was that it permitted the rise of Bandar Abbas (previously a small village called Gombroon), a port favoured and protected by Shah Abbas I.⁶² During the next one hundred and fifty years, Bandar Abbas became the centre of commercial and political activities in the Persian Gulf.⁶³

The fall of Hormuz contributed to the decline in the power of the Portuguese whereas the British acquired in Hormuz a port more convenient than in Jask where they first landed. The next aim of the Persians was to follow up the success of Hormuz by taking Muscat, another stronghold of the Portuguese in the Gulf with the help of British who however withheld their assistance.⁶⁴ From 1650 to about 1730 the Omanis continued war at sea. The Arab used the Portuguese vessels they had captured at Muscat and together with their own attacked Portuguese garrisons at Bombay (1661/62), Diu (1668 and 1676) and Bassein (1674) and on the Persian coast at Kung (1670). In retaliation the Portuguese closed their Indian ports to the Omanis.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid , p. 157.

⁶³ N. 45, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Arnold Wilson (1928, 1954, and 1959), *The Persian Gulf: An Historical sketch from the Earlier times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, London: George Allen & Unwin, p.150.

⁶⁵ N. 47, p. 13.

The Dutch Presence in the Gulf

The foundations of the Dutch East India Company were laid in 1595 when a consortium of Dutch merchants sent out two fleets of ships. In 1598 five Companies fitted 22 ships. It was only when the Dutch Government encouraged the union of various ventures in a single Company it was regularly constituted in the Netherlands in 1602 as the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) i.e. the United East India Company with a large joint stock capital.⁶⁶

At the outset the Dutch East India Company's capital investments were ten times the English East India Company's and it also managed through diplomacy and force to prevent the British from becoming established in what was then the most lucrative trade market, the present day Indonesia which in a way forced the British to fall back on India. "What might have proved a consolation prize turned in the long run to be an advantage".⁶⁷ Nevertheless, British encountered Dutch resistance in the Gulf, as Portuguese power still lingered in the Gulf and had not eliminated the English difficulties after the capture of Hormuz nor did it give them a secure position in the Gulf. The Dutch explored the markets in Gulf only after having established themselves firmly in Southeast Asia. It was only then that they began to develop their commercial network in other parts of Asia. The Dutch presence in the Gulf was only in 1623, when Admiral Jacob Dedel with nine fleets of Armada sailed from Batavia and arrived in Bandar Abbas on 20 June 1623.⁶⁸

The Dutch established themselves in Bandar Abbas after the capture of Hormuz, and immediately sought to monopolize the trade in spice and pepper.⁶⁹ To escape the Dutch competition the East India Company opened trade with Basra at the head of the Gulf. Basra had risen in its status as one of the principal port cities of the Gulf, from the sixteenth

⁶⁶ N. 24, p. 267.

⁶⁷ Douglas Peers (2006), *India under Colonial Rule, 1700-1885*, London: Pearson Education Ltd., p. 22

⁶⁸ Willem Floor (2009), "Dutch Relations with the Persian Gulf" in Lawrance G. Potter (ed), *The Persian Gulf in History*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 236. The purpose of the fleet was to assist the English fleet against the Portuguese, but they reached late.

⁶⁹ N. 45, p. 7.

century and was the largest city on the Gulf littoral in the seventeenth century identified as a commercial hub. The port was well suited for overland trade as it was connected with the main centres of the Ottoman Empire via Baghdad and Damascus, with Shiraz and Isfahan in Safavid Iran and by way of maritime trade throughout western Indian Ocean basin from Surat to Coromandal.⁷⁰

By mid of the seventeenth century the English East India Company was in a critical position after a series of defeats in Gulf as the trade in the territories went completely in the hands of the Dutch.⁷¹ The East India Company had to surrender to the commercial and political supremacy of the Dutch in the Gulf for the next few decades during which its relations with the Persians were also on the decline due to differences in the sharing of custom profits.

However by the end of seventeenth century the position of the British vastly improved and for once the Dutch vigour and energy were exhausted. Events in Europe wherein in 1688 Dutch and British together fought against France and Dutch interests were subordinated to those of British besides the declining power of Holland on the European continent had affected the Dutch position in the Gulf more than anything else. While they continued to play an important part in the commerce and politics of the Gulf during a great part of the eighteenth century, they were never again to become the masters of the region.⁷²

The French Interactions with the Gulf

In comparison to Portuguese and the Dutch, the French presence in the Gulf was limited. The French East India Company was established in 1664 and in 1665 opened a factory in Bandar Abbas which carried very little trade. French penetration in Persia had already begun in the seventeenth century and Persian armies were generally drilled and frequently

⁷⁰ N. 28, p. 105.

⁷¹ N. 45, p. 8.

⁷² Ibid., p. 11.

commanded by French officers.⁷³ Trade contacts between France and Persia continued till the mid eighteenth century. In the post revolution period attempt was made to renew the contacts and the French Emperor Napoleon I and Persian Emperor Fath Ali Shah joined hands against Russia and Britain. Napoleon aimed at attack on British India.

For a while, in the eighteenth century the British lost interest in the Gulf and could find no reason to justify its maintenance of the settlement at Basra which it had started in 1723, other than the need for supervision of overland communications to and from India. The threat due to the advance of Napoleon towards India increased the importance of Gulf for the British. Napoleon's arrival in Egypt (1798) was interpreted in British circles as a prelude to the invasion of India. The Gulf now no longer remained an area of commercial interest alone but rather that of strategic and one which was to be retained to protect the security of India. It was in these efforts that the British took measures to protect and enhance their position in the Gulf and India remained the most important reason for it. The British soon worked their way around in eliminating the influence of regional and European powers as they ensured that the route remained free of any encumbrance.

France had trade relations with Oman which was also the scene of Anglo-French rivalry. The first French-Omani contacts go back to the 1660's, when the merchant ships from the Indies Company trading with the Persian Gulf put into Muscat's port, one of the best trading places of the region. The people of Muscat had expelled the Portuguese's tutelage (1508-1649) in 1650 under the Yaariba's and the Omani seaborne trade was experiencing a rapid expansion at the end of the 17th century and at the beginning of the 18th century. From 1750, trade between France and Oman took a concrete turn.⁷⁴ French carried their activities in the Indian Ocean from their base in Mauritius (then called Ile de France). In 1775, France acquired a permission to establish a trading post in Muscat, and, in 1786,

⁷³ H.L. Hoskins, (1924), "The Overland Route To India In The Eighteenth Century", *History*, Vol. 9, Issue 36, January 1924, p.302.

⁷⁴ France In Oman, First Contacts Under The Ancient Regime, Embassy of France in Muscat, <http://www.ambafrance-om.org/First-contacts-under-the-Ancient>, accessed on 15 January 2012.

France obtained the right to appoint an official representative.⁷⁵ The British were already weary of Napoleon's designs on India after his Egypt conquest and thus signed a treaty with the Sultan of Muscat in 1798. A year later Napoleon wrote a letter to the Sultan protesting his friendship with the British and also sent a letter for Tipu Sultan which was intercepted by the British agent in Mocha.

It is necessary here to take a brief look at British position in India and the importance of their growing power that finally culminated in their establishing an Empire in India. It was to protect this very position that Britain encouraged its involvement in the Gulf.

1.5. British Foundations in India

Before the British came to India, the country was a territory earmarked for trading activities by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the French. In India the foundations of the Mughal Empire were yet to be laid and the country was divided in various kingdoms. The Lodhi's ruled in the north and the Deccan and south Bahamanis (1347-1518) and the Vijaynagar (1336-1565). The Portuguese had arrived in India in 1498. By 1505 a viceroy was appointed and trading posts were established in west coast of India. The *Estado da India* was in its economic aspect, almost exclusively a maritime trading empire.

The East India Company was formed on 31 December, 1600 and obtained a Royal Charter to trade in the East the next year. The Company was incorporated by the name 'the Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading into the East Indies.'⁷⁶ In 1609, Captain William Hawkins of the *Hector*, presented himself at the court of Mughal Emperor Jehangir in Agra for favour of obtaining grant or firman for trading rights obtained the 'firman' in 1612 and soon set up their trading centres at Surat, Ahmedabad and Cambay. "The year 1613 marks the beginning of an era of British progress in their chequered career in the establishment of their Empire in India."⁷⁷ It was in this year that the British were

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Dr. Ishwari Prasad, (1973), *India in the Eighteenth Century*, Allahabad: Chugh Publications, p. 51.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

given grant for protection and right to trade. Agencies were established at Ahmedabad, Burhanpur, Ajmer and Agra.

In 1615, Thomas Roe was sent as an able official agent of the British nation to make a permanent treaty with the Mughal Emperor. Roe's embassy marks a definite stage in the development of East India Company in India. The company soon found its base in India as it had already set up a factory at east coast in Masulipatam in 1611 and in Hoogly in 1632 for trade in Bengal. Soon Charles II granted the Company new charter in 1661 giving them right to coin money, build fortifications, administer justice, punish interlopers and make peace or war with non Christian states.⁷⁸ The company soon acquired Bombay in 1668.

In 1685 Bombay became their chief seat of power and in 1687 the British East India Company transferred its headquarters from Surat to Bombay. The chief Bengal agency was removed from Hoogly to Calcutta and in 1696, Madras had become the chief seat of East Coast. In 1730 Fort William became the seat of the Presidency of Bengal and Bengal was designated as a separate Presidency.

No one country had a monopoly on India's trade. The principal competitors for its business were the British and the French companies, with the Dutch in the third place and slipping in their position. The French ambitions in India and threat to British power in India waned after the Three Anglo French wars (1740-1760). The aggressive policies of Robert Clive (1725-1774) paved way for the establishment of a powerful British Empire in India.

Once it had established its rule in Bengal in 1765, the East India Company did not immediately embark on the conquest of the rest of India. The company of merchants while still remaining linked to trade assumed an increasingly territorial and political dimension. The company nevertheless sought to guarantee the safety of its possessions in Bengal and South and Western India. It succeeded in integrating most of them into its system of alliances except for the Marathas and Mysore. At the time of Aurangzeb's death in 1707 the Marathas continued to hold many fortified places and continued to undermine the imperial

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 55.

campaign in many ways. The Maratha fate met its downfall in Panipat in 1761. Then onwards the Maratha disintegration followed though the last count was in 1818 at the battle of Ashti. In Mysore Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan were set to beat the Company at its own game. Hyder Ali's death in 1782 did not halt Tipu's efforts who resisted British efforts of control. Yet Cornwallis's initial defeat of Tipu in 1792-93 followed the final one in 1799 when Seringapatam was captured.⁷⁹

It was the battle of Plassey (1757) which laid the foundations of British rule in India. The Nawab of Bengal and his French allies were defeated by the forces of English East India Company. Robert Clive helped the Company win the battle which also reduced the French influence in Indian politics. In 1773 Warren Hastings (1773-1785) was appointed as the first Governor-General of the company's Indian territories subordinating the other presidencies to a new capital of British India in Calcutta. After 1773, by Act of Parliament, the administration of India was placed under the Bengal governor as Governor-General's thus subordinating East India Company's affairs to British Parliament. By the Pitts India Act of 1784, his authority was clarified over his council.⁸⁰ With the arrival of Governor General Wellesley (1798-1805) in 1798 the company embarked on a systematic policy of territorial annexation through the Doctrine of Lapse.⁸¹ With the establishment of its trading stations in Indian cities in the 18th century, the East India Company had steadily moved ahead in acquiring revenue collection rights. The mighty Mughal Empire declined in 18th century.

Lord Wellesley's Subsidiary Alliance System (1798-1805) ensured that kingdoms were brought under the control of British. With the control of Mysore in 1799 after defeating Tipu Sultan and the Marathas in the Battle of Ashti in 1818, and Lord Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse (1848-1856) the British control of India was complete. The final ascendancy of

⁷⁹ Burton Stein (1998), *A History of India, New Delhi*: Oxford University Press, p. 210.

⁸⁰ Peter Robb (2002), *A History of India*, New York: Palgrave, p.123.

⁸¹ Claude Markovits (ed.)(2004), *A History of Modern India 1480-1950*, London: Anthem Press, translated by Nisha George and Maggy Hendry, pg. 252

British power was thus established in the mid nineteenth century and the British power in India was paramount from sea to sea.

As the British paramountacy over India was being increasingly established, the Empire's key cities Madras, Bombay and Calcutta, acquired increased prominence and developed as centres of political, administrative and commercial activity. After the Revolt of 1857, on 2 August 1858 the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act, transferring the authority of the East India Company to the British crown. This power had to be exercised by the Secretary of State for India that was now divided in three presidencies for administrative purpose – Madras, Bengal and Bombay. The pattern of twenty-year charter reviews now gave way to regular Parliamentary scrutiny of Indian affairs.⁸² There was a body of vessels that remained under GOI- the Bombay Marine, the Bengal Marine.⁸³ Thus interests of the British became paramount in the governance of India. The legislation of 1876 reinforced the control of the Secretary of State for India. Since 1876 the sovereign was the monarch, represented in India by a Viceroy, and with its large army and Britain's massive stake in the economy, India was valued more than any part of the Empire.⁸⁴

In 1880, of Britain's empire still ruled from London, the Indian empire accounted for 85 percent of the entire global empire of Britain which was ruled from London and in terms of population, in 1872, of all men, women and children living in Britain and its empire over 78 percent lived in Indian empire and by 1881 the Indian empire covered some 97 percent of Britain's Asiatic Empire⁸⁵. India was a base for Britain for its political and commercial relations with the countries in the Far East, South-East Asia, West Asia and East Africa. The importance of India's defence was a matter non negotiable and at no point of time contested by any of the governments in Britain. Britain acquired territories surrounding

⁸² Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf (2002), *A Concise History of India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.103.

⁸³ Jayanta Kumar Roy (ed.) (2007), *Aspects of India's International Relations 1700-2000: South Asia and the World*, PHISPC, Centre for Studies in Civilization Vol. X, Part 6 in D. P. Chattopadhyay (Gen Ed), *A History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization*, Delhi: Pearson Longman, p.28.

⁸⁴ Peter King (1980), *Twentieth-Century British History Made Simple*, London: W. H. Allen, p.11.

⁸⁵ N. 69, p. 4.

India for its protection and maintained a status of protectorate over some others. Britain wanted “that it (India) be left in unmolested enjoyment of its vast and splendid possessions of which India was an omphalos”.⁸⁶

Thus in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Britain had established itself as a great colonial power and the British Indian Empire was well established with the set administrative system introduced. For the first time in the India’s history any single power had established its hold over it and subsequently the entire subcontinent. On 1st January 1877, the British Queen assumed the title of the Empress of India when India was formally accommodated in the British Empire, and it was a given fact that all efforts were now to be directed towards maintaining the superior position of Britain in India. Britain had its colonies in other parts of Asia and Africa; however it was its Indian empire that demanded the utmost attention as India remained most central to its concerns of empire. India remained the centerpiece of their empire. By the 1870s the colonies of white settlement-Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Cape Colony had been granted responsible government.

With India firmly under their control, the British, largely with Indian resources which included Indian ships and soldiers, began to expand their presence in the Gulf. Here it would be necessary to first look at early British interactions with the Gulf and the appeal that the region held for them apart from its significance to devote a considerable amount of thought and resources on the part of the GOI for maintaining its position in the region. Here it would be necessary to first look at early British interactions with the Gulf.

1.6. Rising British Interests and Growing Domination: The Gulf, A Cause for India

The British had first appeared in the Gulf at the beginning of seventeenth century for the purpose of trade.⁸⁷ In 1581, John Newberie, the first Englishman to travel by overland

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 5.

⁸⁷N. 45, p. 1 opening sentence.

route to the Gulf reached Hormuz. Thereafter various attempts were made by English merchants to establish trade establishments that failed due to consistent Portuguese efforts. “The failure of various attempts by English merchants to establish an overland trade route to the Persian Gulf had clearly shown that the Portuguese hegemony could be broken only by a superior sea power, such as was now possessed by England.”⁸⁸ The East India Company was to achieve a major victory in this relation when it established its contact with the Gulf from India.

One of British India’s earliest interactions with the Persian Gulf was in the year 1615, when the Directors of East India Company sent a ship from Surat to Jask. Jask was the site of first mercantile settlement made by the East India Company on the Persian soil.⁸⁹ Later in 1621 four of the newly acquired pinnaces, the ‘Shilling’, ‘Rose’, ‘Robert’ and ‘Richard’⁹⁰ of the Indian marine that was formed in 1613, were ordered in preparation for an attack on the Portuguese who controlled Hormuz, the strategic *entrepot* to Persian Gulf.⁹¹ The fall of Hormuz signalled increased British presence and expansion in the Gulf. Soon ports of Muscat, Basra, Bushire, Baghdad were taken.

With India firmly under their control, the British, largely with Indian resources, began to expand their presence in the Gulf starting with the Imam of Muscat/ Oman in 1798. In the next one and a half decade a series of truces/treaties signed with different local tribal leaders limited the movement of the ‘Trucial Coast’ tribes and established British supremacy under a protectorate. This resulted in the General Treaty of Peace and Suppression of Piracy in 1820 concluded with coastal tribal leaders.⁹² British influence actually became dominant in the Gulf in 1820. In 1835, the British Resident introduced an idea that soon became the *leit motif* of British policy in Gulf, that of signing an engagement

⁸⁸ Roger M N. 7, p. 25.

⁸⁹ George N. Curzon (1892), *Persia and the Persian Question*, London: Longmans Green and Co. p. 427.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 419.

⁹¹ Shreedharan K. (1982), *A Maritime History of India*, New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, p. 99

⁹² The Shaikhs of Trucial coast signed these treaties. Bahrain also signed it.

banning naval warfare for a period of six months.⁹³ In 1853, the Perpetual Maritime Truce imposed on the local chieftains of the Persian Gulf formalized the earlier temporary Truces and confirmed British dominance in the Persian Gulf which now virtually became a British lake.⁹⁴

The British activities in the Gulf were largely dictated by their relevance to India- whether those activities were concerned with commerce, diplomacy, imperial defence or strategic position.⁹⁵ The Gulf represented one of India's imperial frontiers. "It is the nature of such frontiers to be inherently expansionist".⁹⁶ Perceived threats to the British position in India were seen as emanating from various quarters, with one of the principal ones being the direction of the Gulf. If the Gulf was one of India's outer frontiers, it followed that it must be kept under British influence and control. "European challenges to British influence in Gulf constituted potential threats to India, either because they threatened British predominance in the Gulf or because they were seen as possible encroachments on India itself".⁹⁷ Thus, beyond the boundaries of the formal empire were established protectorates, whose rulers were theoretically sovereign but whose foreign policies were to varying degrees controlled by Britain and beyond them were at times large areas of the worlds where Britain exercised great influence because of its economic and financial power, and because of the might of navy.⁹⁸

As British India established itself in and around the Gulf with factories, political representatives, and military outposts, it found it necessary to defend those elements, and that in turn deepened the related commitment. Another source of commitment came with

⁹³ Ravinder Kumar (1965), *India and the Persian Gulf Region, 1858-1907, A Study in British Imperial Diplomacy*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, p. 17.

⁹⁴ J. B. Kelly (1968), *Britain and the Persian Gulf: 1795-1880*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp.354-408.

⁹⁵ N. 9, p. 277.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 279.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Dominic Lieven (2000), *Empire, The Russian Empire and its Rivals*, London: John Murray (Publishers) Ltd., p. 90.

the rooting of British and indigenous Indian commerce in the region. British commercial interests in the region and the resident subjects and property had to be protected.⁹⁹

The second significant role of the Gulf in British Indian imperial policy was its importance in providing lines of communication between India and Britain. The protection of its empire in India was vital. Though India was administered by a battery of British and Indian administrators, their prime decisions were often guided and influenced by, and at times even surrendered to, the notional directions of London. By mid nineteenth century and particularly after the Revolt of 1857 in India, the continuous, uninterrupted and speedy link of communication between Great Britain and India was an important concern.

Britain had come a long way from a trans-desert camel mail that passed between Baghdad and Damascus whereby Indian mails passed to and returned from London.¹⁰⁰ The earliest was mail via Cape of Good Hope, across the India Ocean, which took a long time till reply from the Home office, could be gathered.

By the mid-eighteenth century the route via Basra, Baghdad and Syria had become well established and Basra was authenticated as British trading port and headquarters in Gulf. In 1861, The British Indian Steam Navigation Company (BI) began operating in the Gulf.¹⁰¹ In 1862 with the introduction of Bombay to Basra steamer mail service, that reliable mail communication with the Gulf was established.¹⁰² The mail steamers of the BI ran between Bombay and Basra weekly touching fortnightly at Gwadur, Maskat, Jask and Bahrain. Direct steamers between Gulf and London mostly ran fortnightly.¹⁰³ By 1866 the company had a regular schedule of stops along the west coast of India and in the Gulf. Steam communication and posts and telegraph had contributed in a great way by reducing the time

⁹⁹ J. E. Peterson (2009), "Britain and the Gulf: At the Periphery of the Empire", in Lawrence G. Potter (ed.) *The Persian Gulf in History*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 279.

¹⁰⁰ N. 8, p. 26.

¹⁰¹ Michael Pearson (2003), *The Indian Ocean*, London: Routledge, pp.203-205.

¹⁰² N. 99, p. 280.

¹⁰³ Report on Trade of the Persian Gulf for 1878, MSA, PD, 1880, Vol. II, No. 158, Part II, p. 29.

of communication. By 1888 the number of steamers employed in the Gulf trade had rose to 40 and upwards.¹⁰⁴

Introduction of the telegraph was a technological advance that further improved imperial lines of communication. The fastest link of direct communication ever known till then was used. The 'Electric Telegraph Department' in India had established telegraphic lines in India in 1855 itself that connected the major cities of the Indian subcontinent¹⁰⁵ but the connection with London was in progress.

A submarine and coastal telegraph system was established through the Gulf in 1864, enabling the Indo-European Telegraph Department (later Cable and wireless) to provide an essential and profitable service.¹⁰⁶ The first telegraph message between Karachi and London in 1865 ensured its regular usage and dependence from then onwards.

The Gulf region was looked upon as the means to protecting sea routes to India. British policies towards the littoral states were largely influenced by the primary consideration of India. Between 1873-1914 the British position in the Gulf was influenced by many factors such as the situation in Europe; the role of the rising and existing great powers of Europe, their interests and aspirations of expansion of power and territories in Asia; limitations of British military and influence of British navy; but most importantly how it perceived the threat to its Empire in India.

Unlike the Portuguese who stayed and dominated the trade in the Gulf for a little more than a century from 1515 till the fall of Hormuz in 1622, and the Dutch who tried to establish themselves by giving the British a tough competition in the Gulf, or the French, the British sustained their presence and control over Gulf for long. The significant reason for this was

¹⁰⁴ Administration report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency for 1888-89 (1889), Selections from the records of the GOI, FD, No CCLIX, FD serial No. 25, Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, p. 28.

¹⁰⁵ Christina Phelps Harris (1969), "The Persian Gulf Submarine Telegraph of 1864", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 135, No. 2, June, 1969, Blackwell Publishing, pp. 169-190.

¹⁰⁶ N. 99, p. 279.

their firm authority over India. The Portuguese and the French consistently aimed at establishing a foothold in and a firm control over India. However the British restricted their presence in small territories as they established the 'British Raj' over India. The British presence in India gave them a reason to identify the Gulf as region of importance for India's security concerns. The lack of full and effective control over India can explain the loss of Gulf control for other contemporary powers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. To supervise the Gulf, the GOI raised an administrative structure to facilitate its policies.

1.7. Administration of the Gulf Residency from India

At the turn of 19th century, the East India Company's domain in India had considerably expanded. From here onwards the emphasis of British activity in the Gulf became more political and less commercial as the protection of India was now directly linked to that of Gulf. Britain's legal and formal dominance implied permanent responsibility and supervision and hence the Persian Gulf Residency was established in 1822. It became one part of Government of India's far-flung residency system, with a Political Resident in the Persian Gulf (PRPG) headquartered at Bushire (Persia). In 1873, the town and district of Bushire was under the charge of Prince Assadullah Mirza who was subordinate to the Governor-General of Fars.¹⁰⁷ Between the years 1822-1873, this Residency was subordinated to the Governor of Bombay and was under direct administration of Bombay Government till 1872. Later, acknowledging its increased importance, it was transferred under the supervision of the Government of India from 1873 to India's independence in 1947. The administration of Government of India was initially operated from Calcutta as the seat of the GOI and later from Delhi. However with the beginning of World War I in 1914, London acquired greater control of affairs in the Persian Gulf leaving the Indian government little to decide.

¹⁰⁷ Annual report on the Administration of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency for the year 1874-75, MSA, PD, Vol. II Comp No. 1882, 1876, p. 5.

The Government of Bombay kept the Home Government informed about the activities in Gulf and through Proceedings or Enclosures to letters. At times, considering that there were delays in information and communication, the Gulf Resident, in matters of urgency, directly reported to London. The Government of Bombay dealt with Gulf affairs in the Political and Secret Departments, and they reported their proceedings to the Court of Directors of the East India Company. The revolt of 1857 brought in a few administrative changes. The system was overhauled and a Cabinet member, the Secretary of State for India, advised by a Council of India was given the responsibility to look into the affairs of the government of India. In India the Viceroy of India, was given the supreme authority. This new title was assumed by Governor General Canning when Queen Victoria proclaimed these changes to the 'Princes Chiefs, and the People of India' in November 1858.¹⁰⁸ The Viceroy was to be advised by an executive council (originally set up with exclusively British membership in 1853) now expanded for legislative purpose by up to 12 new members of whom half were to be 'non official'.¹⁰⁹

After 1858, letters and proceedings were sent to the Secretary of State for India. From 1843 the Government of India dealt with foreign matters in the Political and Foreign Department, and from 1859 in the Foreign Department up to and after assuming direct responsibility for them later (1873).¹¹⁰ Till 1868, Bombay Government transmitted reports on the affairs of the Gulf to London but soon administrative arrangements were in for a change.

By the late 1870s the situation in the Gulf called for larger involvement on the part of GOI as GOB was seen as increasingly inadequate of handling the affairs of the Gulf. Turkish involvement in Hasa and its claims over Bahrain and similar claims of Persia over Bahrain reflected upon the growing concern of the GOI. Besides, the GOB was unwilling to handle the responsibilities any more. In its despatch of 1 March, 1872, the GOI detailed out the reasons for the transfer of authority from GOB to GOI citing the convenience of "increased facilities of communication and extension of commerce and closer relations into which the

¹⁰⁸ N. 82, p.103.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.103.

¹¹⁰ N. 94, p. 852.

affairs of Asiatic countries have been drawn with Europe, and from other causes, our political relations with these countries have of late acquired an importance which they never before possessed and have given rise to questions more delicate of all that occupy our attention in the Foreign Department”.¹¹¹

The control of Gulf territories was thus transferred to the GOI in January 1873. The GOI was now responsible for the political, civil and military services in the Gulf along with communicating Gulf matters to the IO. For all practical purposes, the Viceroy of India and his government was now responsible with Gulf affairs.¹¹² Bombay was not left out of it as a copy of correspondence was sent to Bombay.

British India's role was direct supervision of all affairs related to the Gulf. Some of the crucial issues which it handled were treaty negotiations, promotion and protection of commercial activities and small-scale naval and military operations in the Gulf. The Gulf region was looked upon as the means to protecting sea routes to India. British policies towards the states were largely influenced by the primary consideration of India. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the British administration in India considered Gulf as the key communication link between the governments in India and London.¹¹³ In fact, the Gulf region was considered as the outer ring of India's defence. Thus, to meet the challenges of the Ottoman Empire, Russia and Germany, the British entered into treaties with the Arab Shaikhs. Ottoman Empire was keen on reinstating its influence in the wake of British domination; Russia wanted more share in Persian trade and territories and progressed towards the boundaries of India; Germany secured railway contracts out of the newly developed friendship with the Ottoman Sultan that encroached on British influence in the Gulf.

¹¹¹ GOI to Secretary of State for India, No 13, 1st March 1872, Secret Letters and Enclosures from India, BL, L/P& S/5/269, in Penelope Tuson (1979), *The Records of the British Residency and the Agencies in the Persian Gulf*, London: India Office Library and Records.

¹¹² Secret Letters and Enclosures from India, Letter no. 15, 31 January, 1873, BL, L/P&S/5/272.

¹¹³ N. 21, p.197.

The Resident and Residency

The territories under the administration of the Persian Gulf Residency grouped as follows:

1. Oman under the Sultan of Muscat;
2. Independent chiefdoms on the southern shores of the Gulf of Persia, from its entrance to the district of Qatar;
3. The islands of Bahrain independent to the same degree but classed separately as being of much greater wealth and importance;
4. The tract of coast from Qatar to the Shatt-el Arab, more or less held in subjection by the Turkish government;
5. Coast of Persia from Mohammerah to Cape Jask including the islands and the British station at “Bassadore (Bassiduah)”.¹¹⁴

The British headquarters in the Gulf were at Bushire. The Resident of the Gulf (PRPG) was placed there. He was directly under the Foreign Department of the GOI and directly subordinate to the Viceroy of India and answerable to his office for the Gulf affairs on the Arabian side. By the turn of the twentieth century the position of the Resident had become one of extreme significance and continued to attract power, dignity and authority over the next two decades as Percy Cox took over in 1904.

Thus the Gulf was ruled from India, and those who served there constituted a unique, small foreign service of their own. They were working as Political agents and officers. At the top was the Resident, “who developed into a kind of overlord....He was part diplomat, part

¹¹⁴ CAEd. Archive editions, Volume I 1873-1879, The report on the Administration of the Bushire Residency including that of the Muscat Political Agency with reports on trade for 1873-74. Calcutta: Printed at the Foreign Department Press, 1874.

advisor, part military governor”¹¹⁵. The Resident was assisted by a 1st and 2nd Assistant Resident. Besides, a British Civil Surgeon was stationed at Bushire.

In 1873, the Resident and his Assistant were appointed as the Justices of Peace by the GOI and invested with the limited Judicial Powers. It was the 1889, Persian Coast and Islands Order In Council placed the jurisdiction powers of the Resident of the Gulf on a legal basis and subjected the Resident in criminal and civil matters under the supervision of the High Court Bombay.¹¹⁶

From 1873, i.e. from the time the GOI took over responsibility of the Gulf affairs, the Resident, along with his officials was required to produce regular printed administration reports that explained the political, diplomatic and economic developments in the area. These reports continued to be produced without interruption during the period under study. The early reports were compiled jointly by the Resident at Bushire and the British Agent at Muscat. Thus, they were the administrative reports of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency which comprised of summaries of events, certain articles on of special subjects and statistics on trade. In 1905 the format of the reports was changed which reflected on the varying nature of British influence in the area. Through lack of space the trade tables were dropped, and the now appointed Agents at Bahrain and Kuwait, as well as the Consuls on the Persian coast each submitted separate sections. From 1908 the reports ceased to run from April to March as before and were compiled for each calendar year. All the matters were reported to the FD, GOI.

The Foreign Department

The Foreign Department of the GOI was created in 1784 by Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of India, was originally divided into three branches of Secret, Political and Foreign, and was known until 1842 as the Secret and Political Department.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ N. 11, p. 9.

¹¹⁶ Ibid

¹¹⁷ J. Talboys Wheeler (1868), *Summary of Affairs of the Government of India in the Foreign Department from 1864 to 1869*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, pp. 1-2.

A Foreign Secretary assisted the Governor General. In 1842 the name of Secret and Political Department was changed to Foreign which continued. In the nineteenth century, the GOI carried on foreign relations with the States of Afghanistan, Central Asia and Western China, all of which were beyond northern frontier; the Gulf states including relations with Muscat and Zanzibar which were beyond India's western frontier and Burma proper or Ava beyond its eastern frontier. The foreign relations with the countries beyond the boundaries of India, was carried on by the GOI through the local Governments that lie nearest to the foreign State in question. Thus the Foreign relations with Afghanistan, Central Asia and Western China were carried on through the medium of Punjab Government; those with Gulf States, Muscat and Zanzibar through the medium of Bombay Government and those with Ava through the Chief commissioner of British Burma. As for the Gulf affairs, the focus of the present study, as mentioned earlier, in 1873 the affairs of Gulf were transferred to the FD, GOI.

The Foreign Office

To some extent Foreign Office may be regarded as the headquarters of British diplomatic activity and the establishments abroad as the front lines through which it operates. The task of Foreign Office was to carry out wherever possible and as far as possible the foreign policies laid down by the British people as represented by the parliamentary majority, the governments deriving from that majority, the Cabinet heading the government and the Foreign Secretary as the specialist within the Cabinet.¹¹⁸ The Foreign Secretary was assisted by a permanent Under- Secretary. In the period under study there were two Under-secretaries- Julian Pauncefote and Phillip Curie (1889-1894). Three Assistant secretaries supervised the political and administrative divisions of FO. The FO was located in Whitehall. The Political Resident was answerable to the Foreign Dept of the GOI for

¹¹⁸ Lord Strang (1955), *The Foreign Office*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., p 17

dealings on the Arabian side of the Gulf whereas as Consul General he was responsible to the British Minister in Tehran who was under the jurisdiction of Foreign Office.¹¹⁹

1.8. Survey of the Literature

The Persian Gulf has been a strategic region both for the western and eastern countries since ancient times, hence commendable amount of work has been done by scholars reflecting upon various issues related to it such as trade and its routes, tribes, interest of west etc. More importantly, some of the most ancient civilizations as Magan, Dilmun, Sumerian and Mesopotamian civilizations have flourished in this region contributing to its rich ancient history and culture that had contacts with the Harappan civilization (*Geoffery: 1970; Ratnagar: 1981; Al Ansary: 1992; Thapar: 2000; Possehl: 2002*).

The renewed interest in the region due to oil led to the contributions to the Gulf history of 20th century with particular reference to the Western interests in the region. The writings of *George Lenckzowski (1952, 56, 62)*, *S.N. Fisher (1959,69,79)*, *Philip K. Hitti (1961)*, *George Kirk (1964)*, have contributed to the understanding of the region especially the formation of states and oil politics while referring briefly to the historical background of the region. The survey of literature however aims to draw attention to those academic contributions that reflect its situation when it steadily became a part of the larger imperial interest of the British and while being so often offered itself to be an area of constant intrigue and struggle for other European powers. The literature survey will also attempt to reflect on the specific contributions referring to British India's role in the region.

British Interests in the Persian Gulf

For more than a century British interests were guided by the Persian Gulf's geo-strategic location and its importance for the protection of British India as important communication routes to India passed through the Gulf. Though seemingly unimportant in their early years

¹¹⁹ Briton Cooper Busch (1967), *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914*, California: University of California Press, p. 7.

of presence, the Gulf became a concern for the British with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 and assurances of support to Omani Sultan and through him to Tipu Sultan of Mysore, thereby accelerating a renewed interest in the region. Initially the various tribes, ruling families and their socio-political structures were not of much concern to them except for the protection of their trade, routes and merchant ships but the rivalry of the European powers and equally important, the steady rise of British interests in the region were the important aspects of 17th and 18th century Gulf which pushed them to take greater interest. (*Amin: 1967; Bhacker: 1989; Chaudhary and Morineau (eds.): 1999; DasGupta and Pearson (eds.): 1987. Lawrence Potter (ed.):2009*). The pursuance of these interests had severe implications on the region, its tribes and people who often retaliated to the policies of the British pursued by the GOI (*Khuri: 1980; Khaldoun: 1990*).

The grand imperial designs and the need for a secure Indian empire continued to dictate British policies towards the Gulf. (*Curzon: 1892*). The region was keenly studied for a better understanding and future designs (*J. G. Lorimer: 1915*). With the agreement with the Trucial States starting in 1820 and the Permanent Maritime treaty in 1853, British influence was acknowledged. Gulf became a part of British 'informal empire' (*J.Gallagher, R.E.Robinson: 1953*). The distinction between the formal empire that denoted legal control and the 'informal' empire of influence was highlighted by Gallagher and Robinson who also promoted the 'peripheral or 'excentric' theory of imperialism. British imperialism in the Gulf then can be explained as part of those frontiers of British empire that was influenced by the British presence. British overseas expansion and imperialism was sustained in India, Ottoman and Persian Empires and Africa including its 'informal empire' in the Gulf (*Cains and Hopkins: 1993*).

Similarly the specific response to Bahrain and Qatar explains the local setting and local response to the British plan. However a more colonial and imperial point of view emphasized Britain's role as harbinger of peace and discipline in an otherwise perceived strife torn, lawless and piracy prone region. (*Arnold Wilson: 1928, 1955, 1959; John Marlowe: 1962*) and in doing so, as Kelly mentions the British, "wrote one of the most honourable pages in the history of British Empire" (*J.B.Kelly:1968*). Britain's vast colonial

empire reflected astute diplomacy and calculated policy in retaining the various regions. The policy entailed as far as possible to avoid direct control, but wherever necessary establish complete control. Gulf affairs continued to be operated within this larger framework (*Pugh Martin: 1982; M. E. Chamberlain: 1988; John Clarke: 1989; Zara Steiner: 1969*).

Britain's relationship with Bahrain and Qatar was hence, in this view, a reflection of its interests in West Asia in general and Gulf in particular. During the nineteenth century the British used the "weapon of national independence", than the use of armies to create divisions in the region (*Busch: 1967, pg.63*). The treaties with Bahrain (1860, 1871 and 1892) had established a legitimacy of British control over the territories. It had to be kept out of the occasional claims of Ottomans, Oman and Iran and hence the power of the Al Khalifa's was recognized. So also with Qatar which British looked as vantage point en route to their colonial interests in India. They were quick in recognizing Qatar's distinct status than Bahrain granting it a sense of political selfhood (*Zahlan: 1979*).

British India's Involvement

As seen earlier, British involvement in the Gulf stemmed from commercial, strategic and regional considerations for India. The acquisition of India and establishment of political authority prompted British power to define its sphere of influence. India's importance was non debatable and this was true for Indian and the imperial government. Britain compensated well enough through its empire in Asia and Africa for the lack of interest it displayed in the European politics in the nineteenth century. Maintaining the position in the Gulf was important for maintaining the position in India. *Rosa Louise Greaves (1959)* effectively intertwines the critical events in Persian Gulf and British policy towards them. The book is helpful in understanding British India's interest and military considerations in Persia, Russia's interest in Persia and the British response to it. The importance of West Asia had increased for the British, "Persian Gulf was the cornerstone of British influence in Middle East" and in effect ".....the interests in Middle East were distinctly secondary to their enterprise in India" (*Zaki Saleh: 1957, 1966, p.19*).

The large British Empire could not have survived without regional administrative divisions. India however was a separate administrative territory by itself. It would have been difficult for the London authorities to take over the responsibility of the affairs for which Indian officials were given responsibility. The powers of Government of India were real and great (*Dodwell: 1925*). There was no reason for the authorities in London to reduce its position to a more subordinate agency, as was believed by those in India. British Indian Government dealt not just with affairs in India but to safeguard its interests and ultimately those of the Empire, it handled affairs of Afghanistan, Persian Gulf region and even of African territories. British interests were represented in the Gulf by the Government of India through local Political Resident headquartered on the coastal township of Bushire in Iran with representations from Bahrain and Qatar. The Political Resident was a servant of Indian Government and was answerable to the Foreign Department of that Government. (*Wheeler: 1868*) which was answerable to the India Office and the Foreign Office (*Lord Strang: 1955; Clarke: 1989*). The administrative set up ensured a smooth flow of communication in the “unofficial empire” of Britain in the Persian Gulf that was managed by the agents of that Empire such as merchants and traders who belonged to not just the Gulf but even those from India and African territories were secured by the British officials (*James Onley: 2007*). Responsibility of the control and direction of British relations with the Persian Gulf States was exercised by the Government of Bombay and later by the Government of India. “Prior to 1914, the Government of India, preoccupied with the need to safeguard the interest of subcontinent, took upon itself to administer and finance the control of Gulf”, (*Leatherdale: 1983, pp.19*).

Difference of Opinion and Clash of Interests

For long, a view has persisted that foreign policy of Government of India was but a mere reflection of larger British interests that were determined by relationships between Britain and Ottoman Empire and the other European nations. The role of the European nations as Russia, France and Germany in the Gulf in late nineteenth and the early twentieth century

had contributed much to the framing of the British policies (*Brandenburg: 1965; Dawson: 1966; Anderson: 1966; Druhe: 1970; Gordon: 1978; Duncan: 2007*).

However the contributions of various researchers in the past few decades has explained that the British Indian Government had evolved its own school of diplomacy that many a times confronted with the Home Government in London, which was guided by the relations with other European nations and considered British India's stand on certain issues as unacceptable. In many instances, the authorities in London even took independent decisions on matters relating to Bahrain and Qatar causing much embarrassment to the Indian Government that was actually in charge of the Gulf affairs.

Though the government in India held the authority to conduct administration in Persian Gulf yet, it was not immune to the comments, orders and decisions of the Home Government. It is in this connection that it often came in conflict with the London authorities. The cooperation and conflicts of Secretary of States and Viceroy's have counted for much in history of British India. The British Indian officials reacted to the issues in Gulf from India's security point of view and insisted to treat the problems of Gulf as essentially Indian. The clash between Britain and India's external policy and also that of the expansionist schemes of the Imperial government reflected the difference of opinion between the Government of India and the officials in London. More than anywhere else, this was clearly brought out in the role of British India with response to the Gulf (*Robert Blyth: 2003; Malcolm Yapp: 1980; Briton Cooper Busch: 1967; Ravinder Kumar: 1965*). Ravinder Kumar's work, eminently examines the situation in India and the British India's response to safeguarding the Indian interests at every opportunity of an intervention from other European country in the Persian Gulf. Furthermore, he explains the dichotomy between the Imperial government and Indian government and examines the politico-economic aspects. The above mentioned works give a detailed explanation of the interaction of ideas, strategies and even criticisms among the British policy makers.

Whether it was London that always decided matters for India or whether the Indian administrators who insisted on their right to take decisions on issues that fell in their ambit

of power is an issue of research. London, as some believed was the seat of power and authority and the reference to India is only in the context of the larger British policy. Britain's foreign policy initiatives in Europe, West Asia etc. were a reflection of Britain's interests and obligations in those regions with India having a limited role. Hence, "London was the epicenter and not Calcutta" (*Sneh Mahajan: 2002*) and thus British India had no reason to decide the strategies in the Gulf as the hold was all from London (*Malcolm Yapp: 1980*). These are areas that the study contends as studies have ignored the role of British India officials in policy matters pertaining to regions under their jurisdiction.

1.9. Purpose and importance of the study

Importance of the period

The period of the proposed study, 1873-1914, is a period of forty-one years. The GOI took over the reins of administration of Gulf from the Government of Bombay which had earlier looked into the affairs of the region. The period from 1873 to the beginning of the World War one (1914) was a period of increased international rivalry in the Gulf. The British interest in the region was both strategic and commercial. The British had long established their hold over the Gulf maintaining a conscious and strict policy of keeping the other powers at bay. The European powers however had cautiously treaded on the territories by way of courting trade concessions to the regional powers as Ottoman and Persian Empires who had no military or naval potency to combat British influence in the region but who diplomatically continued to resist British influence. As Britain established control and mastery over India in the eighteenth century, the Gulf became important as a concern of frontier for India, rather than as a strategic concern of London resulting in the British policy in the Gulf up to the mid twentieth century being primarily formulated and conducted by the GOI and not Whitehall. More often than not, Indian aggressiveness was often deplored by London, which saw the Gulf as possessing only minor importance and certainly not worth jeopardizing grander strategy in Europe and with the Ottomans.

The Government of India constantly looked at the Persian Gulf as an area of its expertise and hence on numerous occasions clashed with London. All Gulf problems were seen as essentially Indian problems. Indian interest was seen as part of an Imperial interest and Indian officials strongly felt that they cannot be excluded from policy decisions regarding matters that fell within the radius of political interest of India whereas the Imperial Government in London accepted that Indian authorities are entitled to have opinions but cannot challenge Whitehall supremacy and in London's view the opinion in India seemed to serve only Indian cause. The beginning of World War I in 1914 reduced the Imperial dependence on Indian authorities. Indian soldiers were deployed in the regions of Sudan, Egypt, Aden, Gulf, Iraq and Iran.

The references to British policy often do not exclusively refer to the Indian aspects. The tendency is no different than the erstwhile Imperial government's approach to brush off any such instances of Indian government as mere desperate attempts to prove its importance and insist on an almost impossible solution in foreign policy matters. The final blow to the whole debate is cast by relegating the Indian Government as subordinate to that of Britain, and justify that the matter of its policy decision was anyway not worthy of consideration.

The fact that there was enough resistance from the Indian side to Home Government's approach, in more than one instances towards the Gulf and that in spite of instructions from London, the Indian officers remained unconvinced is good enough a reason to look into their side of story. It is obvious that a more insistent demand for control came from India and not from Britain and that diplomacy was equally important as much was the naval power.

Often the aggressive pursuance of affairs in Gulf was a result of strong individual personalities. Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty (1898-1905) marked the "high noon" of the Empire. Apart from him Sir John Malcolm, Lord Lansdowne, Col. Lewis Pelly and Sir Percy Cox, E. C. Ross among many others ensured that British India interests received significance in Gulf matters.

There is no such detailed and dedicated study to explain the causal relationship between the policy decisions taken by the British officers of India towards Persian Gulf and the commercial and political concerns that were truly Indian in origin. The areas of cooperation, convergence or divergence between London and Delhi will be explored. In times of clash with the Home Government, the Indian government, without exception, would demand greater involvement and a more hard line policy.

For the long years of British interest in the Gulf, no research has explored by an Indian the period of study i.e. 1873-1914 from the British India point of view in detail.

The research study is about the assessment and the examination of the definite role of British India in the administration of the Persian Gulf Region with special reference to Bahrain and Qatar. It reflects on the response of British Indian officers to the select events in the region; the impact of these events, as they saw it on the British Empire in India and the subsequent policy they designed to meet the challenges. In order to look at British interests in the Persian Gulf and to understand the divergences and the reasons for it, case studies of Bahrain and Qatar are taken up. The two regions could appear to be of less significance for the European powers as compared to Kuwait or Oman, yet hardly unimportant for the British maneuvers in the region. They attracted the attention of the British to counter the advances of regional and other European powers and in these cases, the Indian government sharply conveyed its decisions to London office asserting its authority in dealing with such matters.

This research study is compiled information that helps understand and critically evaluate the policy of British India towards the Persian Gulf. It is about understanding British India's response and challenges to other powers and the impact on the country. The study reflects on the decision making of Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and London concerning the issues identified in the specific regions of the Gulf i.e. Bahrain and Qatar. More importantly, it is interesting to note and understand how India was influenced by such policies in Gulf apart from being a reason for such an influence. The study also comments on the impact of these policies on Gulf.

Gulf history is an important dimension to the study of the region that is in India's close neighbourhood. The relevance of such a historical study cannot be more underlined in the understanding of the region today. In the light of the policies pursued by the British officials concerning political, security and commercial interest in the Gulf region, top decision makers such as Lord Curzon and others established policies which remained in place for long time. Interestingly, even after the lapse of over a century, some of the basic premises of the policies are relevant and useful in the context of independent India's engagement with the Gulf. There are issues of Indian workers, energy security, trade, investments and maritime security along with defence issues. This becomes all the more important in the context of close relations the GCC countries and Iraq have established with the West and India's own warming of relations with the US. More importantly the Arab Gulf states and Iran as well, increasingly look upon India as a major power in the region for maintaining security and stability in the Gulf region.

1.10. Objectives of the study

- To study British interests in the Gulf as they saw it from India in the given period.
- To examine the key differences over policies between authorities in London and in India concerning Bahrain and Qatar.
- Strategies adopted in the Gulf to safeguard the empire's interests as seen from India.

1.11. Hypotheses

- 1) British India took a more assertive policy role in the Persian Gulf because it believed London had less knowledge about the region.
- 2) In safeguarding British India's interests, its officials strongly defended their decisions concerning Bahrain and Qatar.

1.12. Methodology

The study is based on historical-analytical method. Archival sources of the period have been widely and extensively referred to. The Administrative affairs of Persian Gulf and those particularly of Bahrain and Qatar are studied and the British policies therein are analyzed to look into the British India perspective. The archival material is used in the framework of the British and their policy concerning the two identified countries and also in the larger context of areas of convergence and divergence between London and India.

To study the policies and strategies, archival records of largely Foreign Department and Political and Secret Department and few Legislative Department and the Baghdad Residency Records have been used from National Archives, New Delhi. The records provide valuable information on the developments in the Gulf and give detailed responses of the Indian and the imperial authorities and at times also of British Ambassador at Constantinople and Residency in Baghdad and sub-ordinate consul in Basra.

The Persian Gulf Administrative reports for the period 1873-1914, are the printed administration reports that summarize political, diplomatic and economic developments in the Gulf region. The earliest reports were drafted and compiled jointly by the Resident at Bushire and the British Agent at Muscat. They include summaries of events, occasional write-ups on subjects of special interest or the dynastic history of a particular shaikhdom or tribal leader and detailed statistics on trade.

For the same period, Political Department files are referred from the Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai. They include mostly handwritten copy of some records in the Foreign Department and do not exclusively refer to the Gulf matters but also refer to Indian rulers and provinces. India Office records, now hosted in the British Office Library, London and Foreign Office records and Cabinet files at National Archives, Kew gardens, London were also referred. These include the letters and proceedings to the Secretary of State for India as also the printed and published administration reports.

Apart from these, secondary sources in the form of books, articles, Ph.D. theses and monographs are also used. Internet sources are used as well.

1.13. Chapter Scheme

The first chapter is *Introduction* to the research study explains the theme of this research and the importance of such a study and its aims and objectives along with the survey of literature. It explains the geo-strategic significance of the Gulf for the British with the historical background. It explains the importance of the Gulf for India and British India's involvement and relationship with the Persian Gulf region. The chapter gives the historical background of the Europeans and British in Gulf and the establishment of British influence over Gulf. It refers to the British interactions with other European powers and their interests in the Gulf. The chapter provides details of the British administrative structure that was set up in the Gulf which was administered by the Government of India and to a great extent remained influenced by it.

The second chapter is *British India's Interests in the Persian Gulf: Political, Strategic and Commercial*. This chapter explains the authority of British in India (from Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi) and the subsequent strategic demands on the policies. The British power in India could be threatened by changes in the Persian Gulf and therefore the specific policies were framed. The GOI and the British officers who played an important role among others, to protect political, strategic and commercial interests as also to keep the Gulf a zone of non-interference for other European and limit the role of regional powers and subsequent interests in Bahrain and Qatar are discussed.

The third chapter deals with GOI's policy in Bahrain. It is, *Bahrain: Domestic regional and Global Concerns*, British challenge to Persian and Ottoman designs; Bahrain's acceptance of British protected status; Influence due to the trade with India; Interests referring to Indian merchants.

The fourth chapter is *Qatar: Saudi, Ottoman and Indian Merchants' Issues*. It refers to British interests in Qatar first to restrict and confine Ottoman control and later to detach Qatar from Ottoman influence and being used for aggression against Bahrain, the role of Al Thanis in the emergence of a separate status of Qatar, the Saudi-Wahhabi interest and the issue of Indian merchants will be discussed in this chapter. The role of Political Resident will also be analysed.

The fifth and the last chapter *Conclusion*, concludes the study. It will highlight the hypotheses, its validity or otherwise besides bringing out the salient conclusions.

British India's Interests in the Persian Gulf: Political, Strategic and Commercial

By the nineteenth century the Gulf had already become a British imperial concern. The British imperial interests had engagements with the Gulf that resulted in the establishment of a British administrative structure in the region with demanding policy concerns. This chapter will describe the authority of British in India and the subsequent strategic demands on the policies. Their power in India could be threatened by changes in the Persian Gulf and therefore the specific framing of policies of British India and the role of British officers to protect political, strategic and commercial interests as also to keep the Gulf a zone of non-interference for other European and regional powers with specific reference to Bahrain and Qatar will be discussed

2.1. Britain and Persian Gulf in 1873: A Study of Challenges and Responses

The Gulf region in 1873 saw heightened Ottoman activity in the Gulf and growing Persian claims for territories in the region. By this time, Britain had established itself as the supreme authority with appropriate safeguards to defend its interests in the region. The Government of India had taken over full charge for Gulf affairs thus underlining the increasing importance of the region to sustain its prestige and protect its Indian colonial status. The maritime truce imposed in intervals by Britain had brought the Trucial states

and Bahrain within the ambit of its vigilance.¹ This had involved the massacre or killing of anyone who opposed them. Those they didn't kill were sent to remote island prisons administered by Britain like Malta. Yet as the Resident reported, petty skirmishes and engagements, the night attacks, and plundering raids that formed the events of their guerilla-like system of warfare which often arose out of, "claims for the price of blood of murdered kinsmen or dependents, for the restitution of bankrupt refugees, for indemnification on account for miscellaneous losses or other causes" continued to demand attention of the Residency.² Since Gulf Arabs had lost their livelihood due to destruction of ships, ports, killing of sailors and captains, the locals combined to attack the British who viewed it as piracy or as above.

By 1873, the Gulf was already a British domain. Treaties were signed with the Trucial states and recognized boundaries and political authority had brought changes in the socio political structure of the region. The ethnic composition of the Gulf was largely determined by diversity, a hallmark of the Gulf in its long history. It is noted that "a sea faring society in need of widespread contacts and bonds, the Gulf communities...used migration and cultural exchange as foundation blocks for forming commercial and defensive alliances that brought wealth and diversity to the region".³ Migrations from the mainland often contributed to the political change in the region as different dynasties of tribesmen exercised their authority. The dynasties that captured power were no longer nomadic (as in the case of Bahrain, the Al Khalifas), but followed the tradition of the desert as the family fights continued for the distribution of spoils and control of the new fiefdoms.⁴ Agricultural lands were often allocated to the relatives of the Shaikh following the tribal customs. It is argued that in case of Bahrain the distribution of permanent rights over land,

¹ Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al Khaima, Ajman, Umm al Qawain and Fujairah

² Annual report on the Administration of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency for the year 1874-75, MSA, PD, Vol. II Comp No. 1882, p. 2.

³ M.R. Izady (2002), "The Gulf's Ethnic Diversity: An Evolutionary History", in Lawrence G. Potter and Garry G. Sick (eds.) *Security in the Persian Gulf, Origins Obstacles and the Search for Consensus*, New York and Hampshire: Palgrave, p. 34.

⁴ Nelida Fuccaro (2009), *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama since 1800*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 24.

villages and labour force underpinned the establishment of the quasi feudal administration thus altering the political organization before 1869 (the time when Isa bin Ali took over power in Bahrain).⁵ Pearling remained an important dimension of wealth and power. The tribal allies often controlled the pearling industry to consolidate their independent position and maintained councils or *majlis* to deliberate on matters of dispute. It was in case of conflicts that the arbitration of ruler was resorted to. Tribal autonomy fostered political factionalism but the concentration of revenue from pearling in the hands of tribal entrepreneurs allowed for example the Al Khalifas to construct a tight network of political allegiances.⁶ Alongside the Al Khalifas a “ powerful cohort of tribal rulers came to control the Arab coast, favouring the consolidation of a new constellation of maritime outposts” who as tribal regimes competed for the control of regional and long distance trade with the leading commercial ports of Basra, Bushire, Muscat and Oman.⁷

The tribal councils *Majlis* and the religious courts *al-qada al shari* signified autonomy of various tribal groups. Control of economic resources defined the authority a particular group would wield over the councils. Isa bin Ali’s council reigned supreme in Bahrain through which he controlled the distribution of palm tree estates and pearl diving rights, the management of ports and variety of taxes.⁸

The tribal structure in the Gulf was altered with the entry of the Europeans and the control of the British. At the same time, the tribal leaders and the locals engaged in coastal trade were evicted from the Persian coast. They were dislocated, their work operations disrupted and they were confined to small places as most Arabs were forbidden to move or build ships or engage in any trading activity with India as they were used to for centuries not only for their livelihood but who made profit out of it as it was lucrative with no hindrance. In

⁵ Ibid. p. 25.

⁶ Ibid. pp.26- 27.

⁷ Ibid, p. 43.

⁸ Faud I. Khuri (1980), *Tribe and State in Bahrain , the Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, p. 35.

the absence of the earlier freedom to traverse the waters for the conduct of the trade, the tribes were now left chained and constrained.

In the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, inter-tribal wars were frequent. The nineteenth century Gulf States were different than the ones in the region earlier. Historically these states came into prominence in the earlier century after the market demand for pearls increased and the trade routes shifted from the eastern to the western part of the Gulf. They became separate political units through the intricate balance of power involving the British and the Ottoman Empire and regional powers blocks of Persia, Oman and Saudi. It was the foreign intervention combined with the tribal structure of the Gulf that helped them consolidate their authority of independent ruling families in separate trading, fishing and pearling centres. At various times in history, these blocks exchanged control over the Gulf emirates holding them as dependencies or as part of larger empire.⁹

During this period, Russian affairs were largely confined to Persia. Russian influence and opposition to British aims and interests in Persia, was a dominant factor in the general situation, though Russian activity in the Gulf was not prominent. So also the French interests were limited to Persia.¹⁰ American interests were meager in the Gulf and German interests with respect to the Berlin Baghdad railway had yet to bring them closer to Kuwait. German interests in Bahrain were largely related to business in pearls particularly the mother-of-pearl shells.

The regional powers as Ottoman and Persian Empires remained expectant of their role and authority in few territories of the Gulf though rarely clashed with each other over the issue. The Ottoman Governor Midhat Pasha and later of the Sultan Abdul Hamid II, “the first and the last Turkish ruler who made a special effort to enlist the support and the loyalty of the hitherto neglected Arab provinces”, had encouraged Ottoman presence in the Gulf by an

⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁰ J. G. Lorimer (1908-1915), *Gazetter of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, Vol. & Part I, Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing; Reprint Archive Editions, 1986, pp. 269-270.

attempt to collect more taxes or to dispatch troops to subjugate tribes .¹¹ The Ottoman interests in Gulf remained as the officials increasingly tried to bring various sheikhdoms under the Ottoman suzerainty and in the process clashed with the British authorities. The Ottoman Empire had one goal in establishing control over Arabia: securing its southern borders against European influence. However after years of neglect towards the region, the Ottoman response met with discerns and the British did everything to discredit the Turks. Moreover they lacked the resources necessary to establish law and order or even to develop the territories.

The Arab Shaikhs were distant from the manoeuvres in the Turkish court and away from the politics in Constantinople but they were keen on consolidating their position for which they were willing to align with any power that guaranteed them so. It was the “turbulent and independent spirit” of these Arab tribes and the policy of Britain towards them that changed the face of the Gulf in the years to come. The British crushed their spirit and subjugated them. The proud and independent Arabs were reduced now to slavery and dependent status.

Britain was the biggest imperial power then and it had well outgrown its commercial interests in the Gulf and emphasized on its interests of strategic importance thus encouraging the status of the Gulf states away from Ottoman influence. In the name of ‘independent status’ the British virtually made them vassals and controlled and manipulated them to serve their imperial interests. Britain had practically established itself as a dominant power. It is important to note the situation in the states at the beginning of the period.

Throughout the history including that of the European domination, the Arab tribes had projected themselves as fiercely independent, be the nomadic or the sailors and traders. The Sultans, emirs and the Shaikhs were drawn from the tribes. The Bedouins were th nomadic

¹¹ Sir John Baggot Glubb (1959), *Britain and the Arabs, A Study of Fifty Years 1908-1958*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, p. 52.

tribes but the settled tribes also had nomadic branches. In 1870s Gulf, the Al Khalifas, the Al Sabahs and later the Al Thanis became dominant.

Persia (Iran): The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a notable expansion in the Persian influence in the Gulf. The maintenance of power in the region was more of appearance than a reality as for every British move in the region was met with the assertion of Persian claims and strong protests at the infraction of their rights in the region. In 1873 Iran was ruled by the Qajar ruler Nassir-ud-din Shah (1848-1896). Britain and Russia had already made inroads in Persia. The British presence in the Persian Gulf was derived initially from trade, especially after the establishment of a factory at Bushire in 1763.¹² The need to protect that trade encouraged military involvement which was also required to protect the routes to India and from Russia and France. British aim in the initial years was to work in alliance with Iran as a buffer state against Russia which also required an arrangement with Russia. An independent Persian Gulf strategy was the second requirement on an island there, preferably, Kharg. From here Britain could safeguard its routes to India and foster its trade in the Gulf, an option preferred by the GOI then.¹³ The Shah had tried to play Britain against Russia but interference and territorial encroachment of the two powers had increased in Persia. The British occupied Kharg (1838-42) and later by the Anglo-Persian War of 1856-57 the British occupied Kharg, Bushire and Muhammara.¹⁴ Herat was lost in 1856 as a result of Anglo-Persian War and Britain controlled territories in the Gulf on which Persia lay claim. The British concession holders had laid telegraph lines and were opening railways and mines in the 1870s.¹⁵ During this period, the Shia ulema had been gathering, strength mobilizing people, and pressured

¹² Venessa Martin (2005), "The British rule in Bushehr, the impact of the First Herat War (1838-41) on Relations with State and Society", in Venessa Martin (ed.), *Anglo-Iranian Relations since 1800*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 55.

¹³ Ibid. p. 56.

¹⁴ Malcolm Yapp (1981), "The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in Alvin J. Cottrell (Gen. ed.), *The Persian Gulf States: A General Survey*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, p.52.

¹⁵ David Pryce-Jones (1989), *The Closed Circle, An Interpretation of the Arabs*, New York: Harper & Row, pp-353. 352.

successive Shahs curtail growing interference and encroachment by Russia and Britain.¹⁶ Persia on the other hand was keen on increasing its influence in the Gulf and throughout the period it constantly reminded Britain of its standing in the Gulf. Persian influence in the Gulf resulted out of some factors, namely the fears aroused by the British intervention; the result of the consolidation of the Qajar authority; the obstruction of the realization of Qajar ambitions in other directions, such as Transcaucasia, Turkestan, Afghanistan and Iraq; desire to protect the valuable trade as Persia had the largest share of Gulf trade; and lastly the desire to increase the customs revenues.¹⁷

Iraq (Mesopotamia): Mosul, Baghdad and Basra were the three provinces of Ottoman Empire that were to later to become territories of modern Iraq.¹⁸ It was by 1534 that Baghdad was wrested from the Safavids of Iran (Persia). These regions came under Ottoman domination after having lost it for a while to the Safavids. Basra at the head of the Gulf was left autonomous with an Arab Chief for a time but was eventually taken over in 1547.¹⁹ Turkish Iraq was administered as a single *vilayet* or *pashaliq* of the Ottoman Empire.²⁰ Basra was the *sanjak* or sub division of the *vilayet*. Baghdad was the seat of government of *pashaliq*.²¹ By the nineteenth century the Ottoman empire had lost its power over many regions of its earlier empire as “centres of power existed in many cases autonomously, interacting under shifting circumstances that gave advantage to now one grouping, now to another”²². The Mamluk pashas acknowledged the sovereignty of the Ottoman Sultan but rarely acknowledged the control. The Empire’s weakened central administration contributed to the neglect of this region and Baghdad and Basra remained

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 353.

¹⁷ N. 14, p.52.

¹⁸ The term *al-‘Iraq* meaning the shore of a great river along its length, as well as the grazing land surrounding it. Charles Tripp (2007), *A History of Iraq*, Third edition, first edition 2000 New York: Cambridge University Press, p.8

¹⁹ Ashin DasGupta & M. N. Pearson (eds.) (1987), *India and the Indian Ocean 1500-1800*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 29.

²⁰ Referred to as Turkish Arabia in British records.

²¹ J. B. Kelly (1968), *Britain and the Persian Gulf: 1795-1880*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 34.

²² N. 18, p. 8.

remote provinces.²³ The country was nominally under the Sultan but actually enjoyed a great deal of independence under the Wali (governor) of Baghdad, who were in early eighteenth century, Mamluk Pashas. With the end of the reign of Daud Pasha (1831), the last of the Mameluks, the Sultan once again became the sovereign.²⁴ Towards the mid eighteenth century, there was a marked British predominance in the region. During the period 1747-1756 the British position in Gulf was affected by situation in India and Persia. In India it was the battle against and in Persia, the developments in post Nadir Shah(1736-1747) period. Establishment of political authority in India ensued after limiting the French influence. Abdul Amir Amin maintains that during this time, “trade in the Gulf area was of lesser importance to the East India Company because the area did not produce staple exports to Europe upon which the company profits relied so heavily, its commercial interests in the Persian Gulf did not warrant any special exertion at this time”.²⁵ Nevertheless the company servants stayed on at Bandar Abbas expecting friendly relations with Nadir Shah, the new Persian governor. With no change in the situation, deliberations started over the moving the Agency from Bandar Abbas to one of the Persian Gulf islands for it to be free of Persian control, considered to be “the first suggestion that had ever been made of British territorial expansion in the Gulf”.²⁶ The suggestion came from the agent at Bandar Abbas. With a temporary lull in French wars in India as Dupleix was recalled, the Company reviewed its position in the Gulf.

Saudi Arabia (al Hasa): Hasa was once a part of the Ottoman Empire, however by the end of eighteenth century it was only the presence of few families that reminded of Ottoman presence at one time. During the initial long reign of the Wahhabis Faisal bin Turki, (1834-38, 1843-1865), the British had several contacts with the Al Saud. In 1848, Faisal appealed to the British Resident to support his representative in Trucial Oman and to restrain the maritime tribes of Trucial Oman from interfering with the passage of supplies to him from

²³ Phebe Marr (1985), *The Modern History of Iraq*, London: Longman, pp. 19-20.

²⁴ Zaki Saleh (1966) *Britain and Mesopotamia*, Baghdad, Iraq: Al-Ma'areef Press, p. 156.

²⁵ Abdul Amir Amin, (1967), *British Interests in the Persian Gulf*, Leiden: E. J. Brill. p.25.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 30.

Hasa. From then till his death in 1866, the Wahhabis endeavoured to assert or reassert their power at various times in Bahrain, Qatar, the Trucial Shaikhdoms and the northern Oman.²⁷ In 1865 the Wahhabis became active in Oman and even plundered the coastal town of Sur and later Batinah attacking two British Indian subjects on two different occasions. In retaliation British bombarded Dammam on the Hasa coast. In 1866 an emissary of Faisal's son and successor Abdullah came to an agreement with the Resident Colonel Pelly. Later the Saud's were to view this as a treaty with the British.²⁸ Faisal's death led to fratricide and dynastic rivalry. In 1871, Midhat Pasha responded to the call of Abdullah ibn Faisal in the struggle of supremacy over Najd with his brother, undertook the campaign and occupied Hasa. A Turkish garrison was maintained there.

Qatar: Qatar was earlier recognised as a dependency of Bahrain. The territory even later was claimed by the Shaikh of Bahrain but for the British attempts to consider both to be separate. Having established garrison at el Qatif and el Hasa, the Ottomans turned towards Qatar, a province opposite Hasa. In 1868 when the Shaikh of Bidaa signed the agreement with the British they did not acknowledge any other authority and signed it with him considering him as an independent Chief and having direct relations with the British authorities but in 1872, Qassim bin Thani, the son of the Shaikh Mohamed bin Thani, accepted a Turkish flag and garrison. An Ottoman garrison was placed at Bidaa on Qatar.²⁹

Bahrain: The reference of a letter signed by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566) which was sent to Murad Khan (or Reis), the ruler of Bahrain which shows Bahrain as part of Ottoman territories. The Ottoman documents stated that Murad Khan, the Governor of Bahrain sent a letter to Sultan Suleiman in order to submit his homage in reply to which

²⁷ Gary Troller (1976), *The Birth of Saudi Arabia, Britain and the rise of the House of Sa'ud*, London: Frank Cass, pp. 15-16.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 17.

²⁹ Details in chapter four.

Suleiman sent an undated imperial letter to Murad, mentioning him as “*sancak beg*” of the Island.³⁰

Bahrain’s position right off of the Qatif coast and abundance of pearls made it a highly prized territory. In the year 1847, it was rumoured that the Porte entertained designs on Bahrain. However on being questioned about it by the British, the Ottoman authorities denied any such intention at the same time admitting that if the Governor of Basra by negotiation could induce any of the maritime chiefs to return their allegiance to the Porte they could not disapprove.³¹ A suggestion came from Lord Palmerston to put it on permanent footing but was not accepted by Resident Henell. On the contrary when the Shaikh desired to place himself under Turkish protection instructions were sent to Sir Stafford Canning to inform the Turkish authorities that such an arrangement could not be agreed to as the Government of British India had concluded treaties of 1820 for suppression of piracy and 1847 for the prohibition of exportation of slaves with Bahrain as an Independent State.³²

Thus the British Government objected to any such arrangement which could transfer Bahrain to the dominion or Protectorship of any other power. The British Indian Government entered in a “Friendly Convention with Sheikh Mahomed bin Khaleefa Independent Ruler of Bahrein” and signed a treaty with him on the 31st May 1861.³³ The shaikh promised to abstain from all maritime aggression as was required by the British. The treaty was approved by the Indian Government and the Turkish and Persian Governments were informed about it so that they “might not regard British relations with Bahrein with feelings of jealousy and distrust”.³⁴ In 1867 the Shaikh of Bahrain and the Chief of Abu

³⁰ Dr. Faisel A. Al-Kandari, The Letter of Sultan Suliman, the Magnificent, to the ruler of Bahrain <http://pubcouncil.kuniv.edu.kw/jgaps/english/showarticle.asp?id=1607>, accessed on 26/3/13 at 1.20pm

³¹ CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Primary documents 1820-1960, Volume 2, 1868-1892, Archive editions, England, Memorandum of separate claims of Turkey and Persia to sovereignty over the island of Bahrein, p. 341

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. p. 343

³⁴ Ibid. p. 345

Dhabi were reported to have broken the maritime truce by attacking and plundering the province of Qatar. The chief of Bahrain was required to pay up a hundred thousand dollars and to surrender alarmed boats he had used in the expedition. However, by 1870s certain factors as the combined to encourage an active Turkish Policy in Arabia.³⁵ Sultan Abdul Aziz wished to consolidate his position in Asiatic territories.³⁶ It was in January 1870 that a telegram was sent from Constantinople to the Turkish Ambassador in London enquiring about the happenings in Bahrain.³⁷ Bahrain was strategically located besides its pearl banks were a significant factor to establish control. Turkey continued to assert its position in Bahrain.³⁸ British mail steamers called on Bahrain on a monthly service, a practice that was found inconvenient and demanded weekly service. There was no Post Office at Bahrain yet which was established only in 1884.³⁹

Kuwait (province of Ottoman Basra): Kuwait's position as a part of Basra *vilayet*. At the time that Ottoman rule extended down the eastern coast of Arabia the sheikhdom as such did not exist. Kuwait town was not founded until after the effective Ottoman rule in the region. In the 1820s the Al Sabahs, who were appointed as the Kaim Makams by Basra *vilayet* governor, were reported to have acknowledged Ottoman suzerainty and be paying a small tribute to Baghdad every year.⁴⁰ Although the sheikhdom now fell under the Empire's (nominal) jurisdiction, and Kuwait was acknowledged to be a Turkish dependency, and the Ottoman Sultan or at least his representative claimed suzerainty over it, no Ottoman official was stationed in Kuwait and there was no officer on the spot. The reason being that Kuwait was a small and obscure port and close to Basra. Thus no need was felt to station an officer.

³⁵ The Policy of the Sultan to extend sovereignty over territories in the Gulf and the forward policies of Midhat Pasha. Also explained elsewhere.

³⁶ Ravinder Kumar (1965), *India and the Persian Gulf Region, 1858-1907, A Study in British Imperial Policy*, New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, pp. 113

³⁷ N. 31, p. 352.

³⁸ Details in chapter three.

³⁹ N. 2, p. 5.

⁴⁰ N. 21, p. 33.

In 1867, Abdullah ibn Sabah who succeeded Shiakh Jabir in 1865, had been formally recognized as Shaikh by Namik Pasha, the *vali* of Baghdad, and had been confirmed in office by a *firman* delivered to him by the commander of the Turkish steam corvette. Namik Pasha had wanted to assert a more effective control over Kuwait by setting up a customs house there but Shaikh Abdullah of Kuwait had resisted.⁴¹ Kuwait had been under Ottoman administration since 1871 and in 1875 was included in the Basra Vilayet. Kuwait's close relationship upon Basra was based upon commercial not political ties. Basra was Kuwait's main trading partner. Ottoman role in Kuwait was minimal as there was no assertion of authority as long as it did not become ally for hostile powers and not threatened by interferences in its internal affairs.⁴²

UAE (Trucial States): Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Sharjah, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaima, had signed treaties of maritime truce with the British in 1820 which the British had imposed on the purpose of maintaining peace at seas and a conducting smooth operations during the pearling season. In 1835 the acting Political Resident Captain S. Hennell called for a maritime truce during the next pearl fishery which was signed by the shaikhs of Sharjah, Dubai, Ajman and Abu Dhabi, and a perpetual maritime truce was signed in 1853. By the virtue of that agreement they were known in British records as the Trucial States. Internal struggles between these shaikhdoms though continued. The Shaikh of Abu Dhabi and Sharjah were in constant rivalry.⁴³ Besides in the 1870s the actions of other powers affected the undisputed British influence on the Trucial coast. In 1874 Turkish officer claimed Khor al Odaid of Abu Dhabi as under the Qatar jurisdiction and between 1873-1876 a small tribute was paid by a small colony of Qubaisat-subjects of Abu Dhabi who had moved there in 1869.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 725 & Arnold Wilson (1959), *The Persian Gulf: An Historical sketch from the Earlier times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, London: George Allen & Unwin, p. 251.

⁴² Jacqueline S. Ismail (1982), *Kuwait Social Change in Historical Perspective*, New York: Syracuse University Press, p. 42.

⁴³ Sir Donald Hawley (1970) *The Trucial States*, London: George Allen and Unwin, pp. 335-336.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p, 137.

Muscat/Oman: Muscat was in treaty relations with the British since 1798, though French had established exchanges with the Imam even earlier. As early as 1624 Muscat featured in the commercial policies of the East India Company. The Portuguese who had established a sway were expelled from Sohar in 1643 and the Ya'arubi (Imam Nasir b Murshid al-Yarubi) invited the East India Company to trade formally at Sohar and Seeb when Muscat was still under Portuguese. This had resulted in an agreement between the Ya'arubi and the Company officer (Philip Wylde) 1646.⁴⁵ Muscat was seen by the East India Company as crucial to its trade in the Persian Gulf. Besides, Tipu Sultan of Mysore had established contacts with Oman that were irksome to British designs in India as well as in Oman. However the Dutch presence and the leverage they enjoyed with the Imam of Muscat by the virtue of their limited assistance to the Omanis against the Portuguese, thwarted successful British attempts to establish a trade factory in Muscat for some time.

Oman was a powerful empire in the Gulf that put up the strongest resistance to the British East India Company's efforts to penetrate in the Gulf. A large and powerful state of the eighteenth century, Oman's power extended not only to substantial part of Southeast Arabia but also to the southern and the south western coasts of Persia and the eastern coast of Africa, including Zanzibar and Pemba islands. The Arab tribes inhabiting Eastern Arabia, who wanted to retain control over local navigation and develop their own sea trade, were allied with Oman.⁴⁶

In 1749, Al bu Sa'id dynasty came to power and soon consolidated its position. By 1790, Muscat and Matrah were reported to be the most flourishing ports in the Gulf and considered as the eastern pillars of the extensive trading empire in the Indian Ocean.⁴⁷

In 1789, Oman was caught in political crisis as internecine struggle broke out in the country and the Imam took shelter in Muscat. Soon the state was virtually split into the imamate of

⁴⁵ M. Reda Bhacker (1992), *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar, Roots of British Domination* : London: Routledge, p. 31.

⁴⁶ V. Mikhin (1988), *Western Expansionism in the Persian Gulf*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd, p. 17.

⁴⁷ N. 14, p. 44.

Oman and the Sultanate of Muscat. As the ruler of Muscat searched for allies, the British took an advantage of the situation and the Governor General of India, showed apprehension about the presence of French agents in Muscat to propose a treaty.

In 1798 Sayyid Sultan, the Imam of Muscat bound himself by an agreement to always side by the British government in international matters; to deny a commercial foothold in his dominions to the French and the Dutch nations; to dismiss from his service and expel any employee of French nationality; to exclude French vessels which had made base at Muscat; in case of hostility between the British and French to assist the British; and finally, to permit the British to establish a fortified factory and garrison at Bandar Abbas which the Sultan then held on lease from Persia.⁴⁸

In 1807 Sayyed Sai'id became the new Imam. Wahabee designs on Muscat kept him busy for a while. The British lost no opportunity to help him with arms and ammunitions against the Wahabees. From 1820 to 1856 the Wahabee power was almost forgotten by the British but it revived itself again and threatened the power in Muscat. In 1856 with the death of Sayed Sai'id his two sons Thuwaini and Majid succeeded and the division of dominions as Muscat and Zanzibar between the two ensued in 1861. Britain could easily control the two Sultanates with the new division. "Muscat nevertheless remained a vibrant commercial force in the triangular trading network connecting ports of East Africa, Oman and West India."⁴⁹

By this time, in 1860s situation was however made somewhat complicated by the aggression of the Wahabees. In 1864 an agreement was concluded with Sultan Thuwaini for the construction of telegraph lines in Muscat and in 1865 by a convention for the extension of the electric telegraph in Arabia and Makran. Sayyed Thuwaini Imam died in February 1866 and his son Sayyed Salim succeeded to the position. The British deposed him on the implication of murdering his father. In 1871 Sayyid Sai'id' son Turki became

⁴⁸ Arnold Wilson (1928), *The Persian Gulf: An Historical sketch from the Earlier times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, London: George Allen & Unwin, p. 232.

⁴⁹ N. 45, p.195.

the Sultan of Muscat and was recognized as ruler by British in the same year. In 1873, a treaty was imposed on Turki with Sir Bartle Frere, the former Governor of Bombay, for the suppression of slave trade. The same year the Sultan was made to accept that the subjects of Indian states resident in the Sultanate were on par with British subjects, amenable to British consular jurisdiction.⁵⁰

France had interests in Muscat and by the treaty of 1862 claimed equality of treatment with Great Britain. But it was not until 1894 that, in response to pressure from the Colonial party in the Chamber, who openly urged the necessity of lending Russian influence in the Persian Gulf the support of French cooperation, a French Consul was appointed to reside at Muscat. The French soon made a bid for coaling-station and asked for a lease of a small plot of ground inside Muscat Bay. But the British feared this station might easily develop into a naval base, on the coast of Muscat evoked the clause of the treaty of 1892 by which the Sultan had pledged not to cede any part of his territory without the consent of the British Government.⁵¹ In the 1870s, the focus of Omani trade had shifted from Muscat to Zanzibar where commercial prosperity was to reach its zenith during late 1870s and early 1880s.⁵²

During the period under study, the settlement of the Arabs was already recognised in the Trucial states, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar and Central Arabia. Persian Empire continued to express interest and enjoyed a certain sway over the Gulf region and so did Ottoman Empire. The regional powers possessed or claimed to influence the Gulf and whose centers of powers included Baghdad, Riyadh and Teheran.

Ottomans: Ottoman claims to the influence in the Gulf appeared through Saudi Power in Najd.⁵³ Ottoman claims also entered the region at the head of the Gulf through Basra in a

⁵⁰ N. 48, p. 236.

⁵¹ Valentine Chirol (1903), *The Middle Eastern Question or some Political Problems of Indian Defence*, London: John Murrey, p. 254.

⁵² N. 45, p.195.

⁵³ The Ottoman interest in the Gulf is explained ahead in the chapter and specific role in Bahrain and Qatar in respective chapters ahead.

tenuous chain stretching back through Baghdad to Istanbul.⁵⁴ In 1870s Ottoman power aimed to reestablish itself in the politics of the Gulf. “A dormant, disregarded Ottoman claim had become a reality, and although the Ottomans lacked the power to enforce their claims, they were willing to bide their time”.⁵⁵

Apart from these two empires from the region, the Europeans had re-entered with aspirations of controlling territories in the Gulf by promising concessions to these ailing but aspiring to be once again powerful empires. The 1870s was a period of renewed activity of the European powers and Russia in the Gulf. The earlier decade had witnessed great economic and commercial expansion in the Gulf chiefly due to the introduction of steam communication, post and telegraphs as the British interest of every sort was on corresponding scale.⁵⁶

The Europeans: The European powers, for the purpose of trade, had established themselves in the region since the sixteenth century. But the weakening of the Persian and the Ottoman and Omani empires had raised the expectations of the forthcoming opportunities, and demands on the territory had increased. Germany and France had gained headway in matters of business, trade and finance causing enough concerns to the GOI and the Government in London. But the biggest player in the region apart from the British, was the Russian Empire that had for long envisaged the decline of the regional powers and which due to its geographical continuity with the Persian Empire aspired to reach the ‘warm waters’ of the Indian Ocean contributing to GOIs consternation about its status in the region though in the 1870s there were no symptoms of Russian activity in the Gulf region.

During the period under study, the European countries as Russia, Holland France, Turkey, Persia, Germany, Belgium, Greece, Austro-Hungary, Sweden, Norway and Italy along with

⁵⁴ N. 14, p.41.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 51.

⁵⁶ N. 10, p. 252.

USA, maintained diplomatic, political and consular representation in the countries bordering the Gulf waters. Britain maintained a Residency at Bushire, while Russia, Holland and France maintained Consulate at Bushire. Greece, Austro-Hungary, Sweden, Norway, maintained Consulate at Baghdad.⁵⁷ During the period of this study, large territories in Asia, Africa and America were claimed as colonies by these states, Britain's share being the largest. France, Germany and Russia were most ambitious and who time and again compelled the GOI to revive its claims of protection and treaty relations with the local rulers in order to maintain the region as free of foreign intervention but without establishing a complete and official protectorate over it. The Gulf was *de jure* ruled by the Shaikhs but *de facto* under the British authority.

There were various factors that contributed to the situation in the Gulf in the late nineteenth century. It was the inability of the regional empires to retain control as well as that of the local shaikhs in Gulf to maintain their hold against other powers that led to the larger British influence. Besides, the Shaikhs' ambition to rule as "independent rulers", though only puppets of British and independent only in the name, had resulted in the various agreements with the British. By the 1820 and 1853 General Treaty Of Maritime Peace And Perpetuity, the British had already identified the 'independent' rulers with whom they renewed agreements at various intervals as and when they were confronted with the issue of any other power assuming greater role in the region.

2.2. Crystallization of Policy: Role of the Government of India

The Gulf and the Indian subcontinent were two regions that were engaged to each other by British policy concerns. The contacts were deliberate, the engagements real and the matters of policy, directed towards a constant effort to eliminate or restrict any European or regional power presence in the Gulf region. The Gulf was a zone of British influence which was now under increasing threat from the other European nations as Russia, France and Germany. Apart from these, the issues with the Ottoman and the Persian Empires,

⁵⁷ Ibid. pp. 2685-2689.

particularly about their claims over Bahrain were a constant botheration for the British Indian authorities.

In the 1870s the important areas of conflict for Britain were two- Europe and the Empire. Britain had few possessions in Europe but great potential influence on the balance of power.⁵⁸ Elsewhere i.e. in India and Africa, Britain had vast territories, though trade remained the basis of power.⁵⁹ In the 1870s and the 1880s, the entry of European nations had brought competition for Britain over colonies. European countries were involved in imperialism before. Spain Portugal and Netherlands had empires that were spread far and wide throughout the world in the nineteenth century though a smaller territory and static, while France's empire was both extensive and expanding. Russia had shown its intentions of expansions and US had made inroads though not a threat. Apart from these the other non-European powers had to be reckoned with; China in East Asia, Ottoman in three continents and Persia in West Asia. The presence of multiple empires was not a new phenomenon but the competition between them had increased in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as the commercial and imperial interest overlapped in territories. By the end of the century Germany too joined the race.

It is suggested by Bernard Potter, that one reason for this situation was that the spaces between these empires were diminishing. For most of the century the expanding empires had broadly enough territory to push into, meaning countries occupied only by indigenous, to obviate the need for them to expand at the expense of others. By the end of the century though these terrace were becoming scarer as expanding empires came against empires from other direction forming frontiers between them for the first time. It is argued that it left two worrying implications for Britain- first to grab best free land available before it

⁵⁸ British possessions in Europe included Cyprus, Gibraltar, Malta, Heligolord.

⁵⁹ Paul Hayes (1978), *Modern British foreign policy, The twentieth century, 1880-1939*, London: Adam & Charles Black, p 3.

went to any other country and the second to raise concerns about defence of British colonies.⁶⁰

The debate in the British Parliament on foreign policy centered on two important issues: whether Britain should act as European power and the extent to which the imperial advancement should be pursued though the future of the Empire remained the central issue in politics.⁶¹ The management of a global empire required a network of governmental institutions at home and overseas, bureaucratic channels to evolve to implement metropolitan directives and meet colonial challenges. Constantly obliged to adjust to circumstances and opportunity, pressure and constraints, Britain's governance of Empire involved dynamic processes and structures and inert constitutional frameworks. Unlike the other European powers as the Spanish and the French the British never attempted to rule colonies directly from the metropole, neither their resources nor their inclinations pointed towards centralized directions. "At the core of the imperial administration therefore there was a continuous interplay between the mother country and colonial communities, between centre and periphery, a series of essentially bilateral relationships which entailed constant negotiation rather than the imposition of the rule and the acceptance of the subjection".⁶²

In the mid-nineteenth century when Britain's industrial and commercial supremacy reached its zenith, it was observed that "she had no need to exercise formal control in most areas of globe since her overwhelming power ensured the triumph of her interests and her civilization regardless by whether territories flew union Jack or not."⁶³ British interaction with the Gulf started in the seventeenth century and with India started around the same time. British strategy changed as the Company acquired territorial foothold on mainland India. By eighteenth century, the East India Company's trade patterns had translated in

⁶⁰ Bernard Potter (2004), *The Absent Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain*, New York: Oxford University Press, p.165.

⁶¹ N. 59, p. 3.

⁶² Peter Burroughs (1999), "Imperial Institutions and the Government of the Empire", in *the Oxford History of the British Empire*, Vol III, Andrew Porter(ed), The Nineteenth century, New York: Oxford University Press, p.170.

⁶³ Dominic Lieven (2000), *Empire, The Russian Empire and its Rivals*, London: John Murray Ltd., p. 91.

acquisition of territories and annexing the parts of now disintegrating empires. The Company was no longer a trading company but it had soon grown into a transaction power.

The early years of British India's policy towards the Gulf region reflects its interaction with India. The basis of its early policies towards both India and the Gulf was the establishment of control over the territories. The lure of trade and commerce, by late eighteenth century had waned as Britain lost interest in the Gulf due to low trade turnout while that in India increased. The East India Company it established its factories and establishments in ports in India and the Gulf. In India it was Surat (1613), Masulipatnam (1616), Hariharpore (1633) Madras (1639), Bombay (1668) and Calcutta (1690) for the purpose of trade and transit ports of which later Bombay Madras and Calcutta were developed as Presidencies. Jask (1616/18), Isfahan (1617), Bandar Abbas (1622),- subject to the Surat factory, Shiraz (1617), Basra (1723,1763) and Bushire (1763) in Gulf were British ports and establishments.⁶⁴ British encountered European presence in both the regions and later ousted them and limited their political influence. By mid nineteenth century the British India's policy towards the Gulf had altered to a great extent. A combination of duty and pride was a recurring feature of early British policy towards the Gulf. Duty of fostering interests of the British empire of having established safety and peace in the seas and pride of ensuring smooth trade benefits for all, the trade established by the Arabs and the Indians, the benefits of which they enjoyed

By 1900, however, the viability of 'informal empire' was less certain than it was fifty years ago. It is argued by D. Levian that the ability of Royal Navy to control strategic maritime communications across the globe was being challenged. So too was the British exports' ability to compete with some European and American goods in open markets. In some cases where major interests were at stake, the response to these challenges might be to turn informal empire into formal, though even before the European challengers entered the

⁶⁴ In the records mentioned of Basrah, the spelling of the name "Basrah" was changed to "Bussorah" under the Secretary's order, 1st October, 1890. NAI, FD, External A, November 1890 Prog. Nos. 112-115, Administration report of the P G P Residency and the Muscat Political Agency for 1889-1890.

scene in the late nineteenth century, the ‘informal empire’ was always vulnerable to the internal political dynamics of the territories in question.⁶⁵

This raises multiple questions regarding the purpose, demands over policy and the status of the policy makers. How did the earlier conciliatory policy turn to become an authoritative one? If it was modified then what were the reasons/factors for the same? What were the early views and apprehensions related to making of policy and what then were the events/factors that influenced it. What were the consistent aims and objectives? Was it peace, concern over India’s security; defence; desire to expand commercial holdings; containment, that directed the British action in the region. In that case what then were important considerations? Was it a policy marked by cautiousness, threat, physical acquisition? What were the means adopted to address these concerns? And most importantly where was it formulated? Britain, India, India Office or the Governor General’s office? The chapter aims to proceed with explanation to these questions.

2.3. Conventional Policy: Early Determinants

Trade was East India Company’s original *raison d’etre*. The earliest treaty relations in the Gulf were with Oman in 1798. The acquisition of the port of Muscat for example was considered crucial for its trade in the Gulf as any disorder in Omani territories which endangered its survival was of commercial concern to the company. Even to authorities in London then, Sayyed Said’s empire mattered for reasons of commercial and strategic importance. In the early years the policy of the East India company was based on ‘unbridled expansionism’ which was encouraged by London. The ‘Gunboat diplomacy’ became a norm and the Indian-based flotillas of the British East India Company organized regular raids on merchant vessels, ships and on costal populated areas in the Indian Ocean as well as the Persian Gulf countries.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ N. 63, p. 91.

⁶⁶ N. 46, pp. 16-17.

The trade interests soon changed to more demanding issues that were more appropriate for a colonial expansion in its neighbourhood- the Indian subcontinent. Geo-strategy; communication routes; India's security were the dominant aspects of British policy that were facilitated by elimination of slavery and what British addressed as piracy to the efforts of resistance to their position, which by themselves became issues of early British policy in the Gulf. They used them as pretexts or alibis to crush the authority of the local rulers. All local rulers in gulf and in India had slaves as soldiers in armies. The British wanted to put an end to this thereby limiting the military control of the local rulers.

For more than a century British interests were guided by the Persian Gulf's geo-strategic location and its importance for the protection of British India, as important communication routes to India passed through the Gulf. Though seemingly unimportant in their early years of presence, Gulf became a concern for the British in the late eighteenth century. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798; assurances of support to Omani Sultan and through him to Tipu Sultan of Mysore, had thereby accelerated a renewed interest in the region. Britain maintained an attitude of neutrality towards the Arab tribes and the regions they held. Initially the various tribes, ruling dynasties and their socio-political structures were not of much concern to them except for the protection of their trade, routes and merchant ships but the rivalry of the European powers, the Ottoman efforts to exert more influence and equally important, the steady rise of British interests in the region were the important aspects of seventeenth and eighteenth century Gulf. British involvement in the Gulf stemmed from political, strategic, regional and commercial considerations for India and an attempt to weaken their European competitors plus the Ottoman, Russian and Persian Empires.

British expansion in the Gulf was by no means without the opposition, apart from Oman as a strong power in the Gulf, the Arab tribes resisted the presence of the East India Company as the company "failed to mount defences" losing several sea battles near Arabian coasts thus encountering a setback with even its trading stations Bushire and Basra facing

difficulties for settlement in the eighteenth century.⁶⁷ It is argued that this setback compelled the Company to review and re-examine its policy. The period marked the British understanding of officially aligning the defence of India with that of the Gulf, “though it was still most closely connected with the long standing plans of commercial colonial expansion in the eastern areas of the Ottoman Empire, in the southwestern parts of Persia. Despite the complicated international situation in the late eighteenth century, the British government regarded its plans for the region as quite opportune and realistic”⁶⁸.

The acquisition of India and establishment of political authority prompted British power to define its sphere of influence. India was the jewel in the crown of the British Empire and its loss was seen as blow to British prestige and power. Hence for the security of imperial possessions, Britain desired to secure its areas of influence and protect the frontiers that lay beyond the secured territories. “Defending the frontiers of the Indian Empire and the routes to India remained powerful constituents of Britain worldview.”⁶⁹

The colonial intervention changed the formal organization of authority amongst the Gulf tribes and restructured the social boundaries between the groups. This was also the time in the eighteenth century when a large number of Arab tribes gathered on the eastern and western coasts of the Gulf in order to participate in the growing eastern trade. They thus consolidated their authority in specific trading centers and often struggled for control of sea faring, pearl diving and trading centers. As the tribal groups struggled to control sea faring pearl diving and trading centers, and sea wars erupted affecting international trade. The British imperial authorities intervened and put a stop to these wars in the early nineteenth century. The tribes or segments of tribes that happened to be in the de facto control of the given pieces of territory were granted the de jure, legitimate rights according to several

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 18.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Sneh Mahajan (2002), *British Foreign Policy 1874-1914, The Role of India*, London: Routledge, pp. 24-25.

independent “treaties of peace” that were concluded between the British and the tribal chiefs.⁷⁰

With India as its headquarters the British power established the control over the Gulf thereby weakening its commercial and economic capacities. End to slavery, Piracy and arms trade were pretences for interference and subjugation.⁷¹

In the early stages of nineteenth century the view of British presence in Gulf the policy was claimed in the British circles to be that of “the attainment of one great and principal end—the entire suppression of piracy and consequent security to the trade and traders of all nations.”⁷² This was a gross understatement considering the harm that British inflicted on the locals. This requires a brief mention of a challenge to the British allegation of the piracy of the Qawasim tribe. A tribe which in British records has been so much deplored. In challenging the issue of Qawasim as pirates, it is argued that the Qawasim were the most persistent competitors of the British with a large fleet of 63 large fleet and 669 small ships in the eighteenth century, and for who trade was the source of livelihood.⁷³ With the British insistence on dominating the waters of the Gulf for trade, the Qawasimi trade ventures stood affected and hence the aggression on their part, that the British termed as ‘piracy’. The Qawasim were influenced by Wahhabi zealots and which subsequently attracted British attention towards them.⁷⁴ Not to be embroiled in the desert feuds of Arabia which then seemed even further than the Gulf shaikhdoms, the Government at Bombay decided to wait and watch rather than confront the Wahhabi attempts at expansion.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ N. 8, p. 13.

⁷¹ Khaldoun Hasan al Naqeeb (1990), *Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula A different Perspective*, London: Routledge. Translated by L.M.Kenny, p. 47.

⁷² *Selections from the records of Bombay Government* (1856), No.XXIV, New Series, Bombay: Bombay Education Society’s Press, MSA, p. 62.

⁷³ Al-Qasimi, Sultan ibn Muhammad (1988), *The Myth of Arab Piracy*, London: Routledge, p. 31.

⁷⁴ Balfour-Paul, Glenn (1991), *The End of Empire in Middle East: Britain’s Relinquishment of Power in Her Last Three Arab Dependencies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 99.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

The weakening of the Ottoman empire and decline in its prestige after its military defeats and territorial losses; the weakening of Persian influence with the struggle between the Zand and the Qajars; a gradual elimination of the Dutch power, after the Portuguese had created a situation for realization of British imperial interests; with a significant rise of East India Company's power in India defined the position of the Gulf in the next century. Yet the Company was careful in its activities towards the region and its people. The Governor General of India, Charles Cornwallis, was instructed to orient the East India Company not towards preparing for a resumption of hostilities against the Arabs, but towards conducting with regard to them complicated diplomatic manoeuvres in line with the new British colonial policy.⁷⁶

By the 1820s the fear that Russia might overrun Persia and break into the Indian Ocean thus threatening British dominance there, was a common concern of policy both for the British government and the East India Company.⁷⁷

The measures pursued in support of this line of policy were perceived as "mild and conciliatory; but a constant surveillance and an unremitting vigilance, aided by the occasional demonstration of power" considered essential.⁷⁸ Persian and the Ottoman Empires were two important regional powers and the Government of London preferred to look upon them as indivisible whole in the formulation of British policy.⁷⁹ Relations with Iran were controlled from India for a while but in 1835 returned to the London Government. The British feared an alliance between Iran and Afghanistan under Russian influence. Thus from 1837, the principal aim was to prevent such an alliance and keep these states separate as buffer for India.⁸⁰ There were twofold reasons for the same- first not to

⁷⁶ Mikhin, V. (1988), *Western Expansionism in the Persian Gulf*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

⁷⁷ Richard Hall (1996), *Empires of the Monsoon, A History of the Indian Ocean and its Invaders*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, p. 379.

⁷⁸ N. 72, p. 62.

⁷⁹ N. 12, p. 56.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

engage in hostilities with Russia as its goodwill was needed to maintain relations both with Afghanistan and Iran and secondly India could not be made to bear the financial burden.

As the British presence and power gradually strengthened the approach towards the region was increasingly considered as one of the maintenance of commercial interests of the inhabitants of the maritime Arab states particularly those in pearling trade. As the collapse of the central power in Iran took place, the Arabs held most parts of the Gulf in mid-eighteenth century.⁸¹ The treaties signed with the Arab Shaikhs were seen as a 'desire on their own part for *perfect* tranquility on the seas'.⁸² These treaties in fact were helpful for the British as they eliminated for them many great difficulties that first existed and enabled the British Government to curb the annual expenditure on account of the naval establishments employed in their watch and observation by its reduction to the complement of 'one sloop of war, one brig, one schooner, and the Resident's yacht'⁸³ without compromising on its influence or any great danger of renewal of former disorders.

It was well within the British interests that peace and tranquility be maintained in the Gulf seas for the purpose of prosperity of trade and to keep the communications lines intact. The considerations of local people and their behavior were of 'poverty, habits of rapine interminable blood feuds (the heir-loom of the Arab) and the enticing prospects of rich booty to be obtained from a course of piracy'⁸⁴ were believed to be temporarily restrained by the British presence and the complete abandonment of 'lawless habits' were a cause of concern for the future generations. On the contrary the nomadic chieftains who had traditionally lived from raiding their sedentary neighbours, found the peace inflicted on them as one that would rob them of their revenues and legitimacy.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *Selections from the records of Bombay Government* (1856), No. XXIV, New Series, Bombay: Bombay Education Society's Press, MSA, p. 62.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ N. 63, p. 91.

In the early years of signing of the treaty of 1820 it was not considered advisable or expedient to hold its conditions so strictly binding as their import and wording admitted. Besides the early British policy was “not to interfere with the petty feuds of the subscribing powers, while they continued to observe stipulations of the treaty” hence in these circumstances the government could hardly pretend to impose any restraint on the motions of vessels intended for internal warfare. It was thus clear that the “Government at was not prepared at that time to take upon itself the responsibility with such a line of policy must have entailed in the investigation and settlement of such endless complaints and claims and the redress of such grievances as must in that case have been referred to it for arbitration and decision’.⁸⁶ Thus, the domestic issues in Gulf were never much a matter of concern. In fact the British handling of domestic matters in the Gulf were directed by its concerns of international diplomacy. The Indian Government maintained a stand that it shall not involve itself in the internal administration of the Shaikhs and not interfere in their domestic matters as a policy decision though there were many times when they took active interest in the administration at times even guiding it to suit their purpose. The interests of the European and the regional powers instigated the response of the Indian government.

The British Approach

Piracy as the British looked at it in the Gulf waters remained an issue to be dealt for long. The presence of the British flag and acceptance of it meant that the respective parties would avoid the risk of being confounded by the pirates. The friendly Arabs were to carry a flag ‘red flag with or without letters in it...in a border of white, the breadth of the white being equal to the breadth of the red...the whole forming the flag known in the British Navy by the title of “White pierced Red”⁸⁷. At the same time on one hand where the British policy was underlined to be that of non interference in internal matters the treaty of 1820 stated that it was ‘most ready on all occasions to offer its mediation where disputes may exist and

⁸⁶ N. 82, p. 64

⁸⁷ Aitchison’s Treaties, General Treaty with the Arab tribes of the Persian Gulf, 1820.

will always rejoice at their peace and happy termination’⁸⁸ The early nineteenth century British policy aimed at establishing peace at the seas, noninterference in internal matters of the Shaikhdoms and maintaining the routes for communication and trade free by dealing with the issue of piracy. The issue of slavery was one such that was not dealt by the British for long though the practice of slavery existed for long.

For the first two decades of the nineteenth century the British India officials took little or no interest in the Arab slave trade outside the confines of India. In 1812 the subject was first broached by the Government of Bombay as there was a great extent of slave trade from Africa⁸⁹, and the virtual certainty that the slaves would find their way into India on Arab vessels was a matter of concern for the Bombay government. However not only had the British authorities in India no desire to interfere with the Arab slave trade, but they took pains to avoid giving the impression of wishing to do so.⁹⁰ The Indian authorities however had to deal with it for a while till in 1842 they handed it over to the Foreign Office and the court of directors treating it as an issue of national policy rather than Indian policy.⁹¹

The tone was set to change in the coming decades when the Indian authorities were to demand more space in policy decisions rather than depending or handing it over to the London authorities. Years later Lord Curzon was to describe British role in the Gulf with much pride by stating that ‘She (England) does not demand that the Persian Gulf should be a *mare clausum* (closed sea) against foreign trade. She does not impose treaties upon humiliated foes, wresting from them the right to fly their own flag in their own waters....(thus) for the sake of peace she is here to guard that no hostile political influence shall introduce its discordant features upon the scene.’⁹²

⁸⁸ N. 72, p. 65.

⁸⁹ N. 21, p. 419.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 420.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 451.

⁹² George N. Curzon (1892), *Persia and the Persian Question*, London and New York: Longmans, Green and Co., p. 465.

The period also reflected the increasing interests of the heads and shareholders of the transport, trade and industrial enterprises who spared no effort to monopolise the domination over the markets, rivers and sea routes as it enabled them to “make maximal profits on the extremely high freight rates, loans with excessive interest rates, and profitable concessions and trade operations.”⁹³ Preserving their interest and hegemony over this region was also a concern for the British Government.

2.4. New Developments and Reassessment

The concerns for change came in the second half of the nineteenth century. The British power was not only paramount but unchallenged. The focus of British policy was the preservation of the empire. By the year 1865 and the death of Palmerston the foreign policy situation was being perceived differently. Public opinion played some part in the formulation of the foreign policy earlier too yet, “the expansion of the electorate and the increasing information available in newspapers produced a situation in which foreign policy was at the centre of the political debate and subject to far greater public control”.⁹⁴

Throughout the early part British concerns in the region were dictated by developments in the region that prompted British action to be aimed at maintaining the status quo. The competition of foreign trade in the Gulf had increased but the British concerns were the various manifestations of foreign influence in the Gulf apart from the commercial enterprise. Besides, the influence of Turkey and Persia was also to be considered. The threat to British position in the Gulf certainly did not come out of Turkish and Persian ambitions in the Gulf littoral but, as Valentine Chirol, the then renowned journalist from ‘The Times’ who made a trip to the Persian Gulf with Lord Curzon in 1902-03, was to note later, “from the Turkish policy in the Gulf ...liable to be wire-pulled from Constantinople

⁹³ G. Bondarevsky (1987), “Turning the Persian Gulf into a British Lake: British Domination in the Indian Ocean in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” in Satish Chandra (Ed.), *The Indian Ocean, Explorations in History, Commerce and Politics*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 322.

⁹⁴ John Clarke (1989), *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy 1782-1865, The National Interest*, London: Unwin Hyman, p. 296.

by Germany, and Persian policy from Tehran by Russia". He had noted that twenty years earlier there was no sign of foreign influence but that of the British which was not only paramount but unchallenged but he stated "today it is still predominant, but it no longer stands alone, and it is being openly challenged in more quarters than one".⁹⁵

The later years thus brought in sweeping changes in the region and subsequently in the British India's policy too. The presence of French, German and Russian Consuls on the Gulf ports and increasingly the Indian authorities asserted their position in decision making as the London authorities continued to remain driven by matters of Europe and relations with the powers of the region.

As Britain established and deepened its mastery over India in the eighteenth century, the Gulf "emerged as a peripheral concern of India, rather than as a strategic concern of London."⁹⁶ resulting in the British policy in the Gulf up to the mid twentieth century being primarily formulated and conducted by the GOI and not Whitehall. More often than not, "Indian aggressiveness was stymied by London, which saw the Gulf as possessing only minor importance and certainly not worth jeopardizing grander strategy in Europe. Still the Gulf's role in Indian foreign policy was not entirely negligible".⁹⁷

Up to 1870, Gulf was a British domain secured without much challenge to the established state of affairs. The situation soon underwent an alteration due to the play of few factors on the international scenario that contributed to the change in the direction in which the regional powers particularly the Turkish Empire saw itself.⁹⁸

Throughout the period the squabbles with Turkey continued due to Turkey's intention to consolidate its position in the Gulf region. So also the intentions of Persia in the region were left to be checked. This was particularly in connection to Bahrain and Qatar. Apart

⁹⁵ N. 51, p. 257.

⁹⁶ J. E. Peterson (2009), "Britain and the Gulf: At the Periphery of the Empire", in Lawrence G.Potter (ed.) *The Persian Gulf in History*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.279.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Explained ahead in the chapter.

from that the diplomatic situation was relatively peaceful. The period under study is dominated by British concerns, particularly those of the GOI, regarding the threat from other quarters, European and regional. This led them to aggressively aim to consolidate their position in Gulf.

The treaty relations established with the Shaikhs of the region a few decades ago were now being used for British advantage in order to keep the other powers at bay. The Resident in Gulf, though not bestowed with judiciary powers was nevertheless the strongest of the British authority in the Gulf. New treaty relations with different Shaikhs were established and the GOI tried to make its position more secure in the region by keeping an alert on every single movement of the Russian, French and German officers, envoys and traders as also on the Ottoman and Persian moves in establishing renewed authority. In order to understand a change in the GOIs attitude towards its approach in the Gulf, the following factors should be considered. They caused the response of change in the GOI's policy.

2.4.1. The Ottoman Factor and Issues in Bahrain and Qatar

British influence in Constantinople was well established in the late sixteenth century.⁹⁹ This was the time when Russia too had made inroads in the Ottoman Empire. Britain's preoccupation with the territorial ambitions of Russia and Austria in the Turkish Empire but more importantly protection of the routes to India and the safety of the corridor to the Indian Ocean encouraged it to maintain good relations with the Ottoman Empire. This remained one of the principles of British foreign policy till the First World War¹⁰⁰. This policy was, however not without its doubts. The development prospects in the Ottoman Empire were bleak by 1875 and the empire soon defaulted in payments that resulted in British investors' withdrawal from the Ottoman Empire often selling their holdings to French and German companies. The British policy towards the Ottoman empire was under

⁹⁹ The recognition of William Harborne as English ambassador by Sultan in 1583 was a beginning of English relations with east. Halford L. Hoskins, (1928), *British Routes to India*, London: Longman's Green 1928, p 2.

¹⁰⁰ During the Napoleonic wars William Pitt proposed that it should be the British policy to maintain the territorial integrity of Ottoman Empire. The same was put forward at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 by England, France and Austria but rejected by Turkey. N. 11, pp.40-41

reappraisal and even an disintegration was considered acceptable.¹⁰¹ It was the fear of Turkish bankruptcy and influence of Russia that encouraged the British to work for the stability of the Empire. At the same time declining Turkish claims and refuting its sovereignty over the regions in the Gulf was also the significant element of its policy towards Turkey in the Gulf. These conflicting pulls and pressures became part of British diplomacy towards Istanbul.

On the part of the Ottomans, few factors influenced their situation in the Gulf the Crimean war was one of them.¹⁰² Britain had fought the war alongside Turkey against Russia. Ottoman Empire had a significant share in total British foreign trade. The policy to maintain the integrity of Ottoman Empire had given Britain the largest share after French in direct foreign investment in the Ottoman Empire¹⁰³. The war had left Turkey in a strong military position. Added to it was the weakened Wahhabi influence in Arabia, forward policies of Midhat Pasha (1869-1872) the Governor General of Baghdad and the foreign policy of the Turkish Sultan Abdul Hamid II and his officials who aimed to surge ahead in the Gulf and establish authority over more territories in eastern Arabia.

Prior to the British influence over the Gulf, the Arab provinces of the empire preserved certain autonomy under the governors appointed by the Ottoman Sultans. In desert Ottoman suzerainty was confined to fringe towns- Aleppo, Bir and Baghdad in Syrian desert, and Jeddah, Sana, Mocha, Aden, Yemen in Arabia.¹⁰⁴ Even though the Turks were keen on extending and establishing their authority, their actual power was almost confined to great and important cities for e.g. Damascus or Baghdad. These were the seats of *walis*, or governors and were garrisoned by regular troops, whether by janissaries in early times or by one of the two army corps in the nineteenth century. A few miles outside the country,

¹⁰¹ P. J. Cain and A. J. Hopkins (1993), *British Imperialism, Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914*, London and New York: Longman, pp. 403-404.

¹⁰² Crimean War (1853-1856) against the Russian empire with France Britain and Ottoman Empire.

¹⁰³ Sevkettin Pamuk (1987), *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820-1913, Trade, investment and Production*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 78.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Seearight (1969), *The British in the Middle East*, London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, p.6.

the tribes controlled the country under their own chiefs, and government troops were unable to proceed further without provoking a battle. The tribes were however ready enough to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Sultan and the Caliph in distant Constantinople and even to extend tribute in return for which the *wali* might present the Shaikh with a robe of honour or gold pieces. That however was about as far as tribal loyalty extended.¹⁰⁵ The shaikhdом could be declared as a *qaza*, or district of a *vilayet* under Ottoman administration that was either Baghdad or Basra with the sheikh nominated as *Kaim Makam* or the deputy governor. The Shaikh at times defied the authority. The response to an outrage, which was not infrequent, would be a military punitive action on the part of the *wali* who sometimes met with disaster and other times were successful in the event of which a future obedience was promised on the part of the tribes till further skirmish and misgiving.

The GOI had built up a predominant position for the British power in the Gulf. Its position was almost sealed with the treaties that it signed with the local Shaikhs thereby recognizing them as sole representatives of their territories and discouraging them from entering into treaties with any other powers. Apart from this GOI administered the Gulf residency and maintained its agents in Gulf and maintained its commerce by ensuring safety of its traders. In all this it was backed by the British naval power that continued to show its presence in the Gulf waters.

In 1871, the Ottomans captured el Hasa in Eastern Arabia thus challenging the predominant position of Britain in the Gulf. They later extended their nominal authority over Qatar peninsula by securing allegiance of the ruler of the principal town, Doha. The catalyst to the events in el Hasa, was a request from Abdullah bin Feysul from the Wahhabi reigning family being engaged into conflict for the throne of Nejd with his brother applied to Midhat Pasha for help. Midhat Pasha had less concerns for the feud between the brothers or for that matter, Abdullah, but he saw in the expedition an opportunity to extend the Ottoman sway. The Turks never went to Nejd, but the Turkish army occupied the maritime district of Qatif

¹⁰⁵ N. 11, p.50.

and the inland oasis of Hasa.¹⁰⁶ Thus direct Ottoman rule was restored in 1871, and ‘Al-Ahsa’ (Hasa) was placed first under Baghdad Vilayet and with Baghdad's subdivision Basra Vilayet in 1875. It was from here that the Mutasserif of Nejd extended a claim for Bahrain as a dependency of el Hasa.¹⁰⁷ The Ottoman military presence at el Hasa was a reason for British concern in the region as a direct claim on Bahrain was put forth.

If the British presence and forward policies in the Gulf affected Turkish position and led to a response on the part of the Ottoman Empire to defy it, the newly established Turkish presence contributed to reframing the structure of the British Indian policies in the Gulf. There was a distinct feeling among the British official circles both in London and in India “that henceforth policy cannot be conducted in semi isolation from Europe and Near Eastern diplomacy, as it had been in the past. The presence of Turks added a new and complicating factor to its politics, but it also meant that what went on there would become a subject of continual exchanges at Constantinople. It meant too, because the Turkish capital was on the circuit of European diplomacy, the other powers with no direct interest in the Gulf would be drawn into those exchanges.”¹⁰⁸ For some time the Indian authorities were particular about identifying the division of Gulf responsibilities between Indian and Turkish authorities, but very soon the attitude changed and the issue was no longer a matter of debate. The GOI authorities refused to let their influence in the Gulf waters be reduced and to be relegated to a lesser position, or to surrender any responsibility to the Turks. The situation “rendered it inevitable that long drawn out and acrimonious disputes over their respective jurisdiction in the Gulf should arise between the British and Turkish governments from 1873 onwards”.¹⁰⁹

Every time the British encountered a threat to their position in the region from either the regional powers- Turkey and Persia, or the other European powers as France, Germany and Russia, they invoked the treaty status and maintained the garb of independent status of

¹⁰⁶ N. 92, pp. 454-455.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ N. 21, p. 754.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

the Shaikh thereby disallowing any other power to establish a base in the region.¹¹⁰ It also explains the strategy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The exclusion of other powers by various methods was to become of primary importance to British policy decisions.¹¹¹

As the British Indian authorities strengthened their hold over the Gulf, they increasingly treated any move on the part of Ottoman or Persian as encroachment on the region equally so on Bahrain and Qatar and as highly unacceptable by referring to the treaty relations. The GOI protested at the slightest move by any of the powers in the region and this also included issues of British Indian merchants and traders as also that of those from the Gulf and in treaty relation with the British for example from Bahrain and Qatar. In reality though, it was the GOI that had slowly encroached on the regions that were once under the sway of either the Ottoman or the Persian empires. The British Indian merchants were seen as mercenaries and worse as spies by the locals.

The treaties with Bahrain and the Trucial Chiefs were on the same lines; but provided not only that the Chief shall receive no representations of any Foreign Power, but that he shall not enter into any agreement or hold any correspondence with any Foreign Power. And as regards the cessation of territory, these treaties provided that “the Chief will not sell, lease &c. any territory except to the British Government” and these treaties carried no promise of protection or good services.¹¹²

The GOI remained vigilant over the events in Bahrain disallowing the Chief of Bahrain to interfere or play a role in any events that happened beyond the limits of his confined jurisdiction which were defined by the GOI. In 1874, when Nasir bin Mubarak arrived on the Qatar coast and his presence there caused anxiety to the Chief of Bahrain, Nasir, who

¹¹⁰ Chapters three and four explain the British relations with Bahrain and Qatar with respect to Ottoman and Persian Empire and the British maneuvers to maintain a *de facto* position.

¹¹¹ Briton Cooper Busch (1971), *Britain, India and the Arabs, 1914-1921*, London: University of California Press, pp. 10-11.

¹¹² British interests on the coast of Arabia, Koweit, Bahrein and El Katr, by R. Ritchie, 30 January 1905, IOR/L/P&S/18 B133A-160, B151p.1

claimed that for last six years was deprived of his rights in Bahrain which was the property of his family, was told that any such aggression on his part would be met with active opposition on the part of the British Government, at the same time the GOI informed the Resident by a telegram that, since the Chief of Bahrain had no possessions on the mainland of Qatar and that his rights there were of an uncertain character, the British government would protect him only if he adhered to the treaty conditions and hence he must not be the aggressor or undertake measures which will involve him in complications and which were considered inadvisable by the British Government.¹¹³

Similarly on the issues of piracy committed by the Arabs and the recovery of plundered goods the British policy was conveyed to Turkish authorities who were asked to recover the plundered goods:

[I]ntimating that the independent Arabs of the Persian Gulf in treaty relations with the British Government look to that Government for protection of their trading vessels and recovery of their property plundered at sea as....The British government were interested in recovering indemnity and cases were classed under following heads British Indian subjects/ a naturalized British subject/ subjects of the Bahrein chief/ subjects of the Trucial chiefs of Ras-el-Khymah/ Persian subjects who had petitioned the British Agent at Lingeh for redress.¹¹⁴

Nasir had tried to attack Bahrain once again with the help of Qassim bin Thani in March 1881. The GOI warned Qassim of being held directly responsible notwithstanding that he flew Turkish flag and received Turkish garrison while the Political Agent in Turkish Arabia was instructed to formally intimate to the Ottoman authorities that unless they could prevent or punish piracies on the coast claimed by the Porte the Indian Government might be compelled to take eventualities in its own hands.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Proceedings of Col Nixon in respect to the Persian Gulf piracies from Pol Agent, Turkish Arabia, Nos. 32,38, 5th and 26th April 1879, NAI, FD, Political A, September 1879, Nos 287-339..

¹¹⁵ J.A.Saldana, Persian Gulf Gazetter Part I Historical and Political Materials. Précis of Katar Affairs, 1854-1904. 28 September 1904, IOR/L/PS/20/C243, p.24. Secretary's dispatch no 31 dated 26 August 1881. Prog no 237 of Secret December 1881 nos 224-258

The attacks and the possibility of further attacks had made the GOI review its position in the Gulf and particularly in this case, Bahrain. Within a decade of Turkish expansion in el Hasa in the 1880s, the GOI had proposed that its position in Bahrain should be protected by special arrangements, providing for its independence under the protection of Great Britain. Turkish expansion in the Gulf could trigger a similar concern from Persia, contributing to a complex situation where, the GOI feared, demands on the British position could be exhausting.¹¹⁶

Thus, according to the GOI, the limits of Turkish jurisdiction on the west coast of the Gulf were imperative so as to prevent any increase to the Turkish fleet in those waters, but at the same time also to relieve Persia of any apprehension of Turkish encroachments. The GOI believed that it was not obliged to consider the feelings of the Turkish Government, but only enforce order in the Gulf.¹¹⁷

Engagements with the Region

By 1880s the GOI was keen on taking a policy ahead in relation with Qatar, Shaikh Qassim and Turkish government in Qatar. In its dispatch to the IO it raised these questions.¹¹⁸ Shaikh Qassim's activities in the Gulf region, his desire to occupy Odeid which the British Government believed belonged to Abu Dhabi and his intention in 1881 sending a force by sea to attack his enemies, the Ajman Bedouins in the neighbourhood of El Katif were a cause of concern. The Shaikh, it conveyed, was nominally under the Turkish jurisdiction, "a fact which greatly complicates our dealings with him in all cases; and in the present instance his proposal is of such a nature that there is some reason of doubt whether the British Government would be justified in actively interfering against him. The Qatif coast is in such close proximity to Bahrain that any expedition to this neighbourhood may easily have the effect of disturbing the security of the island ...and in all probability lead to the

¹¹⁶ K.W.I, NAI, FD, Secret, June 1881, Nos. 10-47, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ J.A.Saldana, Persian Gulf Gazetter Part I Historical and Political Materials. Précis of Katar Affairs, 1854-1904. 28 September 1904,p. 24-25, dispatch 145 dated 30 October 1881 IOR/L/PS/20/C243.

renewal of piracies and disorder in the adjoining waters.”¹¹⁹ The GOI required a clarification from IO if the agreement of 1868 made with the Shaikh Mahomad bin Thani “something of a personal character, and as its force may be held to have been weakened, if not annulled, by the Turkish assumption of authority over El Bida, we have thought it better for the present day to lay stress on it.”¹²⁰ It added that “the Sheikh may be willing to admit as binding on him the engagement made by his father; and if so, the result may be to contribute materially to the security of Bahrain and the neighbouring seas” The GOI needed to instruct the Resident “to take any suitable opportunity that may occur of ascertaining whether the engagement may still be treated in a force.”¹²¹

The Secretary of State replied¹²² that the friendly disposition to the Shaikh Qassim should be encouraged and that,

“[T]here was nothing incompatible to his relations with Turkey as regards his affairs on land, while, if he acts up to his professions, and abstain from ill-treatment of British subjects, the précis nature of those relations may be a matter of comparative indifference to the Indian Government, whose consistent policy has been to restrict its interference with the tribes on the Arab coast, whether parties to the maritime truce or not, to the measure necessary to prevent hostilities at sea, and to hold aloof from their quarrels and concerns on the mainland. To this policy HMG desire to adhere”¹²³

If British presence in Gulf had encouraged the Ottoman response, Turkish attempts in Gulf contributed to the crystallization of GOI’s policy. The Turkish activities for establishment of its authority over the region that started in early 1870 showed no signs of abatement as the century drew to its closure. The Turkish endeavours to make their power felt in the Gulf were concentrated, in the last decade of 19th century, on the head of the Gulf. The incidence of outbreak of plague in India in 1896 had its repercussions in Gulf too. A Turkish military post was established at Fao and British Indian vessels were forcibly made to halt and pay quarantine charges. On the agreement about a quarantine stationed be established near the

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p.25. dispatch 145 dated 30 October 1881.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., p.24-25, despatch no. 3 dated 20 Jan 1882, & NAI, Secret, No. 122, May 1882, Nos. 122-126.

¹²³ Ibid.

entrance of Gulf and the other at Basra, Turkey insisted that instead of Basra, Fao should be considered and the number of quarantine stations be increased with stations at Bahrain, Qatar, Hasa and Kuwait and that they all should be placed under the international board of Health at Constantinople. Britain obviously opposed.¹²⁴ In Ottoman perception the British had defeated and overthrown the Mughal Empire in India. They had sufficiently weakened the Qajar Empire in the name of checking the Russians. They had subdued the Afghans. Now they were undermining the Ottomans and using the Arabs in their scheme.

In 1903 when the Turkish Mudirs were to be sent to Zobara, Odeid and Wakra and Amair or Abu Ali island, Sir O' Connor wrote to Marquis of Lansdowne stating that a fresh contentions on discussion on the eve of ministerial Council which it was expected would come to a favourable decision in regard to Aden frontier. The issue of Turkish sovereignty he agreed was a matter of discussion with the Porte, but he was against any immediate rebuke to the Turkish government. "I confess I see strong objections to basing our representations on the fact that we do not recognize Turkish sovereignty over this coast, as its immediate result will be to provoke the Ottoman government to reassert, in the most formal and official manner, their claim as happened in 1891-92...; and if we allow their pretensions to pass with nothing more than verbal or written contradiction, we shall rather have weakened than strengthened our present position. If on the other hand, we are not satisfied with merely disclaiming their pretended rights, and the Porte persists in their intentions, we shall be forced to take some definite action, which may lead HMG further than they intend, or further than it is necessary or politic to go at present."¹²⁵

GOIs reservations over Turkish intentions in the Gulf contributed towards its policy decisions in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. On the other hand it is also argued that it was the Ottomans generated policy for the region that was formed in response to the British threat. Ottoman response to the British position in the Gulf

¹²⁴ An international conference was concluded at Venice in 1897 on the issue of prevention of plague from spreading. Britain and Persia ratified the agreement for two stations but Turkey did not. Article J.B.Kelly, p. 252

¹²⁵ Island of Bahrein and the El Katr Coast Vol 8., FD, Secret E No 86, 2 July 1903, N O'Connor to the Marquess of Lansdowne 14 March 1903 NALondon, FO 78/ 5323, 1903.

and GOIs demand for a stronger role contributed to the extended interests of the Ottomans in the Gulf.¹²⁶

In response to British position in Gulf that was largely maintained with the help of Navy and influence over Arab Shaikhs, Ottoman Caliphs tried to match them by increasing their navy's presence in Gulf. In the sixteenth century the Ottoman navy was superior to those of contemporary states. During the reign of Sultan Abdul Aziz (1861-1876), there was a renewal in Ottoman naval activities. Soon with 106 naval ships in its dockyard, it established itself as the third largest fleet of its time. It was in 1880 that a Ministry of the Navy (*Bahriye Nezareti*) was established by Sultan Abdul Hamid bringing all naval forces under its command. *Bahriye Nezareti* was divided into various departments and new reforms were carried out in the organization of the navy. Ships were often imported and there was a heavy dependence on the external sources in shipbuilding industry which in the long run contributed to financial crises.¹²⁷

The modernisation of the armed forces was just one cause but the economic decline in the empire made it even easier for the other powers to challenge the empire and dictate terms. However the Ottoman presence in Gulf remained till the beginning of the World War I.

2.4.2. European Concerns

The period of the 1870s was a period of increasing international activity in the Gulf. British power was at its zenith. The European powers had established their presence in the Gulf to participate in the trading activities however, the overall British presence and the continuous visibility of its power through the stationing of ships and addressing matters of judicial and civil concerns even for the people of different nationalities and the Indian traders and those

¹²⁶ Bğlal Emre Bğral, (2009), *The British Threat To The Ottoman Presence In The Persian Gulf During The Era Of Abdülhamîd II And The Responses Towards It*, A Thesis Submitted To The Graduate School Of Social Sciences Of Middle East Technical University.

¹²⁷ E. Ihsanoglu (ed) (2001), *History of the Ottoman State, Society and Civilisation*, Vol. I., Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), pp. 424-425.

from the region, had conveyed its position as an authoritative power in the region. On one of the occasions related to pearling banks in the Persian Gulf and an effort to insist British authority to exclude the presence and interference of any other power, one of the members of the Governor-General's Council, T. Raleigh, had commented though not without doubt, "[W]e might suggest that His Majesty's government should invite Foreign Governments (when the occasion arises) to agree to the exclusion of Europeans on the ground that the peace of the Gulf would be disturbed."¹²⁸

British strategy demanded acute responses to the changing situation. The imperialistic ambitions of European powers as France and Germany were in consideration with the situation and responses of the regional powers – the Ottoman and the Persian Empires. The *de jure* position of the Gulf was maintained as a sea open to all powers and flags who wished to trade in it but the *de facto* position was that the Gulf was a British preserve and it was to be maintained so.¹²⁹ In this respect, it is important to understand British interaction with various European powers in the Gulf.

Anglo-Russian

Britain's most serious challenge came from Russia interested in Asia especially over Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan, where it was seen as a threat to the stability of the Indian empire and the routes connecting it. Formal diplomatic relations between Britain and Russia were established in 1553.¹³⁰ But by eighteenth century, they were great empires and bilateral relations were significant for peace in Europe and Asia. The basic difference between the two was that Britain was a maritime power and Russia was a great continental land empire. During the nineteenth century, these two empires became each other's major rivals in Asia where it reflected in the 'great game' though they remained natural allies in Europe.

¹²⁸ Foreign Department notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1904, Nos. 237-246, p.7.

¹²⁹ N. 36, p. 218.

¹³⁰ Janet M. Hartley (1986), *The Study of Russian History from British Archival Sources*, London: Mansell Publishing Limited, p. vii.

British influence in Persia was declining whereas Russia was fast consolidating its position in Persia. Its aspirations in Asia and the Gulf had alarmed London and India both. For the GOI, no other matter of any consideration could match the threat of Russia in Gulf and subsequently on the door of India considering the Russian attempts in Afghanistan. Curzon was later to comment, “I should regard the concession of a port upon Persian Gulf to Russia by any power as a deliberate insult to Great Britain as a wanton rupture of *status quo* and as an international provocation of war”¹³¹.

Between 1903 and 1907, the British fear of a Russian threat to the Gulf gradually abated and that of German designs in the region steadily increased. The spheres of British and Russian interests and disinterests in Persia had to be defined to check Russian influence in Persia as well as in the Gulf. Viceroy Curzon had more than once reiterated the point. If the GOI encouraged a discussion on the same, London accepted to show willingness in the first decade of the twentieth century.

The Anglo-Russian agreement of 31 August 1907 identified the zone of influence for Britain and Russia in Persia. It ended the Great Game in Asia. The Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907 was not well received by the GOI who argued that it should have been consulted, which it was not in matters which were of vital interest to India. The London Cabinet overruled and emphatically held that this so called “Indian Government” could not be granted to conduct a foreign policy of its own.¹³²

The conclusion of this agreement along with a few other developments on the international front regarding checking the growing arms trade marked a change in the Gulf politics. Russia’s intentions in the Gulf had remained a consistent issue for the policy makers in India. In the meantime, France had slowly tried to surge ahead in the Gulf having already a position as a trader country.

¹³¹ N. 92, p. 40.

¹³² David N. Druhe (1970), *Russo-Indian Relations 1466-1917*, New York: Vantage Press Inc., p. 272.

Anglo-French Relations

After the defeat of Napoleonic France in 1815, Britain became the world's dominant naval and commercial power. Yet France remained its strongest rival. Between the 1880s-1914 France was the second colonial power and naval power in the world.¹³³ Though France had traditionally cooperated with Britain in expanding European interests in Egypt the rivalry was embittered by the Egyptian question. During the 1860s the French influence in various parts of the Ottoman empire grew in the form of educational and cultural assistance, railway concessions and trade, but its greatest triumph was the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869 as Britain had opposed the construction of canals and railways on the route to India. The French had persisted and for a long time managed it till the khedive of Egypt sold his canal shares to Britain.¹³⁴ As France lost Egypt to Britain in 1882 it resented it and demanded the end of Egyptian occupation.

As far as Gulf was concerned, France proved a tough competitor when it tried to revive her rights in Oman. France had a coaling depot in Muscat though no naval base and in 1892 France appointed a consular agent in Muscat. In 1894 France opened a consulate in Muscat. Nevertheless, France did not pose a challenge to Britain by threatening to replace Britain as world trading power or building up a great Battle fleet like Germany.

Anglo-German Relations

France and Russia were not the only two powers whose expansionist policies in Asia were a cause of security threat for the GOI in Gulf. By the end of the century Germany “was assuming in the Councils of the Ottoman Empire a place that Britain had once held and which Russia had long aspired to hold”¹³⁵. Germany was unified in 1871. As far as British

¹³³ R. D. Anderson (1977), *France 1870-1914 Politics and Society*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p.153.

¹³⁴ Alasdair Drysdale and Gerald H. Blake (1985), *The Middle East and North Africa, A Political Geography*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 54.

¹³⁵ J. B. Kelly (1967), “Salisbury, Curzon and the Kuwait Agreement of 1899”, *Studies in International History*, (ed). K. Bourne and D.C. Watt, London: Longman's, Green & Co. Ltd., p. 265.

position in Gulf was concerned, the newly unified Germany was certainly not a threat for the GOI.

The situation however changed by the last decade of the century with the accession of the third and last Emperor of Germany, Wilhelm II (1859-1941) who desired a more vigorous policy and expansion of the German empire. After 1890, William II not only interested himself in all the details of German foreign policy but actually determined its course¹³⁶. England was getting uncomfortably aware of the growing competition of German trade and about Germany's colonial development.¹³⁷ To counter the English economic power and navy, Germany had one course open to it - an agreement with Russia and France. England struggled hard to avoid it.

Germany aimed to expand its ambitions in the territories beyond the continent. The German banks looked for commercial opportunities outside Germany.¹³⁸ Since 1880s Germany's economic interest had grown rapidly in the Ottoman Empire. These banks, industrial firms and railway interests had penetrated in the Ottoman Empire whereby Germany antagonized Russia which found Germany competing in Persia and then in the Ottoman court raising the signal post of its Berlin-Baghdad railway project covering provinces in Gulf before Russia could close the deal for its own railway project. German imperial chancellor, Prince von Bernhard Bulow's boastful declaration about German intentions of "worming our way inch by inch down to the Persian Gulf" seemed to threaten British interests in the area and an attempt by Germany to displace Britain in Gulf.¹³⁹ German influence in the Ottoman Empire grew rapidly in the form of arm sales and military aid and German Economic and diplomatic activity was widespread.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Arthur Rosenberg (1931,1970) *Imperial Germany, The Birth of the German Republic 1871-1918*, translation Ian F.D. Morrow, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 35.

¹³⁷ Erich Brandenburg (1933) , *From Bismarck to World War, A History of German Foreign Policy 1870-1914*, translated by Annie Elizabeth Adams, London: Oxford University Press . p.29

¹³⁸ Gordon A. Craig (1978), *Germany 1866-1945*, London: Oxford University Press, p. 248.

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 314.

¹⁴⁰ N. 134, p. 55.

Wilhelm II had taken interest in the German Navy and reorganized the old Admiralty. In October 1898, the Kaiser on his way to Palestine made an extraordinary visit to Sultan Abdul Hamid II and visited Constantinople, Damascus and Jerusalem thereby alluding to British apprehensions. The Germans secured material and political rewards as engineers railway contractors, banking agents paved into Constantinople.¹⁴¹

This was the period of the decline in Ottoman power and its dependence on the European powers, as also with its mistrust on British power had moved closer to Germany. With the establishment of German Consulate at Bushire in 1897, Germany's interests in Gulf were taken encouraged. In June 1906 Mr. Sturken, managing partner of Messrs. Traun Sturken & Co. visited Bahrain with the already established firm of Messrs Wonckhaus's Mr Wonckhaus for a trip of inspection around Gulf and called on the chief of Bahrain, a reason for British anxiety. Later the two visits of German Consul from Bushire Dr. Listemann to Bahrain in 1906 and 1907 also added to British concerns.¹⁴² Germany's activity was seen as having ostensibly passed beyond the zone of legitimate commercial rivalry.

It was the Berlin-Bagdad railway that proved to be the catalyst for the changed British policy towards Germany and the Gulf. Germany had devised a plan during 1899 to 1903, for building a railway line from Berlin and Baghdad. The ambitious scheme had alarmed London and GOI as it threatened to pierce India's outer defences. The German expansion was thus to be resisted. Britain toyed with the idea of participation in the railway building or to neutralize the German plan by combining with the French for an alternative railway. During the conservative administration, Hamilton, Chamberlain and Balfour had considered using the Baghdad railway as a means of 'running Germany against Russia and Turkey in the Gulf'.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ William Harburt Dawson (1919,1966) *The German Empire 1867-1914, The Unity Movement*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., p. 394.

¹⁴² CAEd. Administration Reports 1906-1907, p. 67.

¹⁴³ Stuart A. Cohen (1976), *British Policy in Mesopotamia 1903-1914*, London: Ithaca Press, p. 48.

In 1906 Britain persuaded Constantinople to recognize her exclusive rights to build railways in parts of Anatolia. The 1908 Young Turk revolution was initially interpreted as an opportunity for guiding the new rulers till the inclination of the Young Turks was realized to be towards German, London changed its stance.

Eventually the slow progress of Germany in the railway and its preoccupation with the European security strengthened the hand of British diplomacy in the region. The 1914 Anglo-German Convention ensured that the Baghdad railway would not extend to the Gulf except under British auspices.

The events also resulted in the British signing an agreement with Kuwait.

2.4.3. Commercial Interests

In the nineteenth century Britain had a fairly well established commercial presence in the Gulf, represented by the East India Company. The commercial services were provided by the Board of Trade.¹⁴⁴ In the 1860s the Commercial Department of the Board of Trade became headquarters of the new treaty negotiations. However there was confusion between the Board of Trade and the Foreign Office. Thus in January 1865 a commercial branch was established at the Foreign Office and in 1872 the Commercial Department was set up at the FO. The Board of Trade had intelligence and advisory function with respect to commercial treaties tariffs.

The Gulf was an area under intense surveillance of the British. The earlier trade interests of the East India Company were now overtaken by political and strategic interests. With the suppression of piracy achieved the royal navy regularly policed the waters adjoining the British Empire in India. The separation of British trading and political interests can be traced back to the 1820s when Consular permission for trade was withdrawn and political

¹⁴⁴ Commercial reports from British legations and consulate overseas were forwarded to the Board of Trade which in turn instructed to the Foreign Office to send instructions back, if any.

officers were debarred from trading as British official interest and influence in the Gulf became purely political. Thus politics enjoyed primacy and trade became secondary.

This is not to underestimate the trading activities the Gulf. In fact, the Gulf had extensive trade relations with India and England, under overall British supervision. The British commercial interests were based on certain articles and products like tobacco, cotton, wheat, barley that were exported from Persia, cultivation of poppy and export of opium through Bushire and Bandar Abbas. In the year 1873-1874 the articles imported into Calcutta from Persian Gulf were of a total value of Rs. 3,64,605 and into Bombay at Rs 70,13,411, which included drugs and medicines, dyeing and colouring material, fruits and vegetables, paints, colours and painters' materials, salt, shells, stationery other than paper, and provisions as ghee, dry fish and oilman's stores. The same year the exports from Calcutta included manufactures of cotton, grain and pulse, hides and skin, indigo, raw silk and manufactures of the same, sugar and saccharine matters and also tobacco all amounting to a total of Rs. 20, 71,607 and from Bombay Rs. 93,79,725.¹⁴⁵ One feature of the trade of the 1860s-70s was the great increase in cotton and wollen manufactures of European particularly English origin, exported to the Gulf. By 1870-71 the value of European cotton goods of Indian manufacture exported from Bombay, Calcutta and Karachi combined, another was the rise in the opium traffic from Persia.¹⁴⁶

Sugar, metals, rice was imported in the Gulf. There was a clear fall in the Gulf-India trade from 1869-70 to 1873-74. The total value of trade between Calcutta, Bombay and Karachi on the one hand and Gulf on the other decreased steadily from the imports at Calcutta declining from 7, 31, 345 in 1869-70 to 3,64,605 in 1873-74, which was almost half. During the same period Bombay too reflected a decline in trade with the Gulf with imports falling from Rs. 1,16,31,735 in 1869-70 to Rs. 76,13,411 in 1873-74 and exports from Rs.

¹⁴⁵ N. 2, pp. 8-9.

¹⁴⁶ Lt Col Ross (1876), Annual report on the Administration of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency for the year 1875-76, FD No CXXVIII, Calcutta: printed at FD press, pp. 32-38.

1,08,41,455 to Rs. 93,79,725 respectively. In the next five years however, the trade nearly doubled.¹⁴⁷

In 1877-78 due to the Russo-Turkish War trade channels were diverted from the north to the south of Persia. The advantages of the southern route had increased due to the more frequent steam communication. Cultivation of poppy in Persia and export of opium through Bushire and Bandar Abbas steadily increased and increasingly good quality cotton grown in Persia was exported to Bombay.¹⁴⁸

One of the most important aspects of the Gulf trade was of course the Pearl industry, a premier industry of the Gulf. The classical word for a pearl in Arabic is *Lulu*, in Persian *Marwarid* though the common term then used in the Gulf was *Qumashah*.¹⁴⁹ Attempts were made from British private companies as well as other European countries to explore the banks in more scientific manner.¹⁵⁰

Pearl fishing and trade was an occupation peculiar to the region and most often the only source of wealth among the residents on the Arabian side. The pearls of the Persian Gulf were considered superior than the ones found near Karachi, Ceylon, at Red Sea and Socotra. Bombay was the most important market for pearls. Bulk of the pearls from Bahrain, Lingeh and Dubai were brought to Muscat and exported to Bombay, where they were classified for dispatch to European and other markets, but some going to other places like Baghdad.¹⁵¹

The value of the pearls exported during the nineteenth century and then the early twentieth century reflected on the importance of protecting the industry. Comparing the figures with earlier decades, in 1833 and 1866 the amount was estimated at £300,000 and £400,000

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p.10.

¹⁴⁸ Report on Trade of the Persian Gulf for 1878, MSA, PD, 1880, Vol. II, No. 158, Part II, p. 27.

¹⁴⁹ The Pearl and Mother of Pearl fisheries in the Persian Gulf, Appendix C, CAED, Records of Bahrain 1820-1960, Vol. 3, 1892-1923, p. 487.

¹⁵⁰ A separate section in chapter three on pearl fishing and European interests in Bahrain.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 499.

respectively, in 1905-06 it was, at the lowest computation, at £1,434,399.¹⁵² The trade had picked up during the period under study. In 1888 pearls were exported from Bahrain and the Arabian coast of the Gulf to the value of almost Rs. 60,00,000, about Rs. 10,00,000 in excess of the export in 1887.¹⁵³

The mother o' pearl shells, a trade of great value had sprung between Gulf and England by 1877.¹⁵⁴ Lingeh, Bahrain and Bushire were principal mother-of-pearl emporia from where they were shipped to Europe. The value of the mother of pearls exported which in 1903-04 amounted to £30, 439.¹⁵⁵ A German firm had important share in the shell business.

Of the other Gulf regions, Bahrain had increased in importance for trade. As early as 1873, the Resident reported "Bahrein is conveniently situated to be an entrepot for the Arabian trade, and is much used as such. The commercial importance of these islands is not inconsiderable"¹⁵⁶. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the volume of Bahrain trade had risen. In 1906 it had risen from Rs. 4,47,52,162 to Rs. 4,73,18,202, thereby showing an increase of 5.73 percent than the previous year.¹⁵⁷ Bahrain had become an important port that no longer depended on the Pearling industry. Trade increased and Bahrain enjoyed a status of trade entrepot leaving the likes of Basra, Kuwait and Muscat behind. Indian traders freely operated in the markets of Bahrain. Likewise many Bahraini families traded with India. A prosperous trading family from Bahrain The Safars, maintained business

¹⁵² Ibid. p. 483

¹⁵³ Administration report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency for 1888-89 (1889), Selections from the records of the GOI, FD, No CCLIX, FD serial No. 25, Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, MSA, p. 29.

¹⁵⁴ Report on Trade of the Persian Gulf for 1878, MSA, PD, 1880, Vol. II, No. 158, Part II, pp. 27-28.

¹⁵⁵ The Pearl and Mother of Pearl fisheries in the Persian Gulf, Appendix C, CAED, Records of Bahrain 1820-1960, Vol 3, 1892-1923, p. 483.

¹⁵⁶ The PG Administration reports 1873-1947, Volume I 1873-1879, Archive editions. The report on the Administration of the Bushire Residency including that of the Muscat Political Agency with reports on trade for 1873-74. Calcutta: Printed at the Foreign Department Press, 1874, CAEd. (1986), p. 10.

¹⁵⁷ Administration report for Bahrain Political Agency, 1906-07, CAEd. p. 66

network with merchant houses in Bombay including those in Bushire, Muscat and Mocha.¹⁵⁸

Russia had active trade transactions in Persia and had its presence felt in the markets as far south as Shiraz and Bushire, but by 1878, the import trade in those parts had become more English and less affected by Russian commerce. In 1901, of the total trade of £3,600,000, in the Gulf ports, £2,300,000 was British¹⁵⁹ In 1907-08 Bushire's total exports and imports totalled nearly £11,000,000¹⁶⁰. By the 1890s, Germany claimed a share in the Gulf trade. The establishment of a German consulate at Bushire in November 1897 aimed at strengthening the German trading position at Basra. German commercial activities in Bahrain had received a considerable impetus from the periodical calling of steamers of the Hamburg-Amerika Line at the port, and the appointment of Messrs R. Wonckhaus & Co as the agents of the line.¹⁶¹

However, the British government maintained that there was no preferential treatment for British trade nor was there any attempt to shield or monopolize the British trade from foreign competition, till the beginning of the twentieth century. The improved sea and land communication during this period definitely increased the chances of foreign players who could challenge British trade prospects in the region. The GOI thus remained watchful over the slightest of change in the events.

The 1840s to the 1930s were decades of British 'free trade empire'.¹⁶² An open door for international trade remained the declared policy of Great Britain. Lansdowne's FO Memorandum of 17 March 1902 accepted foreign trading interests in the Gulf and later the

¹⁵⁸ James Onley (2005), "Transnational Merchants in Nineteenth-century Gulf: The case of the Safar family", in Madawi Al- Raashid (ed.) *Transnational Connections in the Arab Gulf*, London : Routledge, p.63 and pp. 59-91

¹⁵⁹ Figures given by Lord Lansdowne in the House of Lords, 5 May 1903, in D. C. M.Platt (1968), *Finance, Trade and Politics in British Foreign Policy 1815-1914*, London: Clarendon Oxford University Press, p. 245.

¹⁶⁰ D. C. M.Platt (1968), *Finance, Trade and Politics in British Foreign Policy 1815-1914*, London: Oxford University Press, p. 246.

¹⁶¹ Administration report for Bahrain Political Agency, 1906-07, CAEd. p. 66

¹⁶² N. 63, p. 100.

PG Declaration of August 1907 issued simultaneously Gulf and with the Persian convention between Russia and Britain added that, “His Majesty’s Government will continue to direct all efforts to the preservation of the status quo in the Gulf and maintenance of British trade; in doing so, they have no desire to exclude legitimate trade of any other Power”.¹⁶³ Lansdowne told Lamington at the time of his 1903 statement that it was impossible to dissociate commercial from political interests in the Gulf.¹⁶⁴ Though in reality the entry of any Company in the Gulf trade was supervised and its direct interaction with the Shaikhs curtailed. The British were blatantly protectionist and shielded British companies from European competition. In case of Germany Herr Wonckhaus, head of the German firm was regarded by the British as “arch-agent of German political penetration.”¹⁶⁵ Sir Percy Cox saw in Germany “ambition of making Gulf an exclusively British sea endangered by every shipload of barley and every ton of oxide exported by the Germans”¹⁶⁶

Table: Volume of Trade in the Gulf Region, 1901-1908¹⁶⁷

	Year	Volume of Trade
Gulf Region	1901	£3,600,000 (£3,600,000 was British)
Bahrain	1905	Rs. 4,73,18,202
Bahrain	1906	Rs. 4,47,52,162
Bushire	1907-08	£11,000,000

¹⁶³ Anglo-Russian Convention, P.P. 1908 (Cd. 3750) CXXXV, D. C. M. Platt (1968), *Finance, Trade and Politics in British Foreign Policy 1815-1914*, London: Oxford University Press, p. 247.

¹⁶⁴ N. 160, p. 247.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Wassmuss to FO at Berlin, 19 December 1913, D. C. M. Platt (1968), *Finance, Trade and Politics in British Foreign Policy 1815-1914*, London: Clarendon Oxford University Press, p. 248.

¹⁶⁷ Please refer to the text.

Table: Trade Figures between India and Gulf, 1833-1906.¹⁶⁸

Year	Place		Exports		Imports	
	from	to	Products	Value	Products	Value
1833	Persian Gulf (mainly Bahrain)	Bombay			Pearls	£300,000
1866	Persian Gulf	Bombay			Pearls	£400,000
1869-70	Persian Gulf	Calcutta				Rs. 7, 31, 345
	Persian Gulf	Bombay				Rs.1,16,31,735
	Bombay	Persian Gulf		Rs.1,08,41,455		
1873-1874	Persian Gulf	Calcutta			drugs and medicines, dyeing and colouring material, fruits and vegetables, paints, colours and painters' materials, salt, shells, stationery other than paper, and provisions as ghee, dry fish and oilman's stores	Rs. 3,64,605
		Bombay				Rs 70,13,411
1873-1874	Calcutta	Gulf	cotton, grain and pulse, hides and skin, indigo, raw silk	Rs. 20,71,607		
	Bombay	Gulf	Same as above and sugar and saccharine matters and also tobacco	Rs. 93,79,725		
1887	Persian Gulf	Bombay			Pearls	Rs. 50,00,000 (approx)
1888	Persian Gulf	Bombay			Pearls	Rs. 60,00,000
1903-04	Persian Gulf	Bombay			Mother of Pearl shells	£30, 439
1905-06	Persian Gulf	Bombay			Pearls	£1,434,399

¹⁶⁸ Please refer to the text.

2.4.4. Increased Judicial Status

As the British authority was established in Gulf, the need for regular consular and judicial authority over British residents in India was increasingly felt. In 1873, the Resident and his Assistant were appointed Justices of Peace by the GOI and invested with some limited judicial powers. In 1878, the Resident was appointed Consul-General for Fars, and for the coasts and islands of the Gulf within the dominions of Persia. This placed the Resident under the authority of the Foreign Office.¹⁶⁹

The GOI held the view that the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf had legal jurisdiction to adjudicate cases between British subjects on the sea-board of the Persian Gulf. It was the insistence of GOI that no other regional or external authority whether Persian or otherwise, could investigate matter of British subjects within the limits of jurisdiction claimed by the GOI.¹⁷⁰ Increasingly its insisted on its stand “based on usage and prescription”.¹⁷¹

In 1889 the extra-territorial jurisdiction of the Resident in Persia was defined by the Persian Coasts and Islands Order in Council which placed the jurisdiction on the legal basis and subjected the Resident in the criminal and civil matters to the Supervision of the High Court of Bombay. Thus consulates and Vice Consulates were established at Bandar Abbas, Kerman, Lingeh and Muhammarah.¹⁷²

2.4.5. Arms Traffic

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century Gulf was subjected to a phenomenon that was becoming rampant in Asia and which made inroads in the Gulf. The cause was the Afghan War of 1879-80. Large consignments of percussion caps exported from India to Persia were reaching Afghan troops at Heart and small traffic in arms was discovered. In

¹⁶⁹ Penelope Tuson (1979), *The Records of the British residency and Agencies in the Persian Gulf*, London: India Office library and Records, p.7.

¹⁷⁰ T. H. Thornton, Offg. Secretary, GOI, FD to HE W. Taylour, C.B. HMs Minister to Persia, No 538P, Fort William, 23 February 1876, NAI, FD, Political A, April 1876, Nos. 95-102, p. 4.

¹⁷¹ Keep.Withs., NAI, FD, Political A, April 1876, Nos. 95-102, p.4.

¹⁷² N. 167, p.7.

January 1880 the GOI received the first news of a large exportation of percussion caps to the Persian Gulf.¹⁷³ Earlier Resident Ross had conveyed the matter in December 1879 stating that “the unusually large importation of percussion caps into Persia is not owing to increased local demand but large proportion finds its way through Shiraz, Ispahahn and Tehran to Khorassan...likely to meet demands of Afghanistan”.¹⁷⁴

Caps were imported in Persia from Bombay. The exports had been escalating since 1878 since when more than 11 and ½ lakhs caps were exported to PG of which no less than nine lakhs were exported in October 1878 and of which six lakhs on one license alone most of all going to Sultan of Muscat.¹⁷⁵

In March 1880, the Bombay government demanded reports of the arms trade. The GOI decided to convey the matter to the FO and decided that licenses for exportation in future were not to be granted without reference to FO.¹⁷⁶ On 1st October 1880, a notification was drafted and later approved by the Secretary of State for India prohibiting the import of arms to Persian Gulf by vessels touching the Indian ports.

In 1883 a French firm at Bushire started dealing in arms and soon made big profits which encouraged other trading houses to follow suit. The situation required a serious British interference. Prohibition of arms at Persia did not control the situation. These were the British manufactured arms exported by British firms and carried by British ships that were now arming the tribesmen in the Gulf. It was difficult for the government to ban it from its nationals lest it fell in the hands of any other European power. By 1897 the trade at Bushire had reached the value of £1000,000 imports¹⁷⁷. Muscat had sprung up as a trade centre in the Gulf and no attempts on the part of the British seemed good enough. The Persian

¹⁷³Keep-Withs, NAI, FD, Secret, July 1880, Nos. 113-127.

¹⁷⁴ Ross to C. Gonne, Sec to the GOB, No 151, Bushire 11 December 1878, NAI, FD, Political A, March 1880, Nos. 46-57,.

¹⁷⁵Keep-Withs, NAI, FD, Secret, July 1880, Nos. 113-127

¹⁷⁶ Keep- withs, NAI, FD, Political A, March 1880, Nos.46-57.

¹⁷⁷ Arnold Wilson (1959), *The Persian Gulf: An Historical sketch from the Earlier times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, London: George Allen & Unwin, pp. 269-70.

government eventually signed an agreement with Britain and Muscat. The Sultan of Muscat too agreed to put restrictions yet the trade continued in full steam and by the end of the century it reached enormous proportion of 20,000 rifles and brought in its gamut the interior regions as Bahrain¹⁷⁸, Qatar, and Kuwait thereby dispersing the most modern weapons in the hands of the tribesmen. Persian measures proved fruitful and trade was banished from Bushire but the centre now shifted to Muscat in 1898 as it became the centre for supply of arms and ammunitions.¹⁷⁹ It was an important question for the GOI whether, in the interest of peace at the seas, the Government should “prevent the arms falling in the hands of disorderly persons in the Gulf”.¹⁸⁰

Muscat was the centre of arms traffic in the Gulf. The traffic by 1900 was worth well over one hundred thousand pounds. The British effectively suppressed it when it was discovered that the guns landed at Muscat were smuggled into south east Persia and Afghanistan and used against the British in the north-west frontier of India.¹⁸¹

2.4.6. Concerns of British Prestige

For a great colonial power as Great Britain, national security did not imply just the need to take protective measures to ensure the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Great Britain. It implied preservation of its great power status.¹⁸² “The framers of British foreign policy linked Britain’s continued standing as a great power inextricably with the retention and expansion of its worldwide empire”¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ Reference in chapter three.

¹⁷⁹ N. 175, pp. 269-71

¹⁸⁰ IO to FO, 16 February 1899, NAI, FD, Secret E, July 1899, Nos. 94-248, Inclosure 41 in No. 1, p. 58.

¹⁸¹ N. 104, pp.113-114.

¹⁸² N. 69, preface. vi.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Status and position were always topmost on the minds of the policy makers. In one of the incident's that involved Persian merchants and traders¹⁸⁴ wherein the Resident took quick measures to establish a status quo and the Sheikh of Bahrain proved 'obstinate', the reaction of the GOI was that "apart from the successful result achieved without resource to arms, but nevertheless most beneficial to our prestige in Bahrain and all along the Arab coast"¹⁸⁵

In context to the foreign powers, the British colonial authorities feared that the consolidation of Russian or German influence in the Persian Gulf area, the emergence of Russian, French or German bases on the banks and the diminution of British influence in the countries bordering India would appear to the Indian public and the Indian national bourgeoisie as clear evidence of Great Britain's military and political weakness, with all ensuing consequences, particularly dangerous for the colonists at time when Asia's awakening began. It is argued that such was the composition of that section of the British ruling class which, for different economic, financial, political and social reasons, was interested in an active, offensive British policy in West Asia, and turning the Red Sea, the Western part of the Indian Ocean and particularly, the Persian Gulf into a 'British lake'.¹⁸⁶

By the 1914 it was evident that India's line of defence had shifted from Constantinople to the Gulf, where political priorities were more compatible with Britain's commercial and financial interests. Her influence in Gulf gave her a virtual protectorate along the Gulf coastline eastwards to India, and stretched westwards to Aden and on to Egypt.¹⁸⁷

2.5. The Policymakers

Gulf administration was a responsibility of the GOI. There was no elected Assembly that had any control over the foreign policy. It was the Indian government that appointed

¹⁸⁴ Explained in detail in chapter 3, pp. 57-59

¹⁸⁵ NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1905, 523-561, p. 4.

¹⁸⁶ N. 93, p. 324.

¹⁸⁷ N. 101, p. 418.

officers in the Gulf, directed discussions with the Gulf rulers, entered into agreements and treaties with the local rulers and also designed policy for the Gulf. If London was the centre for the decision on the Empire's policy, then GOI in its own right framed, conveyed and implemented policies in the region where it had its responsibility and authority. "It was the Indian government, not the remote offices of Whitehall, which handled the minutiae of treaty negotiations, the promotion and protection of commercial activities and small scale naval and military operations".¹⁸⁸

The GOI was not always in consideration with the comments on the conduct of its foreign policy from London. As for those in London, demands on the empire's international relations were not to be decided by India alone, even if it was at the helm of the administrative affairs. As Briton Cooper Busch has commented "Policy made in London had always to be aware of 'public opinion', or of the views of the Admiralty or the Board of Trade or (in some cases) the Colonial office. But once policy made in the Foreign Office had taken into account these interests, it had yet to deal with the government of India, a power in its own right."¹⁸⁹ The opinions of the GOI were conveyed to the Secretary of State for India who in turn conveyed it to his India Office. At every level, opinions would get added or constructed in their own manner. In the eighteenth century or mid nineteenth century these opinions may often get merged with less impact on Great Britain's international policy.¹⁹⁰ But the situation no longer remained the same during the period under study. As much as Indian opinion about matters in Gulf became precise London became increasingly aware of its implications on its diplomacy in Europe and its impact on the European powers who aimed for equal authority in and around the region.

Conflicting opinions of the GOI with the Whitehall increasingly became a feature of the discussions on foreign policy matters in Gulf affairs. The framers of policy in India were men from the Foreign Department of the GOI who in consultation with the Viceroy

¹⁸⁸ Robert Blyth (2003), *The Empire of the Raj, India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858-1947*, Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ N. 111, p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 3.

conveyed the policy matters to the Secretary of State for India. The Foreign policy of India was an activity 'reserved' within the purview of the Viceroy of India. The Viceroy was assisted by his cabinet, men in the Foreign Department. Some of these had immense impact on the way decisions of GOI were framed. For example, Alfred Lyall, earlier a Home Secretary for the GOI was educated in Eton. He was appointed as a Foreign Secretary in Lord Lytton's administration. As a Foreign Secretary his main preoccupation was the North West Frontier Province. He considered the Frontier as a question of border management and in larger aspect important for defence of India against attack by a foreign European power. For him a firm understanding with Russia would halve the problem of Frontier.¹⁹¹

In matters of Indian defence, there were sharp differences of opinions where some suggested that the British government in India should benefit out of the railways and new modes of communication and thus no harm will come to its defence whereas Russia will have to wrestle out the problems in Asia and deal with the difficult terrain and the people in Central Asia. The others believed that the Russian approach to the frontiers of India would prove disastrous. Lord Lytton as a conservative Viceroy of India in 1876 believed in the latter and Russian threat remained an important factor in Lytton's foreign policy of India.¹⁹²

The GOI's voice became a powerful particularly after the Eastern Question seized British consciousness.¹⁹³ "The wide divergence of views between the Anglo Indians and the British Cabinet" was evident, "while the former were apt to overplay the Indian side of the question, the latter could not afford to ignore the ever-changing spectrum of European diplomacy."¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Philip Mason (1985), *Men Who Ruled India*, Calcutta, New Delhi: Rupa & Co., p. 204

¹⁹² Muriel E. Chamberlain (1988), 'Pax Britannica?' *British Foreign Policy, 1789-1914*, London and New York: Longman, pp. 135-136.

¹⁹³ Ram Lakhan Shukla (1973), *Britain, India and the Turkish Empire, 1853-1882*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, p. 219.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

Authorities in India could not however envisage a policy that was detrimental to the concerns of the British Empire. In fact its concern for the policy was keeping in mind that it was an important part of the British imperial structure.¹⁹⁵ Yet the authorities in India believed that the concerns of issue that fall within the gamut of Indian understanding may be overlooked and ignored by the officials in London. Thus it went on to frame its own perspective on issues that it believed were core to the region and its existence in the larger British Empire.

The Residents for Gulf were men from the Indian Political Services (IPS) “picked men from picked men”¹⁹⁶ Paul Rich has given an extensive reflection on the men from India who administered the policies on Gulf. The other officials of IPS, he states, were “a hierarchic group of European gentlemen” who had relatives serving in India apart from other places who “pledged particular allegiance to the Viceroy....If any group merited the title of Raj it was the IPS, who to an extent determined the geo-political dimensions of the modern Gulf... (they were) more aggressive than their predecessors...”¹⁹⁷. The IPS “grew into a cosseted diplomatic corps of the Viceroy, exerting considerable effect on all of India’s affairs...(and) the Gulf was as much at the mercy of the Indian Political Service as was India”¹⁹⁸.

Earlier the posting in the Gulf was not a prime posting, but as the importance of the region increased the profile of the Resident and the Officers appointed became a more important affair. It was through the efforts of the Residents as E. C. Ross (1872, 1877-1885, 1886), William Prideaux (1876), Samuel Miles (1885-1886), James Crawford (1893), James Sadler (1893-94), Charles Kemball (1900-1904) Percy Cox (1904-1920) that the GOI structured its policies and fostered them in the Gulf.¹⁹⁹ These Residents were well versed

¹⁹⁵ N. 186, p.3.

¹⁹⁶ Phillip Woodruff, *The Men who ruled India: The Guardians*, in Robert Blyth, (2003), *The Empire of the Raj, India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858-1947*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.6-7.

¹⁹⁷ Paul Rich (2009), *Creating the Arabian Gulf, British Raj and Invasions of the Gulf*, Plymouth: Lexington Books, pp. 16-17.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. pp. 29 & 31.

¹⁹⁹ Political Residents to the Persian Gulf.

with the situation in the Gulf and some of them had even served as Political agents in Muscat or Bahrain (Sadler, Cox, Prideaux) or other who had sufficient administrative experience at important positions (Crawford as First attaché and later Deputy Secretary to the FD. Major Prideaux who held the position of British Political Agent at the Bahrain Agency for four and half years, was lauded by the Resident P.Z. Cox for having established a firm control over the British position in Bahrain which “was greatly improved and consolidated”.²⁰⁰

The earliest efforts can be claimed to have started by the Gulf Resident Lewis Pelly (1862-1872), who encouraged a larger sense of interventionism in the Gulf territories departing from the old line of British policy of minimal interference on land as long as peace was kept at sea. Pelly felt that positive measures should be taken to develop the area, almost as if it had been a normal British colony.²⁰¹

In the later period, there was an increased effort and expectations from the Resident to enhance British authority. They asserted British interest in various islands in the Gulf and at times backed the claims of ruling Shaikhs against the regional powers for greater autonomy. For example Kemball backed the claims of Sharjah against Persia; Adelbert Talbot (1891-1893), suggested in November 1891 that the GOI offer a formal agreement to the Trucial Shaikhs, the Exclusive Treaty that later became “the main pillar of British authority on the Trucial coast and served as a model for agreements signed in due course by the Shaikhs of Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar”.²⁰²

That the Gulf was ruled from India remained a bone of contention through the years with the British Foreign Office, which never accepted the idea that the Indian Political Service should be determining strategy there or that policy arguments going on in India had more an effect on the Gulf than that of London.

²⁰⁰ Annual report of the Persian Gulf Residency for the year 1909, CAEd, p.6.

²⁰¹ N. 195, p. 227.

²⁰² Ibid. p. 232.

Robert Blyth states that, “the most distinctive feature of British India’s external policy in the western sphere- as opposed to its strategy on the subcontinent or in Burma- was the desire to keep formal commitments to a minimum and to limit the nature and extent of any involvement in the internal affairs of the neighbouring politics”.²⁰³ This may not be completely true as, in an effort to retain its position in the Gulf against the aspirations of regional or European powers the GOI did itself in the engage in the late nineteenth century in the internal issues of the shaikhdoms. The case of customs with the ruler of Bahrain is an apt example of it. Equally were the cases of Indian merchants or traders that were used as an excuse to interfere in, or control the internal administration of the Shaikhs at times.

In the given period the communication between India and London improved with telegraph as compared to the earlier period when the steamer services would invariably delay the correspondence making it difficult for the government in India (that time Bombay) to depend on it and thus go ahead and take decisions. The political, technological and administrative changes coupled with constitutional changes influenced the policy in the Gulf region at the same time giving India an opportunity to convey its attitudes about it.

Where GOI tried to struggle for more recognition and forge ahead for British position in the region, London settled down for status quo. It is however necessary to note here that in spite of the doubts and reservations that the officials in London had towards Indian authorities, they did not weaken the control of India over the Gulf.

However growing European imperialism in the Gulf, led to a change. The aggressiveness of European interests in Gulf met with equally aggressive attitudes of the Indian government. This led in turn to an increasing influence of Whitehall over the direction of Indian domestic and foreign policy.

²⁰³ N. 186, p.3.

2.6. Fostering an Aggressive Policy in the Gulf

The British raised an impressive, though at times conflicting and complicated, administrative structure in the Gulf. It was this structure that facilitated their interests in the Gulf and helped sustain their status in view of the interests of other powers. The GOI build up strategy to facilitate its policies that sometimes remained acceptable and other times unnecessary to the Home government. The arrangement of treaties, establishment of protectorates and strong remonstrance to Ottoman Government were not always acceptable to London. The GOI developed its own arguments and in period of time, grew more particular and aggressive about its demands of establishing greater control over the states.

The last two decades of the twentieth century saw newer concerns for GOI and London in the Gulf region as the most important concern of policy was all encompassing British position in the Gulf and beyond. Salisbury, as Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, rarely committed to permanent involvement in European quarrels, advocated an era of ‘splendid isolation’ and often did not consider the GOIs suggestions and alarm worth considering²⁰⁴.

England’s stand as nation isolated from others was being questioned and its search for allies in doubt. Deliberations relating to concessions to powers at the cost of losing its control over territories or for the purpose of winning friends were on.²⁰⁵ In Europe the only nation that could be of some threat to England was France, but by the end of the century, it receded. However, Britain’s main security problem concerned with the Indian Empire and the main threat was Russia which could directly attack or subvert British rule, or turn India’s neighbours as Persia, Tibet, Afghanistan, Ottoman Empire into “something like Russian satellite states”.²⁰⁶ In view of this, India’s frontiers were increasingly becoming vulnerable. The fact was noted in London circles too but the European issues often

²⁰⁴ D.R. Gillard (1967), “Salisbury and the Indian Defence Problem, 1885-1902”, *Studies in International History*, K. Bourne and D.C. Watt, (eds.), London: Longman’s, Green & Co. Ltd., p. 243.

²⁰⁵ N. 111, p. 235.

²⁰⁶ N. 202, p. 238.

superseded the discussion on the policy matters. Besides “Britain’s capacity for deterrence or retaliation had just as, steadily declined”.²⁰⁷ Should Russia chose to attack, it was a question if the Indian forces could meet the challenge and a defeat thereby could prove catastrophic to Indian Empire and British prestige.

In Gulf, earlier in the early nineteenth century the GOI claimed to maintain the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the states but the interference was usual. The Resident followed GOIs policy. For e.g. in mid 1875, on the issue of British Indian traders in Qatar, the Resident worked cautiously. “I think Government would wish me, whilst avoiding any appearance of interference with any matters in which British interests are not directly concerned, to continue as occasion required to correspond in a friendly manner with Shaikh Mahomed bin Thani on matters such as the interest of British Indian traders and so forth.”²⁰⁸ However during this period, increasingly the gap between the difference and division of matters of internal affairs of the states and those of British interests narrowed by the prerogatives and choices of the British. As the times progressed and the GOIs interests became more acute by the end of the nineteenth century, it used every opportunity to question, influence and at times stall the decisions of the local rulers.

During its administration of the Gulf, matters with London often remained to be sorted out. The ultimate concern of the GOI was the security of India and by the end of the nineteenth century the ultimate aim in Gulf was to convert the states into Protectorate. Throughout the period the issue was raised several times with debates on the possible advantages over such decision, the impact of such a declaration on the other regional powers and the European powers, and the aspect of secrecy. Hence the attempt mostly was to declare the status of the Gulf States as ‘under British protection’ or simply ‘states in special treaty relations with Britain’.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 239.

²⁰⁸ Ross to C. U. Aitchison, NAI, FD, Political A, September 1875, Nos. 59-67, No 623-162P, Bushire, 18 June 1875, pp. 1-2.

²⁰⁹ Glenn Balfour-Paul (1991), *The End of Empire in Middle East: Britain’s Relinquishment of Power in Her Last Three Arab Dependencies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 102.

The wily Shaikh Mubarak of Kuwait in spite of a de jure blessings of Turkey had sought British help as a guarantee for his position but fearing German and Russian opposition, GOI desisted from proclaiming a protectorate over Kuwait, merely promising the Shaikh of the good offices. Situation changed with Turkey giving a nod to the Berlin-Baghdad railway line, an initial proposal from Russian (Kapnist) but later from Germany.²¹⁰ Turkey's decision to grant Germany a concession to build a railway line from Istanbul to Basra with an outlet at Kuwait had changed British attitude towards Kuwait as a convention was signed in 1899 with the Shaikh of Kuwait whereby he and his heirs agreed not to surrender, lease mortgage Kuwait's territory to any foreign country other than Britain.²¹¹

Indian interest was seen as part of an Imperial interest and Indian officials strongly felt that they cannot be excluded from policy decisions regarding matters that fell within the radius of political interest of India whereas the Imperial Government in London accepted that Indian authorities are entitled to have opinions but cannot challenge Whitehall supremacy and in London's view the opinion in India seemed to serve only Indian cause.²¹² It was much later when by the beginning of World War I in 1914 the Imperial dependence on Indian authorities was reduced. But till the matters remained with the GOI, it emphasized on its role in the Gulf.

In 1898, the Marquis of Salisbury's Conservative government appointed a Viceroy whose whole career in India was exemplary for the British Rule in India due to his aggressive pursuance of policies that underlined the effective need for India's security in the wake of the new situation.²¹³

²¹⁰ A. K. Pasha (1995), *Kuwait: Strategies of Survival*, New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, pp. 26-28.

²¹¹ Ibid. 28.

²¹² N. 186, pp. 3-11

²¹³ Niall Ferguson (2003), *Empire : How Britain made the Modern World*, Camberwell, Australia: Penguin Books, p. 206.

Dynamics of Curzon's Policy

Lord Curzon, the first Edwardian Viceroy, had assumed his office as a Viceroy of India in 1899 and the GOIs approach towards the Gulf underwent a change, certainly not in terms of its desire to maintain control but the aggressiveness with which it now conveyed the same to the Whitehall. His administration marked a new departure in foreign policy matters. He was an ardent imperialist with highest notions of British power and prestige, the fact that led him to bring India's status with respect to Gulf, to importance. "Curzon was the only Viceroy to think in a slightly broader context and to conceive of it as a centre of operation that should built up in its own right...going far beyond Mayo's ideas of 'informal empire' was Lord Curzon".²¹⁴ Curzon often took sharp line. He had a grand vision to treat the Empire in India as an important strategic location with major resources and the point from which British interests in the rest of Asia, i.e. West Asia, south east Asia and China could be controlled.

Curzon pursued a forward policy in the Gulf. Curzon's attempts to strengthen the British position on the Gulf, even when partially successful were generally received with a certain degree of apprehension at home. With Salisbury as a Prime Minister had not helped Curzon much considering that Salisbury was "temperamentally inclined to tackle situations as they arose rather than scheme ahead"²¹⁵. He often took a strong line with colleagues in London. Lord Curzon's opportunity came when Lord Lansdowne took over the FO. Lord Lansdowne was earlier viceroy and hence Curzon believed that he could understand the stand of the GOI.

Curzon was to follow an independent foreign policy distinct from that of London in Gulf. Many were to believe later that in the twentieth century possibly because of the alarming example of Curzon, Viceroys lost a good deal of their power and the Secretary of State took

²¹⁴ Jayanta Kumar Roy (ed.) (2007), *Aspects of India's International Relations 1700-2000: South Asia and the World*, PHISPC, Centre for Studies in Civilization Vol. X, Part 6 in D. P. Chattopadhyay (Gen Ed), *A History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization*, Delhi: Pearson Longman, p. 28.

²¹⁵ D. R. Gillard (1967), "Salisbury and the Indian Defence Problem, 1885-1902", K. Bourne and D.C. Watt (eds.), *Studies in International History*, London: Longman's, Green & Co. Ltd., p. 236.

the lead in deciding most important changes of policy, though power returned to the Viceroy when attacks on the structure of British authority made it possible for him to claim that only a man directly in touch with the situation could see what had to be done to maintain stable government.²¹⁶

Lord Curzon maintained that the basis of British power lay in her naval supremacy over the Persian Gulf British *de jure* position in the Gulf was that of a sea open to the flag of all nations but its *de facto* position was different. The Gulf was a British preserve and it would have to be maintained as one.²¹⁷ Russia's advance in the Gulf worried Curzon to no end and he spent a large time of his tenure devising would be ways of resisting Russian influence. He had been suspicious of Russian designs, and more insistent on British domination in Persia, than Salisbury or Lansdowne.²¹⁸ He sought to check Russian progress in Persia and was particularly concerned let Russia receive a port on the Persian Gulf and thereby menace India.²¹⁹

On the question of whether Russia should be let into the Gulf Curzon attacked the pro Russian approach: a port for Russia in the Gulf would end Persian independence, give Russia unlimited stand for local intrigue and necessitate greater Indian defence spending as a result of the ensuing strategic danger. India would be surrounded by a "ring of fence" of Russia and France.²²⁰

The British policy changes over the decades under study in the Gulf make an interesting understanding of the demands of GOI and those of London.

GOI's tone of letters to the India Office particularly after Curzon took over, is always about how the land which was scene of chronic external aggression intestine feud has been

²¹⁶ T. O. Lloyd (1984), *The British Empire 1558-1983*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 268.

²¹⁷ N. 36, p. 218.

²¹⁸ Hugh Seton-Watson (1967, 1988), *The Russian Empire 1801-1917*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 679.

²¹⁹ N. 132, p. 230.

²²⁰ N. 111, pp. 246-7.

converted into a peaceful and flourishing centre of industry and commerce by the GOI's efforts which secured the stability of the rulers. GOI did not fail or rather made it a point to make a reference to "The Majesty's Government's" approval regarding various decisions that were taken by the British Indian Government in the establishment of its status in the region.²²¹ A Gulf Resident commented, "perhaps Curzon's greatest achievement was to put the Gulf once more upon the map: for it was mainly under his hand that interest in this region revived before the discovery of oil around these shores..."²²²

The last years of the Conservative Government had seen a forward policy against Russia by Curzon and Kitchener from India. Lansdowne had been unhappy about certain prospects of this policy but had encouraged a firm stand against Russia generally.

The Anglo-Russian convention was being discussed and it was necessary to identify the size and extent of British sphere that involved the Gulf. Hinsley has referred in his book on British foreign policy that, during the negotiations with regard to the line demarcating English sphere, Grey, "had more trouble with the Indian government than with the Russians".²²³ He did not consider the Russia having access to the Gulf and under pressure from the GOI who complained about the size of the sphere at the last minute tried to get a clause added recognizing the British interest in the maintenance of status quo in Gulf lest its omission "would seriously affect the popularity of the agreement when concluded".²²⁴ The British formally took note that Russia did not deny British interest in the status quo in the Gulf and a declaration to that effect was published along with the Convention. Grey believed that ultimately it was a question of faith in Russia's good intentions.²²⁵ This optimism was not shared either by Curzon or his successors in India.

²²¹ GOI to Brodrick, Simla, 21 April 1904, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1904, Nos. 72-74, p. 5.

²²² N. 195, p. 35.

²²³ F. H. Hinsley (1977) (ed.), *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey*, London: Cambridge University Press, p.145.

²²⁴ Ibid. p.146.

²²⁵ Ibid. p.147.

The Viceroy, Lord Curzon's Visit to Gulf, 1903

Curzon's visit to the Gulf in 1903 was yet another step in the Viceroy's strategy to gain recognition for the region in the eyes of the FO. Lord Curzon's keenness on making the Gulf as secure space for India's external links and to keep the Russian power at bay under the pretext of its interests in Persia, encouraged the initiative for the visit to the Gulf. The first viceroy to ever do so Curzon was though asked not to infringe upon FOs treaty making prerogatives.

The Viceroy's primary object was to visit the various Arab states on the southern shore of the Persian Gulf, whose chiefs were in special relations with the GOI and to inspect the British Consulates and Political Agencies maintained by it in that part of Asia.²²⁶

But Curzon was equally anxious during the course of his tour in the Gulf, a visit to the principal Persian Ports on the Northern shore of that sea, in which, moreover, the GOI had important political and commercial interests. In his note to Hamilton, Curzon noted the his purpose of his visit as to "inspect the Indian establishments that are maintained in those parts, to visit the Arab Sheikhs who are in treaty relations with the BG, and to testify to the paramount Political and Commercial ascendancy that is exercised by GB in those waters."²²⁷ He further added that, "on the opposite or Arabian shore of the Gulf, it does not seem likely that any fresh arrangements will be required with the trucial chiefs or with the Sheikh of Bahrain who are already under engagements with us that practically constitute a British Protectorate."²²⁸ To particularly install confidence in the Persian court about Curzon's visit to Gulf it was conveyed that the visit was "a fresh proof of the determination

²²⁶ Arthur Hardinge, British ambassador from Gulahek, Sept 26th1903, to Mushir-ed-Dowleh the Imperial Majesty's (Shah's) Minister for Foreign Affairs, NALondon, FO 60/730.

²²⁷ Curzon to G Hamilton, FD Secret, External no 148 dated 17 Sept 1903, 17 September 1903. Reference in FO 60/730.

²²⁸ Ibid..

of the British Government to maintain its rights and interests, which are in harmony with those of His Majesty the Shah in that region”²²⁹

The English media attached a lot of importance to the Viceroy’s visit, a matter that did not go unnoticed by the Persian press. An article in Tehran Gazette “Iran” hoped that “this event will increase and consolidate the political and commercial relations between Persia & England and India.”²³⁰ This was the time when the GOI had been fervently deliberating about the treaty to be signed with Shaikh of Qatar, but had not met with similar response from the FO. Curzon, in his note to Hamilton refers to Kuwait, Muscat but made no reference to Qatar and the treaty to be signed.

Curzon however preferred to stay at British residency in Bushire and decided not to go beyond to the Persian court. He went to Sharjah, where he met the Trucial Chiefs. From Sharjah he went to Bandar Abbas, Qishm and Henjam and Lingeh. He stayed for two days in Bahrain.

Curzon conveyed the details of his visit to Brodrick ending the note by stating, “it cannot, I think, be doubted that they (officers) will have left upon the rulers and peoples of the Gulf, a powerful and lasting impression of the incontestable predominance of British interests in those regions, and of the resolute intention of the British and Indian Governments to maintain them.”²³¹ During the time of Curzon’s Viceroyalty, significant changes were made in the status of Bahrain and Qatar.

2.7. Comparison with India

There were not some but multiple instances in the discussion between the Political Agent, the Resident and the Deputy and Secretary at the GOI in FD wherein the analogies between India and the nature of British position and interaction with the Gulf came up. For example

²²⁹ Arthur Hardinge, British Ambassador from Gulahek, Sept 26th1903, to Mushir-ed-Dowleh the Imperial Majesty’s (Shah’s) Minister for Foreign Affairs, NALondon, FO 60/730.

²³⁰ *Tehran Gazette* “Iran” on 3 November 1903 NALondon (POR), FO 60/730.

²³¹ Report of the visit of the Viceroy to Maskat and the PG, Curzon to Brodrick HMs SSI, FD, Secret/ External/ No 196, Fort William, dated 17 December 1903, p. 5 FO 60/730

in the case of Bahrain there were matters/issues which were compared to the situation in India though it was asserted and reasserted that India was a different case with a different status altogether.²³²

One such example can be considered J. A. Saldana in his *Précis on Bahrein affairs* argued Bahrain's case in relation with India.

"India" is defined by the General Clauses Act (X of 1897) as including "British India together with any territories of any Native Prince or Chief under the suzerainty of Her Majesty exercised through the Governor-General of India or through any Governor or other officer subordinate to the G-G of India." The territory of the Native States is not British territory; nor are their subjects British subjects. But the Sovereignty over them, as Sir Courtenay Ilbert in his *Government of India*, aptly observes, "is divided between the British Government and their rulers in proportions which differ greatly according to the history and importance of the several States and which are regulated partly by treaties of less formal engagements, partly by *sanads* or charters and partly usage." The BG has undertaken to protect these States from external aggression, but as "paramount power," observes Sir Couretnay Ilbert:-

- (a) "exercise exclusive control over the foreign relation of the State;
- (b) Assumes a general but a limited responsibility for internal peace of the State;
- (c) assumes a special responsibility for the safety and welfare of British subjects resident in the State; and
- (d) requires subordinate cooperation in the task of resisting foreign aggression and maintaining internal order."

A perusal of the *Precis* will show perhaps that all these conditions are satisfied in the case of Bahrein. If then Bahrein is under the suzerainty of His Majesty exercised through the Governor General of India, does it not come under the same category as any Native State in India, and may not its relations to the BG and other foreign governments be regulated on the same principles as are applicable to our Native States? If not what is the exact

²³² One of the reference s found in, NAI, FD, Secret E, October 1905, Nos. 508-511, Foreign Department Notes

international status of Bahrein? These important points have to be borne in view in studying the modern history of Bahrein.²³³

But at the same time there was absolutely no confusion about the status of the difference between the two regions. At no point of time was there even a remote belief/thought of establishing a system in the Gulf that corresponded with that of India. Gulf was its informal empire that enabled the GOI to protect its ever supreme colonial empire in India.

2.8. The Gulf: A Zone of Non-interference

British interests in Bahrain and Qatar

In 1903 in response to a comment on the Persian Gulf, in the House of Lords, Lord Lansdowne had summarised that the policy in Persian Gulf. It was to be directed in to protect and promote British trade in those waters; towards the exclusion of the legitimate trade of other Powers; and to consider the establishment of a naval base, or a fortified port, in the Persian Gulf by any other Power as a very grave menace to British interests, and to be resisted with all means at the disposal.²³⁴

On the issue of points connected with commercial interests in the Gulf which was raised by Lamington, Lansdowne said, “It is impossible, to my mind, to disassociate our commercial and our political interests.”²³⁵ The British maintained this position throughout the period.

Issues of British Diplomacy and Ottoman Response

British diplomacy and Ottoman response was more evident in the cases of Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar. Though Oman was converted exclusively into British sphere, Kuwait remained a region of debate with the German interest too. Bahrain and Qatar in that context had witnessed less European activity and interest though it never ceased to be out of British

²³³ J.A. Saldana, *Precis of Bahrein Affairs*, 1854-1904, Part I, preface IOR/ L/P&S/20/C241.

²³⁴ Persian Gulf Statement by Lord Lansdowne in the House of Lords, May 05, 1903, in reply to a question put by Lord Lamington. Despatch of Sir E Grey to Sir A Nicholson FO, NALondon (PRO), FO 881/9342X, Aug 29, 1907.

²³⁵ Ibid.

inst interests of any strategic designs and the GOI remained equally vehement in treating it as its zone of influence opposing the Persian, Ottoman or European interests. The region was a traditional area of influence for the Ottomans who looked at it now as being under threat from the increasing involvement of British without concerns for Ottoman sovereignty.

Throughout the period under study GOI recognized Turkish rights from Kuwait to Qatif town though difficult to dispute Turkish claims to exercise jurisdiction as far as, and inclusive of Ojair. South of this place and on the El Katr Peninsula the British government refused to recognize the rights of Turkish sovereignty and this was in spite the fact that the Turks had garrison at El Bida'a. The British position was that from and inclusive of Odeid eastward, the coast belonged to the Trucial chiefs as far as Ras-al-Khaima. Thus formally recognizing Turkish position in the Gulf, the British government restricted Turkish sovereignty in Bahrain and Qatar. Though avoiding open confrontation on the issue. The other aspect of this position was impressing upon the local rulers of Bahrain and Qatar as well as the Ottoman Government that their inefficiency was the cause of increased British presence in the Gulf waters which the Turkish Government claimed to be Turkish waters.²³⁶

The Ottoman government saw these developments in their waters with alarm and suspicion. The region had for long been governed by the Ottoman power which due to its weakened hold in the mid nineteenth century had seen the position of the British rise and that of the allegiance of the rulers weaken. The period of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) saw a distinct change in the policies of the Ottoman government. Though incapable of renewing the early glory and power that it enjoyed over the Arab world the lengthy reign of Sultan Abdulhamid provided a constant reminder to the British of Turkish rights in the Arab side of the Gulf. The Porte was worried that the European powers might undermine the Empire's independence and integrity from within through techniques of 'peaceful penetration' and thus left unchecked the European influence might seriously undermine the

²³⁶ Note on Bahrain, CAEd., Records of Bahrain, Vol. 3, 1892-1923, pp. 310-311.

authority of the Ottoman government leading to partition. The growth of paramount British influence in the Gulf region was a cause of serious concern which led him to strengthen the Ottoman presence in the region in the 1860's and bring Najd and the Arabian coast of the Gulf of Qatar under its direct control in the 1870s.²³⁷ In the 1870s the Ottoman relation with British had deteriorated and it viewed British position and action in the Gulf with apprehension.

If on one hand, the GOI took immediate action for the slightest Turkish pretensions on the Arabian side of the Gulf and conveyed its strong protests through the British Ambassador to the Porte, the various reports of the central and local Ottoman officials reaching the Ottoman court suggested a different story which identified Britain as the primary threat along with the high ambitions of local rulers.²³⁸ Mehmed Ali the former ruler of Basra had argued in 1889 that the local rulers had been rejecting British offers of agreement wanting to retain their independence. However in view of this the British could have only two policies: externally to protect British-Indian merchants and internally to watch and forestall any aggression on the region by another foreign power.²³⁹ British interests in the trade had made it develop policies that helped her confine the trade in the Gulf region to herself and thereby keep the European presence out. Hence the appearance of German trader in Bahrain and the French Goguyer was a matter of concern for the British apart from the European it would lose monopoly over trade.

To combat the British power and presence in the Gulf, Mehmed Ali stressed the necessity of coastal defence:

It is expected that the English, who seek a pretext to seize and occupy the Arabian coasts, will attempt to send troops to certain disputed places on the Ottoman shore under the pretext of stopping disorder among the bedouins, and since the most important of these [disputed] places stretch from Kuwait harbour, neighbouring Basra, and the Najd coast to Bahrain, first and

²³⁷ Gokhan Cetinsaya (2003), "The Ottoman view of British Presence in Iraq and the Gulf: The Era of Abdulhamid II", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2, April 2003, Frank Cass, p.194-195.

²³⁸ Ibid. p.196.

²³⁹ Ibid. p.195.

foremost, it is extremely necessary to protect and reinforce these [places] against any possibility.²⁴⁰

The reports of increasing British presence in the 1890s reached the Ottoman court through its important officials as the former Mutasseriff of Basra, member of Council of State of Basra and the Inspector of Army. They were the ones who reported about the rising numbers of British officers in the Gulf region, their attempt to spread 'sedition' to the Governor General of India and teaching English language to the Arab youngsters and distributed money and arms to the people to expand their influence.

The British patrolling the shores of the Gulf apart from the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean was a show of their power. The analogy with India was not lost. The Sultan feared the British "zones of influence" and the subsequent partition of his empire on the lines of Egypt and India. The Ottoman officials believed that: The policy of the British was to carry out their perceived intention, alongside the occupation of Egypt, to establish an Arab government in Arabia, a Sudanese government in Africa, so separating the Caliphate [from them] and placing them complete under their own rule, like India.²⁴¹ A strong line of thought that ran through the reports of the officials was that British no longer spared a thought for the protection and integrity of the Ottoman Empire rather they were allowing its breakup which marked a shift in their policy due to commercial and strategic reasons and that the disappearance of the Ottoman empire rather than its survival was favoured by England. The fear that British will take control of the entire region by subverting the Ottoman authority was all pervasive in the reports.

Few reasons for all this were also attributed to the negligence of the wali and the incompetence of the local administrative officials of the Ottoman to a great extent whose callousness had provoked the local population to lose faith in Ottoman administration. Costal defence, fiscal administrative and other measures to gain sympathy of the Arabs thereby forestalling foreign intrigue and agitation were efforts suggested to regain authority over the region and the Arabs. Where ottoman officials were still deliberating and hopeful

²⁴⁰ BOA, YEE, 14'366/126/9, 8 Kanun-I sani 1304 in Gokhan Cetinsaya (2003). p.195.

²⁴¹ Ibid. p.198.

about revival of their power over the Gulf region, British had consistently followed a policy denying Ottoman authority over certain places in the Gulf though not objecting to their presence over the others but at the same time alarmed at the slightest move on the part of the Porte to establish his authority in any place undesired by the British. While GOI remained keen on acquiring increased authority over the people, rulers and the region, the Home Government did not want to raise any issue of immediate concern that could alarm the Ottoman Government. It had little concern for the existence and demands of the Ottoman government over the Gulf, it only wanted to retain the *status quo* in the light of other foreign powers aiming to play an active role in the region. The existence of the Ottoman Empire, though weak, actually was beneficial for the British activity in the Gulf thereby keeping other aspiring powers at bay. Throughout the period of Curzon's Viceroyalty the GOI continued to make substantial changes in the region as the Trucial coast remained the backwater and nowhere in the region could the Turkish government take a forward policy except for its garrison in Bidha in Qatar.²⁴²

Qatar- Turkish influence over the trucional coast in the 1890s had concerned the GOI which had taken objections to the same. Qatar had once been controlled and claimed by Bahrain. British claims to Qatar were based on the Perpetual Treaty of 1853, with Bahrain whose jurisdiction over Qatar was then recognized by the British. British interests and connections with Bahrain were important similarly Bahrain considered its interests in Qatar as important. British had recognized the rights of Abu Dhabi over Qatar's island of Odeid, thereby refusing the claims of the Shaikh of Qatar. In event of the Turks establishing their influence on Odeid in 1891, the Indian government had suggested their eviction from the territories. The GOI was willing to expel the Turkish garrison from Odeid, particularly since the local population under their chief appeared to be favourably disposed towards Britain. Shaikh Qassim was concerned about the Turkish expansion of control over his territories²⁴³. Salisbury in the IO had opposed the idea of warning the Porte then over Odeid

²⁴² Rafiullah Azmi (2004), *Conflict in the Gulf: British Quest for Domination and Ottoman Response*, Delhi: Academic Excellence, p. 182.

²⁴³ N. 111, pp. 24-25.

and Zobara but later relented though the Turks continued to maintained their right to sovereignty over the two places.²⁴⁴ The FO was opposed to any such action of removal of Turks as it saw little chance of permanent success and not fully certain of the possible gain.

The decisions of the GOI were only suggestions for the Whitehall. The GOI highly relied on the responses and comments of the PRPG for the situation and decisions in Gulf. It can be observed in the following pages that GOI resisted every move on the part of Turkey or Persia to extend their claims and sway over the territories in Gulf and was equally alarmed at the continuous presence of a European power or its intentions of any permanent settlement in the Gulf. The IO & the FO did not buy the GOI's argument always. In the instances of suggestions for greater control and sharp action from the GOI, the FO often settled down for conciliatory position of and believed that the conveying of the British position and status in the Gulf to the interested powers by itself was enough an action. The authorities in London had the European politics in mind, the GOI had Indian interests as paramount justified by its understanding that India was a prime aspect of the British Empire and the threat to which cannot be ignored in view of larger British interests.

The clash between the two was inevitable, and remained, but such instances became more frequent during the given period. The reasons were varied. The increasing European interests in the region; the Ottoman domestic & political condition and its policy of extending its authority in Gulf; Persian claims over Bahrain, which was no longer now a domain restricted to its Shaikh and was fast becoming a territory of heightened British interest; GOIs aggressive demands for the establishment of a complete control over the Gulf and the altered political situation in Europe.

The events in Gulf history may have unfolded themselves differently had the GOIs stand been accepted by the FO in its early stage of reference.

²⁴⁴ N. 242, p. 42.

Impact on the Gulf and Local Response

It is important to look at the GOI's policy from the regional and local perspective to ensure a more holistic approach to the study. The British policies in the Gulf that were structured, administered and implemented by the GOI in consultation and agreement of the Home government had serious implications on the region and its people. The profound impact of the British rule experienced by the people and the tribes in the region forever altered its socio-economic and political structure. While referring to the policies of the GOI and its clash with the London government over the implementation of the policies, it is important to understand the impact that was felt on the region. The British period brought in a new socio-political and commercial era which had far reaching consequences on the Gulf.

The Arabs in the Gulf had played an important role in the east-west trade. Despite the rise and fall of Empires in the region as Abbassid or the Mongol invasions, the Gulf retained its importance as the hub of east-west trade. During the Islamic period the trade in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean region increased involving all Asian and African countries in which merchants from the region mutually benefitted from the lucrative trade. The local traders who developed a stake in it encouraged a thriving business.

This peaceful commercial exchange of the Arab-Islamic mercantile trade was affected by the entry of the Portuguese who controlled the trade in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean and engaged in violence. The Portuguese were the first European power who attempted to monopolize the sea routes for trade in the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf. With heavier ships, bigger guns and artillery they ruined the infrastructure that was untouched so far. They first targeted the Muslim traders who were trading for long in the Gulf waters. The introduction of the *cartazes* by the Portuguese for trade in the Indian Ocean had ensured their trade monopoly.²⁴⁵ The Portuguese inflicted their authority and soon controlled the ports in India Gulf and east Africa. Local traders were forced to buy passes and pay custom duties. In the middle of the seventeenth century Omani Arabs challenged

²⁴⁵ “Cartazes” were trading coupons or licences issued by the Portuguese that granted protection for any merchant ships against attacks and providing them with taxes.

the Portuguese authority and by the end of the century were even recognized as the new powers on the East African coast.²⁴⁶ The internecine power struggles in Oman however failed to help Oman retain its position in the region. The Portuguese in three ways disrupted the balance by overwhelming use of violence; use of flags at the sea to establish authority and build forts to identify particular areas as their areas. All this changed the face of commercial exchanges apart from ruining the business and the merchant class.

The Arab-Islamic mercantile trade was seriously affected by the monopolizing tactics of the Portuguese but it was the British East India Company that after arriving, ensured the collapse of the trade. The British realized the grand imperial designs that the Portuguese aimed for but could not have realized. Khaldoun Hasan al Naqeeb in his theoretical work, argues that the collapse of the traditional *mudarabah* trade (or speculative trade) of the Arabs was affected and it contributed to the collapse of Gulf economy, as monopoly in high-profit commodities was established completely monopolized by the Europeans.²⁴⁷ Indian Ocean was identified as a 'Muslim lake' but soon the Arab Muslim merchants lost their role of middlemen in world trade and the local native merchants were confined to being agents or distributors of European manufactured goods, trading of which was monopolized by the imperialist companies.²⁴⁸

The Arab tribes challenged the British authority for various reasons. The British were a nation of traders and they spared no time and efforts in destroying the trade operated by the locals. In a region of limited agricultural opportunities, trade was a significant basis of wealth for the Arabs and at times the only practical source of livelihood, which they had been masters at for centuries. They vehemently fought to gain the position in the trade which they enjoyed earlier. However, this 'lawful resistance' was confused as defiance against established power in the region. The British retaliation thus "aimed at camouflaging

²⁴⁶August H. Nimtz (1980) *Islam and politics in East Africa: The Sufi Order in Tanzania*, New York: University of Minnesota Press, p. 5

²⁴⁷ N. 71, p. 51.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

imperialist designs and in making resistance appear as piracy”.²⁴⁹ Oman’s importance as a Gulf and a sea power in the eighteenth century, had undermined British plans besides its interaction with Tipu Sultan of India that proved increasingly dangerous. The British thus entered into an agreement and after signing a treaty with Muscat in 1798 and neutralizing the threat from Oman for British ships and trade, the British attempts, “were directed towards Qawasim who had been carrying on a vigorous and profitable trade by sea.”²⁵⁰ The British policy makers in India considered the Qawasim a threat to their extension in Gulf. The war was a trade war but the policy makers in India believed it to be a war on piracy.²⁵¹ Soon the coast of Arabia, Aden and Yemeni ports were attacked under the guise of limiting slavery. Ras al –Khyma (of the Qawasimis) and al Fujairah were attacked only to impose the treaty of 1820.²⁵²

The Gulf Arabs were “more vigorous fighters and extremely skillful navigators”.²⁵³ The helplessness that was brought about by the British domination and limitations on the trade prospects diverted the efforts of the Arab chiefs towards the Ottoman or the Persian Empires as they showed willingness to accept their authority in order to dispel the threat of the British. The plight and sufferings of those on the Persian coast was immense as they were evicted from the coast and often dislocated or confined to a small place as most Arabs were forbidden to move or build ships or even engage in trading activity with India as they were used to for centuries thus robbing them of their livelihood and profits.

As far as the institution of slavery was concerned, the concept was widely recognized and accepted in Asia and Africa wherein the Indian rulers often relied on slaves provided by the Arabs who turned mercenaries in the local ruler’s armies. Emperor of Zanzibar supplied slaves to rulers of Bahrain and Qatar. To curtail this power of the rulers the British banned the practice in the name of slavery.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.p. 49.

²⁵⁰ N. 73, p. 31.

²⁵¹ Ibid. p. 151.

²⁵² Ibid. p. 31.

²⁵³ N. 25, p. 32.

As against the other European powers particularly the Portuguese, the British were able to establish themselves firmly in the region due to their base in India. Policy was framed in India and implemented along with the Indian resources. The sustenance of British power also sent a message to the existing regional powers- the Ottoman and the Persian that any defiance on their part to assert their control over territories will be futile. Not much resistance could be offered by these Empires considering the enormous resources and power that Britain enjoyed at land and sea.

This impacted not alone the Ottoman and Persian ambitions in the Gulf but also affected the local situation in the Gulf States. The British settled on the Arab side of the Gulf as they pacified the locals who were lucrative traders. The traders and the rulers who had high stakes in trades had suffered due to the British domination. The hopelessness of the situation encouraged defiance that was translated by the British as piracy (already mentioned above) but above all it was the increasing presence of the merchants, particularly from India who enjoyed the British protected status. These merchants were influential in the Indo-Gulf trade of the British period and cornered much of the profits that the Arab traders and the rulers aimed for. This created resentment thus at times leading to the expulsion of the traders from the territories as in the case of Qatar.²⁵⁴

Socially, earlier the inter-tribal wars resulted in dispersal of family groups, tribes or segment. The autonomous groups revolved around the rich and enterprising cores of tribesmen dominated the trade and the pearling industry. Though these various groups operated in different territories, “the autonomy mattered than the sovereignty”.²⁵⁵ It was only with the British interference which aimed at alleviating intertribal conflicts, was sovereignty fixed within territorial boundary, the beginning of which happened in 1820 with the Maritime peace treaty. Apart from this, was the imposition of the primogeniture. A concept that was alien to the region. For example in Bahrain was maintained a stable polity

²⁵⁴ Reference to the same in section on Indian traders in Qatar in chapter 4.

²⁵⁵ N. 8, p. 73.

and economy, as the rule of Shaikh Isa for long remained recognized.²⁵⁶ The imposition of the rule of primogeniture contributed to internal rumblings in the dynasty, forced to accept a British protected ruler.

The other aspect of British rule in Gulf was the enhanced process of urbanization which received a different dimension under the British. During the British period the old trading ports as Muscat Oman 'dwindled away' whereas Bahrain and Bushire emerged as important trading ports in the Gulf.²⁵⁷ The growth of pearl industry and the inflow and outflow of merchants and traders in the region gave a cause for urbanization. "Tribal mercantilism was the single most important agent of urbanization along the coast."²⁵⁸ It is argued that fully fledged port towns with complex socio-political organizations only began to take shape in the second half of the nineteenth century under the combined forces of the pearl boom and the British informal empire which provided necessary political conditions for the urban economics to prosper.²⁵⁹ The GOI sheltered the commercial emporia of Gulf in variety of ways by providing military protection to the coast against any tribal threats; consolidating the 'precarious' position of local ruling dynasties; granting privileges of extra territorial jurisdiction to segments of urban population.²⁶⁰ There was no attempt to state building on the part of the British. That was not considered necessary or important as is evident from the administrative structure raised by the GOI. Bahrain had become the basis of British commercial operations in the Gulf and at intervals, the GOI entered into negotiations and agreements with the local Shaikhs of Bahrain (1880), Trucial States (1892), Kuwait (1899) and Qatar (1916). If in the early nineteenth century, with the help of steam navigation the Gulf was a region to ensure fast communication with India and a maritime station for British shipping to and from India, the late nineteenth and the twentieth century Gulf was a strong hub of commercial activities distributed in the various ports.

²⁵⁶ N. 8, p. 73.

²⁵⁷ N. 71, pp. 52-53.

²⁵⁸ N. 4, p. 26.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 43.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. pp. 43-44.

Initially British interests were largely commercial with little concern for administrative affairs. Concerns were more towards the maintenance of peace, protection of ports, securing the communication lines, discouraging the claims of Ottoman and Persia over Gulf and protection of the pearl trade.

The GOI encouraged the rise of individuals and dynasties that could exert influence and control over the tribesmen. It protected such Shaikh and dynasties and interfered in the times of tribal conflicts.²⁶¹ This need not mean that the Gulf waters remained at ultimate situation of peace during the British domination. Tribal warfare at sea and intentions of attack on territories were masterminded by disgruntled and/or expansionist tribes. The incidents however emanated strong reactions from the GOI as the rulers were forced to pay compensation to the affected parties (in case of Qassim, the merchants) for lives, property and loss or simply to assert British domination and to ensure that such incidents could be discouraged in the future.

As the importance of the Gulf increased in the international affairs, the GOI replaced the native agents with the British agents. In Bahrain the British officer was appointed in 1900 but in 1904 the imperial officer at Manama was changed from an assistant to a Political Agent which marked a new era in the British-Bahrain relations.

The GOI's policies favoured the growth of port settlements by stabilizing the boundaries of tribal influence. Initially the British referred to the tribal leaders as Chiefs. No longer could a tribal leading Shaikh aim at territorial expansion in different or adjacent territory beyond his domains. The treaties bound him to his identified areas and the shaikhs refrained from insisting fearing the loss of power. During the period under study, the increasing fear of entry of European powers resulted in the GOI formalizing such agreements that controlled the foreign relations of the Shaikhs. The port towns gained importance over the hinterlands as the Royal navy patrolled the waters of the Gulf ceaselessly.

²⁶¹ Ibid. p. 50.

Commercially the Gulf reflected the increased economic activity. Bombay with its proximity to the Gulf continued to remain the hub of commercial activities.

A Case of Bahrain

Bahrain was recognized as an important trading centre in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. The history of trade was long. Pearl fishing was its greatest business as a large population was involved in it as divers, merchants and traders. As Nelida Fuccaro has mentioned, “the strategic position of the islands favoured the consolidation of local administration under the aegis of the regional powers and of the maritime and land empires which dominated the Gulf coast.”²⁶² The presence of British resulted in fixed military and political frontiers the absence of which had “fostered continuous instability in the region”.²⁶³ This did not help the Al Khalifas who were affected by the British protected Indian merchants who traded more in pearls thereby reducing the profits of the Al Khalifa family.

As an important trading centre located strategically, Bahrain enjoyed a special status in the British Gulf policy. The agreements of 1880 and 1892 had converted it into a virtual protectorate. The pearl boom of the nineteenth and the twentieth century had brought encouraged international interest thus bringing the foreign players closer to the Gulf that created a problem of jurisdiction over the foreigners. Besides the claims of Turkey, Persia and Saudi Arabia made the situation even more complex. The subjects of various countries as India, Germany, America, Iran, Saudi Arabi and non Bahraini Arabs were placed in charge of British agency at Manama thereby undermining the sovereignty of Bahrain. The Order in Council created dual authority system in Bahrain one representing the ruler and the other with the British agency.

The Persian Gulf in 1873 was a region that reflected the interests of the Persian and the Ottoman empires. The British had long established their authority in the Gulf and objected

²⁶² N. 4, p.16.

²⁶³ Ibid.

to every claim on the part of the regional powers who were the earlier claimants to the territories in the region. The British power encouraged challenge from the region as Oman, a powerful empire in the Gulf put up a strongest resistance to earlier the Portuguese and later the British designs. The Ottoman claims to the influence in the Gulf came through the Saudi power in Najd and the Ottomans had also established themselves at the head of the Gulf. 1873 was also a period of heightened European activity in the Gulf as Russia, Germany, France made consistent attempts to make inroads in the Gulf region through the Ottoman Empire. The British India's policy towards the Gulf was based on its interaction with India. Policy dynamics for Britain in Gulf were not stagnant. Initially it took a position of non interference in the internal affairs of the states but that no longer remained the policy. As its base in India became strong and confirmed and as it realised the threat to its frontiers in India from the European powers, the Gulf gained importance in policy decisions. The geo-strategic location of the Gulf proved to be of vital importance. The GOI was particular about its position in the Gulf and often questioned the position of London on the matters if contradictory. With Curzon as the Viceroy of India the Gulf policy matters became a cause of immediate attention.

In the course of it all the social, political and economic dynamics of the region and its people changed. The fiercely independent tribes in the Gulf were restricted to specific regions and often suppressed by force by projecting them as those who affected peace thus. Their trade suffered as British took over.

The special references to the study of Bahrain and Qatar during the given period of study will help analyze the position of GOI vis-à-vis the IO and the FO and reflect over the various reasons that acted as causative factors to GOI's perception of the situation in the Gulf. It will also help explain and evaluate some aspects of the present state of existence of these countries.

Bahrain: Domestic, Regional and Global Concerns

The Memorandum of 1874, for the British Foreign Office refers to Bahrain as “a small group of islands, three in number, on the south west side of the Persian Gulf, in the centre of Bahrein Bay, the principle of which is Bahrein (or Aval) lying about ten miles off the coast of Arabia”.¹ Bahrain is Arabic dual form of Bahr, i. e. two seas, thus the islands that lay in the bay of the same name.² J. A. Saldanha referred to it as, “perhaps the most important and interesting place in the Persian Gulf”.³

Nature of the Island

The largest island in the Gulf, Bahrain was favoured by nature and so advantageously suited for commercial purposes, that it was frequently the bone of contention between the neighbouring powers. Bahrain was important as a centre of pearl fisheries of the Gulf which were considered ‘the richest and most productive in the world’ conducted on extensive scale.⁴ It was also the residence of a number of British Indian traders. The trade and wealth of Bahrain were centered in its two principal towns, Manama and Mubarak (Muharraq).⁵ While Manama was the commercial capital of Bahrain, Muharraq was the seat

¹ Memorandum of separate claims of Turkey and Persia to sovereignty over the island of Bahrein, CAEd. Records of Bahrain, Primary documents, Vol. II, 1868 to 1892, p. 333.

² J. Theodore Bent (1889), “The Bahrein Islands, in the Persian Gulf”, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Jan., 1890), p. 1.

³ J.A. Saldana, *Precis of Bahrein Affairs*, 1854-1904, Part I, preface, IOR/ L/P&S/20/C241,.

⁴ Memorandum of separate claims of Turkey and Persia to sovereignty over the island of Bahrein, CAEd. Records of Bahrain, Primary documents, Vol. II, 1868 to 1892, p. 333.

⁵ Annual report of the administration of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political agency for the year 1874-75, CAEd. Administration reports 1873-1914, p.3.

of government, the aristocratic capital.⁶ It was during the long reign of Shaikh Isa bin Ali (1869-192) that Muharraq had become a seat of the government (Dar Al Hukumah) under British protection. Bahrain has been noted to be a “busy ‘buffer’ zone between the Arab and the Iranian worlds and a point of intersection between the tribal and agricultural frontiers of the Persian Gulf”.⁷ The coastline was less of a barrier but “a permeable border in a region which had a long history of indigenous seafaring supported by an advanced maritime technology”.⁸

As the Gulf Resident Percy Cox explained, the population of the island composed of two distinct but important elements, namely:

- (a) Sunni Mohammadens- Arabs “with a sprinkling of Negroes, keeping up a constant and more or less migratory connection with the Arabs of the mainland”.⁹ Among these Arabs was the family of the ruling chief from the Utubi tribe.
- (b) Shia Mohammadens, namely ‘Bahreinis’ who even prior to ruling family, inhabited the island and at the turn of the twentieth century and were a little in majority.¹⁰

Ethnically Arab, the Bahraini Shias are older in the region than the Persian Shias and have closer relations with Iraqi and Saudi Shias.

The Shia peasants who formed the majority of the total population of settled population of Bahrain and of the oasis of al- Qatif and al-Hasa on the mainland resisted the Sunni tribes, “which constituted the most dynamic and eclectic political force of the region”.¹¹ The

⁶ N. 2, p. 4.

⁷ Nelida Fuccaro (2009), *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf, Manama Since 1800*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p.16.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cox to Secretary, GOI, FD, No. 421, 17 December 1904, Bushire, CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 194.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ N. 7, pp. 16-17.

consolidation of the tribal government and the inflow of the Sunni tribes from the mainland had radically transformed the social, political and urban fabric of the islands.¹²

Bahrain remained an important island/region in the British designs as *defacto* power in the Gulf. It was a suitable tract of territory under effective British occupation and was regarded as a convenient centre of British influence in the Gulf waters. With an improved pier and harbour accommodation it was believed “under expert exploitation”, to open up to “considerable possibilities”.¹³

The island, however was an important part of other regional and international power structures too. It was the “object of much tender solicitude from all parties”, Lord Curzon had mentioned.¹⁴ Persia and Turkey, two big regional powers then, had time and again aspired to establish their control over Bahrain in the twentieth century by invoking their previous claims of control over it. In their attempt they clashed with the British authorities. The Shaikh of Bahrain was the sovereign ruler of the island, who in conduct of his internal administration was projected to be independent of control. His external relations with the British government were regulated by treaty and engagement. This chapter will analyse the domestic, regional and global issues affecting Bahrain. It will examine the British challenge to Persian-Ottoman designs over Bahrain, Bahrain’s acceptance in acquiring a British protected status as a response to it, India’s influence over Bahrain due to trade, interests referring to Indian merchants and the role of British India.

In order to understand the causes and to trace the British policy in the period under study, it is necessary to understand the background/history of Bahrain.

¹² Ibid. p.17.

¹³ Cox to Secretary, GOI, FD, No. 123, 11 March 1905, Bushire, CAEd, Records of Bahrein, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 245.

¹⁴ George N. Curzon (1892), *Persia and the Persian Question*, London and New York: Longmans, Green and Co., p. 455.

3.1. Historical Background

The inhabitants of Bahrain to whom a Persian and Arab descent was variously assigned were subject to their own race.¹⁵ In the 16th century, the territory was under the jurisdiction of the King of Hormuz but as the Portuguese captured Hormuz in 1515, Bahrein became a tributary of Portugal though still under Kings of Hormuz as regional powers. The Portuguese recognized the importance of Bahrain, and took it in 1521, and built one of their principal forts in the Persian Gulf thereon. The ambitious Portuguese explorer, Alfonso Albuquerque believed that with Hormuz and Bahrain in Portuguese hands, the Persian Gulf would be entirely in their power.¹⁶ It remained so till the early seventeenth century.

In 1622, the Portuguese were expelled by the Anglo-Persian alliance, as Shah Abbas the Great of Persia coveted the pearl banks adjoining its shores though in 1625 the Portuguese restored to Shah Abbas his coast possessions retaining only the pearl banks of Bahrain.¹⁷ Twenty years later a company of Portuguese merchants, eager for the pearls of these islands, organized an expedition from Goa to recover Bahrain, but the ships were taken and plundered by the Arabs before ever they entered the Gulf. Thus fell the great Portuguese power in the Gulf.¹⁸ Since then the history of Bahrain, till twentieth century as Curzon stated, remained a history that, “(has been) of constant vicissitudes, the result of the covetous appetite of the surrounding nations. In all the conflicts for the supremacy of the Gulf waged by the Arabs, Persians and Turks, each combatant has fixed his eyes upon Bahrein”¹⁹. All these powers at some point of a time in the history of the island state tried to control it at the cost of other.

¹⁵ Arnold Wilson (1928, 1954, and 1959), *The Persian Gulf: An Historical sketch from the Earlier times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, London: George Allen & Unwin, pp. 244-245.

¹⁶ N. 2, p. 1.

¹⁷ N. 14, p. 419

¹⁸ N. 2, pp. 11-12.

¹⁹ N. 14, p. 457.

The **Persians** retained control over the island till 1782 or 1783.²⁰ Till 1747 it was Nadir Shah (c.1698-1747), the chief of Persia, who retained a good hold over Bahrain. Thereafter it was subject to the Shaikh of Bushire who was a vassal of Persia. However with the death of Karim Khan (1707-1779) who ruled after Nadir Shah, the influence of Persia began to wane. Soon the chiefs of Bahrain began to vie for supremacy. In the meantime the Al Khalifas, a sub-division of the wealthy and powerful Utubis and who were later to establish their long term authority over Bahrain, attracted by the prospects of the Bahrain pearl fishery, had migrated and settled in Zobara, a shallow sheltered bay in the south-west corner of the Qatar peninsula.²¹ The Al Khalifas, soon took advantage of the lawlessness in the absence of the strong Persian authority and plundered the island of Bahrain in 1783, though they did not settle on it immediately. Earlier, Shaikh Nasir, the Persian Governor of Bushire and Bahrain, fearing the increasing influence of the Arabs, repeatedly attempted to expel them from Zobara but without effect. He eventually was forced by the Al-Khalifas to retire to his fort.²²

However the very next year in 1784, with the help of the Al Sabahs the Al Khalifas/Utubis once again attacked and subjugated the island. The Al Sabah chiefs soon left the island over a dispute concerning division of land and power the Al Khalifas/Utubis remained the sole masters of Bahrain. Shaikh Nasir of Bushire, who earlier held power on the island before the capture by the Khalifas/Utubis did appeal to Persia for help but in vain as internal dissensions in Persia had complicated matters and Persia was unable to send forces to Bahrain. From this time onwards the Persian occupation of Bahrain terminated.

Bahrain was a part of the scheme of another power that was located to its south. The power of **Muscat** had increased under Syed Sultan, the Imam of Muscat, and soon he attacked Bahrain in 1800-1801 and took away leading families with him.²³ Those who managed to

²⁰ Memorandum of separate claims of Turkey and Persia to sovereignty over the island of Bahrein, CAEd. Records of Bahrain, Primary documents, Vol. II, 1868 to 1892, p. 333.

²¹ N. 3.

²² Ibid.

²³ N. 14, Saldana states it as 1800.

escape to Zobara in Qatar, or to their kinsmen Al Sabah at Kuwait,²⁴ later recovered the island with the help of the Wahhabis. The threat from Muscat almost nullified with the death of Syed Sultan and the island remained with the Al Khalifas. The Al Khalifa Shaikhs had taken help under **Wahabbis** and chiefs of the littoral till 1810 as the Wahabi ruler took reins of the government of Bahrain and Zubara and appointed as his agent Abdullah bin Ufeysan.²⁵ It was at this time in 1809, that the Shaikhs of Bahrain, tired of their allegiance to the Wahhabbis enquired from the British Resident in the Gulf whether if they retired from the mainland and withheld their allegiance from the Wahhabbis, the British Government supply them for a time with a vessel or two, so as to enable them to remain undisturbed at Bahrain.²⁶ At this time the Resident had requested the Bombay Government, then in charge of the Gulf affairs, to grant the request, but the Bombay Government declined to interfere in the matter.²⁷ The Wahhabbi's Vakeel over Bahrain, Zobara, Katif and Qatar was responsible for the supervision and collection of tribute while the administration of Bahrain remained in the hands of Utubis, the al Khalifas.²⁸

Awakening of Interests in Nineteenth Century

But the threat of Turks led by Ibrahim Pasha to the Wahhabi province of Nejd led the Wahhabis to reduce the force and the Utubis drove out the Wahhabi Agent in 1811 and once again gained power in Bahrain.²⁹ In 1815-16 the Imam of Muscat Saiyyed Sa'id attacked Bahrain but was repulsed with great loss but this made the Al Khalifas appeal to the Prince of Shiraz who sent the dresses of honour, the acceptance of which the 'Utoobees...found it necessary to temporize by and giving an outward token of their

²⁴ J. B. Kelly, (1968), *Britain and the Persian Gulf: 1795-1880*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 103.

²⁵ N. 3.

²⁶ GOI to Duke of Argyll, HM's Secretary of State for India, GOI, FD, Secret, No. 18 of 1870, 22 February 1870, Fort William, CAEd., Records of Bahrain, Primary documents, Vol. II, 1868 to 1892, pp. 305-306.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Memorandum of Separate claims of Turkey and Persia to sovereignty over the island of Bahrein, by E. Hertslet, FO, March 1874, CAEd. Records of Bahrain, Primary documents, Vol. II, 1868 to 1892, pp. 333-334.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 333 & N.7. Saldana states it as 1816.

dependence on Persia’³⁰. In 1816, Lt. William Barce, the Acting Resident at Bushire described Al Khalifa’s as sole and undisputed rulers of the island, which they had won from Persia by right of conquest.³¹ In 1817, Mr Willock, the British Minister in Persia, announced to the GOI, that the agent of the Imam of Muscat and agent of the Shaikh of Bahrain, was in Persia and that he had been contemplating to ask the Shah for an assistance of troops as he had heard that the British Government aimed to capture Bahrain and that he could capture the island in the name of Shah of Persia to whom the Bahrainis also looked as their protector and head. Though the help was promised by Persia, it never came.³²

British, by this time, had established dominance over Persian Gulf. The awakening of British interest in Bahrain in the early 19th century was a direct consequence of the resolution of the Indian Government to put an end to what it considered to be and continued to believe in its policies as the large scale ‘piracies’ committed by tribes on Arabian coast that affected seaborne commerce between India and Gulf.³³ The British decided to get the Arab rulers in the Gulf to sign a maritime peace treaty. Bahrain had entered British consciousness long before that. Sir, Evan Nepean Governor of Bombay, had drawn a plan in 1819 whereby the power of the ruler of Muscat was to be enhanced and extended and Bahrain was to be placed under the immediate control of Saiyid Sa’id not only to punish the Al Khalifa’s for their complacency in Qasimi piracy but to also enable Sa’id to increase his revenues to carry out task of maintaining peace.³⁴ The plan never materialized as the next Governor Mt. Stuart Elphinston followed the policy of neutrality and suggested abstaining from interfering in Al Khalifas’ rule as far as they dealt with the issue of piracy. Elphinstone had, in fact, suggested British mediation in the Al Khalifas’

³⁰ GOI to Duke of Argyll, HM’s Secretary of State for India, GOI, FD, Secret, No. 18 of 1870, 22 February 1870, Fort William, CAEd., Records of Bahrain, Primary documents Vol. II, 1868 to 1892, p. 306.

³¹ Bruce to Chief Secretary, Bombay, 31 July 1816, IOR, Bombay Secret Proceedings, Vol. 41, Secret Consultations 29 of 21st July 1819, in Abdul Sattaz Farzi’s (1955), *Persian Claim to Bahrain, a legal and diplomatic study of the British Iranian Controversy*, New York, p. 8.

³² Memorandum of separate claims of Turkey and Persia to sovereignty over the island of Bahrein by E. Hertslet, FO, March 1874, CAEd. Records of Bahrain, Primary documents, Vol. II, 1868 to 1892, p. 333.

³³ Abdul Sattaz Farzi (1955), *Persian Claim to Bahrain, A Legal and Diplomatic study of the British Iranian Controversy*, New York, p. 8.

³⁴ N. 24, p. 141.

recognition of Persian sovereignty over Bahrain in the form of annual tribute provided the Al Khalifas be left undisturbed.³⁵ Things were however to change very soon.

In 1819 the Bahrain chiefs entered into agreement with the British government to prevent the sale of British property in their territory.³⁶ In 1820, General Keir negotiated the General treaty of Maritime Peace and Perpetuity with the Arab Chiefs. By the treaty they agreed to pledge for peace and desist from plunder and piracy and aid if necessary in putting down such crimes. The Bahraini Shaikhs whose part in the piracy had been receiving and dealing in plundered goods, undertook to forbid their people from trading in such merchandise.³⁷ The Shaikhs of Bahrain Suleiman and Abdullah ibn Ahmad signed and endorsed the treaty on 23rd February 1820. Bahrain became a part of the treaty and agreed that “every possible discouragement should be given within Bahrein and its dependencies to pirates”³⁸. This was the first treaty of the rulers of Bahrain with the British that recognized Bahrain as an independent country. The treaty however was limited to maritime peace and indicated that the British interference in the internal affairs will not be encouraged. In April 1822, Captain William Bruce concluded an unauthorized agreement with Persian authorities at Shiraz to accept Bahrain as subordinate to Fars and that British cruisers be loaned if required for the conquest of Bahrain. He was condemned and dismissed by the British Government and letters were sent to Shiraz and Al Khalifas disapproving Bruce’s action and confirming British neutrality.³⁹

Oman: Thus left to manage their internal affairs, the Al Khalifas fearing a combined attack of Muscat and Persia appealed to the Imam of Muscat and finally a tribute of 18,000 Crowns was decided upon.⁴⁰ The impact of British presence was very high on the region. The inability to throw away the British due to lack of strong navy and resources had forced

³⁵ Ibid. pp. 162-163.

³⁶ N. 3, p. 1,

³⁷ Donald Hawley (1970), *The Trucial States*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. p.126

³⁸ N. 24, p. 307

³⁹ N. 33, p. 12.

⁴⁰ N. 24, p. 307

the Shaikhs of Bahrain to thus opt for any and every opportunity that came their way of acquiring protection either from Persia, Muscat or the Wahhabis and even approaching the British. The Al Khalifas took refuge in the authority of Persia as it suited them. An occasional submission to the Shah on sporadic demands and accepting a mandate and a dress of honour from the Shah at intervals was not uncommon. On occasions the Al Khalifas also declared themselves as feudatories of Persia. The interaction with the British during this period was largely pertaining restriction of slave trade. In 1838 and 1839 various engagements were entered into by the local Shaikhs with the British for the suppression of Slave trade.

Apart from Muscat, Wahhabi power and Persia, **Egypt** too cast its eyes on Bahrain. In 1839, the Egyptian army entered the dominions of Wahabee Amir and his General received protection in Bahrain. The Egyptian commander announced to the British Resident in the Persian Gulf of his intention of attacking and reducing the island as forming a part of Nejd, the Wahabee territory, over which the viceroy of Egypt claimed to be Lord.⁴¹ Shaikh Abdullah of Bahrain agreed to pay Khorshid Pasha the Egyptian commander, an annual tribute of 2,000 dollars not to encroach on his territories or his authority. When the British Government, that was watching in anxiety the progress of Egyptian troops, expostulated the Shaikh, he admitted, “both himself and every Arab detested the being at all connected with, or coming under the rule of the Egyptians, and declared that, if the British Government would give a distinct and written pledge to protect him...from all attacks and aggressions, he would drop all further connection with the Pasha and avowed himself a dependent of Great Britain...but that he would not put it in writing unless he was secure of the guarantee”⁴². The British resident however informed the agent of the Pasha that the “British Government could not admit any claim of the Pasha upon Bahrein”.⁴³ Similarly the Imam of Muscat too entertained thoughts of controlling Bahrain but could not take an expedition

⁴¹ Memorandum of separate claims of Turkey and Persia to sovereignty over the island of Bahrein by E Hertslet, 25 March 1874, IOR/ L/P&S/18 B 8-19/2 No B 9 p. 5 & Memorandum of separate claims of Turkey and Persia to sovereignty over the island of Bahrein, CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Primary documents, Vol. II, 1868 to 1892, p. 337.

⁴² Ibid. p. 310.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 337.

without help. Persia continued to retain its claim over Bahrain in spite of British objections to it and hence the Resident in the Persian Gulf was instructed by the Governor of India to resist by force any attempt of the Persian government to establish troops on the island of Bahrain.⁴⁴

The British policy towards Bahrain in the 1860s was influenced by one overriding consideration, the need to keep down the incidence of maritime warfare in the Gulf that would upset the system of Maritime truces that the GOI had build over a long period. The execution of this policy led the government at various times to discourage or actively oppose the dispatch against Bahrain by the Persians, the Sultan of Oman, the Trucial Shaikhs, the Egyptians and the Wahabbis. Hence the British authorities in Bombay/India were fast coming to conclusion that independent position of Bahrain be regularized and that Bahrain should be regarded as independent, and as subject neither to Turkey nor Persia.⁴⁵ As far as Bahrain was concerned there were other dependencies of Bahrain but the amount of authority exercised by the rulers of Bahrain on the Gutter (Qatar) coast seemed to have varied in proportion to the coercion these rulers possessed. If the chief of Bahrain was strong, the tribes acknowledged his supremacy if he was weak they denied it.⁴⁶

3.2. Persia's Claims

The Persian claim over Bahrain had long been aimed by Persia. It was not for the British to accept and allow those claims to resurface. Colonel Sheil, British Ambassador at Tehran observed that the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722) had long ago enjoyed a sway over Bahrain but that the island had not formed a part of the dominions of Persia since the accession of the Qajar dynasty (1785-1925). Even though the Chiefs of Bahrain did pay tributes to Persia as a mark of superiority Persia hardly exercised any control.

⁴⁴ Memorandum of Separate claims of Turkey and Persia to Sovereignty over the island of Bahrein by E Hertslet, 25 March 1874, IOR/ L/P&S/18 B 8-19/2 No B 9.p.6.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 11.

⁴⁶ Major C. Grant, 1st Asst Resident Persian Gulf to Col Ross, 11 Sept, 1873, MSA, PD 1873, Vol. No. 159.

The British signed the treaty of 1861 with Shaikh Mahommad bin Khalifa after seriously reprimanding him for his acts which they perceived as aggressive and which affected the pearl fisheries of Damaun and Qatif in his acts against the Wahhabis and seizing his war vessels. The Convention was entered into between the 'Independent ruler' of Bahrain and a representative of the British government, in which it was arranged that, so long as the former abstained from certain acts disapproved by the British government, the latter would support the Chief of Bahrain against the aggressions of the Chiefs and tribes of the Persian Gulf.

To this the Persian Government objected in 1862 and appealed to the treaties concluded between England and Persia in 1809, 1814, 1821(not ratified) and in 1857 and said that the British instead of respecting the rights and communicating to the Persian government had acted in an independent manner. The Persian minister declared that Bahrain had been and still was the property of Persia, the same as were Qishm, Angaum (Anjam) and Hormuz and that as a mark of proof stated that the Persian flag was flying over the fort of Governor of Bahrain.⁴⁷ The British cared less about these objections. Captain Felix Jones had stated that this argument could hardly be considered valid as at a time he had seen Persian and Turkish flags fly in Bahrain from the same flag staff.⁴⁸ The British Government accepted that Persia had advanced right of sovereignty over Bahrain in 1825, 1848 and 1860 but Lord Argyll, Secretary of State for India, argued that the policy of not recognizing those rights and accepting the Shaikh of Bahrain as an independent ruler now could not be abandoned although Tehran may be notified at times.⁴⁹ Persia was persistent in its efforts towards Bahrain and continued to interpret British acceptance of notifying Tehran as an approval of Tehran's interest in Bahrain by the British and considered that it was only a matter of time till Persia could upgrade its navy to police the waters. However when in

⁴⁷ Memorandum of separate claims of Turkey and Persia to sovereignty over the island of Bahrein by E Hertslet, 25 March 1874. IOR/ L/P&S/18 B 8-19/2 No B 9, p. 14.& CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Primary documents, 1820-1960, Volume II, 1868-1892, p. 346.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 346.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 347.

1868 the Shah appealed to the Foreign Office for assistance in equipping a naval squadron to police the Gulf, the request was turned down at the instance of the GOI.⁵⁰

The Indian Government never accepted the Shah's legitimate control over the Shaikh of Bahrain and in fact questioned Persian officers' piratical expedition which was prejudicial to British interests in Gulf. It was necessary for the GOI to adopt a line of thought and policy that could refute these claims. It stated, "that the Shaikhs of Bahrain had at different periods offered their allegiance not only to Persia, but equally to Great Britain, Muscat, Turkey and the Wahabees; that the British India Government had treaty engagements with the Sheikhs of Gulf as independent rulers; and that, moreover Persia had no Navy and would therefore be unable to repress Piracy in the Gulf"; were of the opinion that "any claim of the Shah to the Sovereignty of Bahrain should be met by a firm remonstrance on the part of Her Majesty's Government".⁵¹

The independence of Bahrain was an important requisite for the British political stability of the Gulf. In the 1850s and the 1860s, Mohammad bin Khalifa could no longer be the apple of the British eyes. The fault finding process began. One reason was also that Mohammad bin Khalifa was an active trader and had links with the Persian merchants. He aimed at free hand to deal with his trading business and independence. This demand of Mohammad was unacceptable to retain Bahrain under British control, thus they regarded him a threat.

Mohammad's clash with his formidable neighbor, Amir Faisal bin Turki of Nejd had kept the situation in the region unsteady. The continued independence of Bahrain was essential for the success of British policy in the Gulf. The British thus played a decisive role in the politics of Bahrain by installing Ali bin Khalifa, the brother of Muhammad bin Khalifa after capturing the citadel of Bahrain, on the argument that he infringed maritime peace by repeated acts of piracy and aggression at sea (1869) and later by installing Isa bin Ali

⁵⁰ Ravinder Kumar (1965), *India and the Persian Gulf Region, 1858-1907, A Study in British Imperial Policy*, New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, pp. 109-110.

⁵¹ Memorandum of separate claims of Turkey and Persia to sovereignty over the island of Bahrein by E Hertslet, 25 March 1874. p. 23, L/P&S/18 B 8-19/2 No B 9 & CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Primary documents 1820-1960, Volume 2, 1868-1892, Archive editions, p. 355.

(1869-1932), son of Ali bin Khalifa in power. The power change was ensured with an attack on Bahrain. Ali was preferred as he could match the British designs.

It was during this time that British decided to play safe and to avoid any further complications arbitrarily waded away the family members of Al Khalifa. Muhammad bin Khalifa, Muhammad bin Abdullah, Nasir bin Ahmed and two other leaders were captured and deported to Bombay.⁵²

Shaikh ‘Ali bin Nasir al-Khalifa deported to India 1869, but later released and allowed to return home in 1880. He later died at Bahrain in 1882. For long Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay had deliberated over this move. Persia was following the happenings in the region and insisted that British government need not bother. Indian Government prepared a comprehensive despatch on the policy to be adopted in relation to Bahrain.⁵³ In its despatch over the policy with Persia in relation to Bahrain, the GOI minced no words about its stand on the issue and criticized the mild approach of FO with Persian Authorities. The GOI stated that since the Bani Utubs came to power, Bahrain had enjoyed a *de facto* independence which had acquired a *de jure* status over the time as the Bahraini chiefs had entered into treaties with the Indian authorities in a sovereign capacity; that the Shah should not be left in any misapprehension over their right over Bahrain and that the Indian authorities would not abandon their hegemony over the Gulf on any condition.⁵⁴

3.3. Turkish Claims

In the year 1847, it was rumoured that the Porte entertained designs on Bahrain. However on being questioned about it the Ottoman authorities denied any such intention at the same time admitting that if the Governor of Basra by negotiation could induce any of the maritime chiefs to return their allegiance to the Porte they could not disapprove. Lord

⁵² Faud I. Khuri (1980), *Tribe and State in Bahrain , the transformation of social and political authority in an Arab State*, Chicago & London : University of Chicago Press, p. 33.

⁵³ GOI, FD, to Duke of Argyll, Secretary of State for India, No 18, 22 February 1870, Fort William, CAEd. Records of Bahrain, Primary documents 1820-1960, Vol. II, 1868-1892, pp. 303-327.

⁵⁴ N. 50, p. 111.

Palmerston had suggested a Treaty of alliance with the Bahrain ruler in independent status to which the British Resident Major Henell had objected to and the Secret Committee of the East India Company approved of it.

It was in the same year that the ruler of Bahrain made a proposition to place himself under the protection of the British Government, but the proposal was not accepted.⁵⁵ On the contrary when the Shaikh desired to place himself under Turkish protection instructions were sent to Sir Stafford Canning to inform the Turkish authorities that such an arrangement could not be agreed to as the Government of British India had concluded treaties of 1820 for suppression of piracy and 1847 for the prohibition of exportation of slaves with Bahrain as an Independent State.⁵⁶ Thus the British Government objected to any such arrangement which could transfer Bahrain to the dominion or Protectorship of any other power.

In between attempts were made by Shaikh of Damaun (1859) to attack Bahrain with the help of Wahhabis which were frustrated by British. In December 1860, the Bombay Government forwarded to the India Office a resolution which it had drawn up and in which an opinion was expressed that, “Bahrein should be regarded as independent, and as subject neither to Turkey nor Persia”, the views were coincided in by the India Office and Foreign Office.⁵⁷

The very next year the British Indian Government entered in a “Friendly Convention with Sheikh Mahomed bin Khaleefa Independent Ruler of Bahrein” and signed a treaty with him on the 31st May 1861.⁵⁸ The Shaikh promised to abstain from all maritime aggression. The treaty was approved by the Indian Government and the Turkish and Persian Governments were informed about it so that they “might not regard British relations with Bahrein with

⁵⁵Memorandum of separate claims of Turkey and Persia to sovereignty over the island of Bahrein, CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Primary documents 1820-1960, Vol. II, 1868-1892, p. 341

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 343.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

feelings of jealousy and distrust”.⁵⁹ Though Persia continued to encourage its claims over Bahrain at times referring to the Shaikh’s allegiance to Persia, or by referring to earlier communications with the British on the subject, Turkey remained silent for long. However by 1870s certain factors combined to encourage an active Turkish Policy in Arabia. The success in the Crimean war and thus the desire of Sultan Abdul Aziz to consolidate his position in Asiatic territories; opening of Suez canal and thus an easy line of communication; the weakened Wahabis after the death of Imam Faisal and along with it all the appointment of the ambitious Midhat Pasha as Governor General of Baghdad.⁶⁰ It was in January 1870 that a telegram was sent from Constantinople to the Turkish Ambassador in London enquiring about the happenings in Bahrain.⁶¹

3.4. Strategies in Bahrain: Its Increased Importance

In the autumn of 1871, it was reported that a Turkish messenger had been murdered by the order of the Chief of Bahrain as it was suspected that he was involved in the murder of the late chief of Bahrain in 1869. The Indian Government fearing serious complication sent Colonel Pelly to the island. The Turkish fleet visited Bahrain in November and the Commodore informed Colonel Pelly that he considered Bahrain as Turkish territory but that it had no intention of obtaining supremacy over Bahrain or contemplate any attack on it or harbour any design of subduing them.⁶²

In 1873 British government was once again alarmed at Turkey’s action when there was a reference to enforced enlistment of natives of Bahrain into the Turkish army. According to British explanation, on the conscription being enforced, the natives of Bahrain sought the intervention of the British Vice-Consul at Basra who informed the Turkish Governor that they were not Ottoman subjects and that the persons taken as recruits were born in Turkey,

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 345.

⁶⁰N. 50, pp. 113

⁶¹ Memorandum of separate claims of Turkey and Persia to sovereignty over the island of Bahrein, CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Primary documents 1820-1960, Vol. II, 1868-1892, p. 352.

⁶² Ibid. pp. 359-360.

their families having emigrated from Bahrain forty-six years previously. The British government had no objection *per se* but it did not admit Turkey's claim to consider Bahrain as a part of Ottoman dominion and that if the natives of the island applied to British consul in Turkey for protection the latter could not refuse their good offices on behalf of such persons as being the subjects of a Chief with whom HMG had friendly relations.⁶³

Turkey's position in the Gulf had become unstable due to British presence and it continued to insist on its presence. The GOI made every attempt to turn down the claims. In 1879 the British Consul General, A. H. Layard, at Baghdad reported that Turkish authorities at Basra had been instructed to levy double taxes on vessels arriving from Bahrain and Muscat on the ground that those places were Turkish ports, as Abdullah Pasha had directed that all ports in South and East Arabia were to be considered Turkish.⁶⁴ The London government commanded for protest through Layard, as it considered, 'the claim (is) one that Her Majesty's Government must regard as having no foundation in fact, and which you (A. H. Layard) should continue to resist if it should be again put forward in anyway'.⁶⁵ In the same year the Chief of Bahrain had complained to the British Resident about 11 outrages committed against Bahraini vessels and residents. This was because the British Resident was bound by Article 3 of the Bahrain Convention of 1861, forthwith to take necessary steps for obtaining reparation. Accordingly, the responsibility was put upon Turkish officials, as steps were taken to obtain reparation and the Political agent in Baghdad/Turkish Arabia was referred to. Application was made through the Political Agent in Turkish Arabia to the Turkish authorities in Constantinople.

The Political Agent and Consul-General, Turkish Arabia, Colonel J. P. Nixon reported that the attacks on Bahraini vessels, had less to do with Turkish interference and they emanated from internecine quarrels among the tribes upon the mainland. Colonel Ross was asked to

⁶³ Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to H. E. Musurus Pasha, &c, &c, &c FO, 14th April 1874, London, NAI, FD, Secret, June 1874, Nos. 34-35.

⁶⁴ Miles to Layard, 22 Aug, 1879, NAI, FD, Secret, November 1879, Nos. 87-93.

⁶⁵ Salisbury to Layard, No 1170, Foreign Office, 16 September, London, 1879, NAI, FD, Secret, November 1879, Nos. 87-93.

report on the matter. Ross seemed to completely disagree and questioned Nixon's source for this statement and blamed such lawless outbreaks to the neglect of the Turkish local authorities by stating that, "opinions of the sort to have weight should be supported by the facts on which they are formed, but general assertions unaccompanied by statement of facts are of course difficult to deal with".⁶⁶ In his letter to the Secretary GOI, A.C. Lyall, the Resident, wanted Turkey to take the responsibility as he explained that there were always latent feuds existing and causes of disputes between the various clans amongst Arab tribes, but that at the time now referred to, no such feuds were known to be in activity and no case of fighting on shore or killing or plundering was reported. The proceedings were confined to exploits by sea and were directed against vessels of Bahrain and Qatar indiscriminately. It was believed that unless severe punishment is inflicted on their tribesmen there would be no permanent security. The failure of the local Turkish officials, whether from want of energy or want of power had caused indiscipline and responsibility was to be pinned on them.⁶⁷

By this time Bahrain's importance was undoubted. Bahrain had been at an important juncture of trade. Its strategic location and continuous flow of trade had increased its significance for the traders; the other powers and the British. In 1879 Captain E.L. Durand, First Assistant Resident, Persian Gulf made a detailed survey of the Bahrain Islands reflecting upon its resources, flora and fauna.⁶⁸ The increasing importance of the island once again brought in the question of Turkish jurisdiction in the Persian Gulf. An issue that never ceased to be discussed for long. The Indian Government recognized the Turkish influence on the coast extending to about the 25th parallel of latitude beyond which were the dominions of the Trucial chiefs with whom the GOI had treaty relations.⁶⁹ North of line was the island of Bahrain with whose government too GOI had treaty relations.

However in 1879, Lord Cranbrook expressed the view that "provided no obstacles are interposed to any operations which may be necessary to preserve the peace of the seas and to punish the marauders, and that no interference is attempted either with Bahrein or the

⁶⁶ Ross to Lyall, No. 167, 5 May, 1879, Bushire, NAI, FD, Political A, September, 1879, Nos. 345-350.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Description of the Bahrain islands, Appendix B to part I, MSA, PD, 1880, Vol. II, No 158, pp.15-18.

⁶⁹ Keep Withs 1, NAI, FD, Secret, June 1881, Nos. 10-47, p. 5.

Trucial chiefs from Odeid to Ras el Khymah, or with Muscat no exception need be taken to the proceedings of the Turks at any point of the coast north of Odeid”.⁷⁰ The British objection at this stage was posed not to Turkish rule but to anarchy, as the British government held a decided view that, “wherever the Turkish sovereignty is at present time firmly established upon the coast, they are ready to recognize it, and would gladly see it accompanied by a regular and civilized administration.”⁷¹

3.5. Turkey and the Agreement of 1880

The year 1880 was marked by an important event in the political history of Bahrain as Shaikh Isa signed an agreement with the British by which he bound himself to not to have any dealings with foreign powers without the consent of the British Government and not to allow the establishment of their agencies or coal depots in his territory. The specific mention to coal depot was directed towards a series of events that reflected Turkish interest in opening one such in Bahrain and which led to the GOI entering into yet another agreement with Bahrain.

In June 1879 news of an alleged intervention of the Turks of establishing a coal depot reached the British camps. The Captain of one of the Turkish vessels at Bahrain gave out that Bahrain was a Turkish territory. This was the time when other foreign powers such as the French, American and Japanese were also extending their commercial activities in the Persian Gulf and the British fearing that Bahrain would be the objective of almost all of them as an important trading centre aimed to secure the island from the ‘political cupidity of some of the more ambitious of them and to maintain the British political influence there was very desirable’⁷² The Political Resident thus took upon himself and though not previously authorized by the GOI negotiated and concluded an Agreement with the Shaikh of Bahrain on 22nd December 1880. He believed that there was a reason to suppose that, “the Turkish Government desired to obtain a certain influence in Bahrein by establishing an

⁷⁰ Persian Gulf. Turkish claims on the Arabian Coast, IOR/L/P&S/18 B133A-160/ B141, p.28.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² N. 3, p. 67.

agency, which should at first and ostensibly be under the form of a coal depot".⁷³ Ross in his letter to the Secretary to the GOI underlined the policy and stated the requirement for an agreement stating that it was necessary to have some formal engagement with the ruler so that he had a valid reason to decline to allow the establishment of agencies or coal depots without being able to join to some formal engagement preventing.⁷⁴

The GOI being clear that it was inexpedient that political officers should enter into such negotiations, yet considering the circumstances, accepted and ratified the agreement, as it believed that a refusal at a stage as this could be misunderstood. It convinced London, that this would not materially increase or alter the existing responsibilities of the British Government.⁷⁵

The agreement of 1880 thus was accepted and sanctioned by the FO.⁷⁶ Thus 1880 became an important year in the history of Bahrain as Sheikh Isa signed an agreement, by which he was bound not to have any dealings with foreign powers without the consent of the British Government, and not allow the establishment of their agencies or coal depots in his territory. The agreement brought the British even closer to establishing a protectorate over Bahrain.

The GOI's had acted upon its strategy by bringing the ruler of Bahrain into the ambit of yet another treaty. Though extremely aggravated about Turkish interest and having secured a position in relation to Bahrain, Indian government remained cautious about its approach towards the Turkish authorities. The second last decade of the 19th century once again brought in issues of Turkish jurisdiction over Bahrain and British policy towards it. The catalyst was Shaikh Isa's old relation and enemy Nasir bin Mubarak. In 1880 the Indian

⁷³ Anglo Turkish Rivalry and British agreement with Bahrain, CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Primary documents, 1820-1892, Vol. II, 1868-1892, p. 407.

⁷⁴ Col. E.C. Ross to A.C. Lyall, No. 252, 24 December 1880, Bushire, NAI, FD, Political A, March 1881, Nos. 15-20.

⁷⁵ GOI to Secretary of State for India, No. 19, 19 February 1881, Fort William, NAI FD, Political A, March 1881, Nos. 15-20.

⁷⁶ Secretary of State for India, IO to GOI, No. 14, 8 April 1881, London, NAI, FD, Secret, June 1881, Nos. 10-47.

Government received news of an apprehended attack / hostile movements on Bahrain by Nasir-ud-din Mubarak from the part on which the Turkish government claimed jurisdiction, as alerted by the Resident Colonel Ross. Shaikh Isa bin Ali of Bahrain wrote a letter to the PRPG to that effect.

Nasir bin Mubarak was Bahrain chief's hostile relative; had lost his rights in Bahrain due to Shaikh Isa's opposition and moved to Qatar coast. A Bahrain refugee, he became one with Beni Hajir to make an assault on Zubarah and fight with Naim tribe. He was married to Shaikh Qassim bin Thani's daughter at al Bida. Qassim was an old supporter of Nasir and had interests in Bahrain. In December 1880, Nasir entertained an attack on Bahrain to regain his rights over the island. Shaikh Isa of Bahrain had received the news that the Bedouins who were with him in Qatar were on the move and had arrived closer at Abul Dhaluf and asked for boats from people there and desire to cross over to Bahrain.⁷⁷

The case was one that could cause disorder on the coast. It was believed that Qassim bin Thani of Qatar too was involved in it. Qassim however professed inability to restrain Nasir any longer but vouched for peace at the seas. In his letter to the Resident, Qassim mentioned the intentions of Nasir for an attack. Qassim stated that he tried to dissuade Nasir but to no avail as, he (Nasir) said that "I am a man, I wish to go to my country and to my property and to my family and to my house to remain there, and will neither plunder nor kill any person", thus Qassim suggested that "there will be no end to disturbances; let these people wither go to Bahrain or come to El Bida, in order that disorders may cease".⁷⁸ Nasir was reported to have left Qatar and moved towards Katif for attack.

In a situation of apprehended attack on Bahrain and inability of notifying any responsibility over the local tribes and rulers, the GOI relied on its native agent for information. Commander Hand of *HMS Beacon*, was asked to and acquired information from the Political Agent in Bahrain, Haji Ahmed. The Agent intimated Commander Hand that

⁷⁷ Chief of Bahrein to E. C. Ross, 29th Zil Haj 1297=3rd Dec 1880, Bushire, NAI, FD, Political A, January 1881, Nos. 141-15.

⁷⁸ Jasim to Resident (no date), NAI, FD, Political A, January 1881, Nos. 141-159.

Sheikh Isa and his supporters were afraid lest Nasir should be acting in concert with or at the instigation of, the Turks, and these suspicions had been aroused from the fact of the Turkish officials having recently attempted to gain a footing on the Island of Bahrain by the establishment of a coal depot, by the expected arrival of another Turkish ship of war and Nasir's proceedings all occurring about the same time.⁷⁹ On the basis of this Commander Hand suggested that, "[W]ith reference to the allusions made in this communication to the Turks, you (GOI) might perhaps consider that the time had arrived when it would be desirable to obtain a renewed understanding with the Turkish Government with regard to their intention towards Bahrein".⁸⁰ The PRPG had a different opinion. The Resident did not believe that Turkish authorities had been a cause of remonstrance instead he believed that probably "their protégé, Jassim bin Mahomed Thani, was secretly at the bottom of Nasir's proceedings".⁸¹ Was it all a heightened imagination for the GOI to believe in Turkey's advancing superiority? The GOI this time opted for a more conciliatory tone, though it gave instructions for precautionary measures. It proposed to make a request to the Turkish authorities regarding the possible disturbance that could cause in the sea due to Nasir's movements and proposed attack.

The Indian Government directed Mr. Plowden Political Agent in Turkish Arabia and H.B.M.s Consul-General, Baghdad, 1881 to convey a warning to the Wali of Baghdad regarding the same. Plowden was expected to explain the circumstances in a courteous manner. The GOI was not satisfied with the way in which Plowden addressed the whole matter emanating a remark from A. C. Lyall, Secretary to the GOI, FD, to the Viceroy, that "Mr. Plowden has got upon bad terms with the Turkish authorities, and does not now trouble himself to be conciliatory even in his language. I imagine he would say that it was useless. It will be difficult to instruct him by telegram in future."⁸²

⁷⁹ Hand to Ross, No. 159, 8 December 1880, HMs S *Beacon* off Ras Rakin, NAI, FD, Political A, January 1881, Nos. 141-159.

⁸⁰ Hand to Ross, No. 159, 8 December 1880, HMs S *Beacon* off Ras Rakin, NAI, FD, Political A, January 1881, Nos. 141-159.

⁸¹ Ross to Lyall, No. 235, 9 December 1880, Bushire, NAI, FD, Political A, January 1881, Nos. 141-159.

⁸² Keep-Withs, A. C. L. to Excellency, Nos. 268-270, NAI, FD, Secret, June 1881.

The Turkish Wali of Baghdad responded to Plowden's letter in a most nonchalant manner suggesting that the British seemed unnecessarily worried about it all. Answering to the fears entertained by the people of Bahrain and the inhabitants of the Arab coast of the Persian Gulf he stated that book reports, which were being received from the Commander of the Imperial Corvette on those waters, and the verbal report of the Commander himself on his late visit with his vessel to Busreh on that coast and that perfect security pervaded there.⁸³

The case of Nasir bin Mubarak's apprehended attack on Bahrain to lay his claims on the territory contributed much to GOIs arguments and counter arguments over the issue of policy to be followed. "the disposal of this case is complicated by the very indefinite nature of the Turkish claims and rights along the coast".⁸⁴ The suggestion was to cut the knot by simply disregarding the Turkish connection with Qatar and dealing directly with Shaikh of Bidaa just as the British would deal with the Trucial chiefs as the Turks were unable to control the piratical attacks.

The disposal of this case was a certain embarrassment for the British as the Turks had laid some kind of claim to the jurisdiction at Bidaa and other points at Qatar coast.

The GOI had no apprehension about the position of Bahrain in its strategic records. H M Durand commented, "Bahrain is under our protection and we are prevented from effectually protecting it, which we could do with the greatest ease, by the fear of violating a Turkish jurisdiction which is merely a shadow of a name".⁸⁵ Nasir's apprehended attack and his friendliness with Shaikh Qassim of Qatar and the Qatari Shaikh's interest in Bahraini territories also brought in the question of the status of Qatar. The British could not allow Qatar to be used in as a springboard for actions against Bahrain, hence the feasibility of treating Qatar as independent was discussed with doubts of Home government to the

⁸³ Translation of a letter from Takee-oo-deen Pasha to HBMs G-G, No. 37 dated 4 Rejeb 1298-20th Mais 1297, corresponding to 1st June 1881, NAI, FD, Secret, July 1881, Baghdad, Nos. 46-47.

⁸⁴ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret, June 1881, Nos. 10-47, p. 9.

⁸⁵ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret, June 1881, Nos. 10-47, p. 10.

proposal.⁸⁶ In the entire affair of possible attack by Nasir and British force being employed and the policy followed, the GOI could not possibly bring the Government in London to see the reality. Much of GOI's problems were due to the Chief of Qatar who was believed to be an "ill conditioned Chief", who had given much trouble "by encouraging attacks and piracies against our protected island Bahrein".⁸⁷ Qassim was refrained by the British from attacking but the question remained whether the British could be justified in interfering directly.

A question that the GOI felt was not easy to answer as, "the view at home and the view held here, regarding the policy to be adopted in these quarters (Arabian coast of Gulf) have not been the same".⁸⁸

GOI's directions to the PRPG, consultations with him, and consequent decisions for action regarding Bahrain were guided by GOI's policy of treating Bahrain as an island under its protection. A.C. Lyall, Secretary in the Foreign Department, GOI, commented, "Bahrein is under our protectorate...anyone who organizes or makes an armed attack upon Bahrein really commits what we shall be entitled to deal with as an act of war...we have to consider how best to protect Bahrein from a lawless aggression".⁸⁹

In 1879 while accepting the proposals of Colonel Ross the GOI had suggested to the Secretary of State that exact limits of Turkish authority were to be defined. As Ross stated, that want of security on the coast was not due to the disorders among the tribes but due to the inability of the Turkish Government to maintain order there.⁹⁰ The GOI was determined not to admit the extension of Turkish influence to any place south of Ojeir except El Bidaa. The GOI by suggesting so was looking at the broader picture that included consideration towards Persia too. It considered that the effect of defining the limits of Turkish jurisdiction

⁸⁶ Refer to chapter 4 p 5 for reference of the same.

⁸⁷ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret, December 1881, Nos. 224-258, p. 4.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret, June 1881, Nos. 10-47, p. 11.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

on the coast would be to prevent any Turkish fleet in those waters and to relieve Persia of any apprehension of Turkish encroachments.⁹¹

Eventually nothing happened in Bahrain, as Nasir bin Mubarak headed to Ross's warnings. The entire episode however led to a round of deliberations regarding the acceptance of the position of Turkey.

3.6. Revival of Persian Claim over the island of Bahrain

In December 1885 Chief of Bahrain was alarmed by a rumour that a correspondence had passed between the English and the Persian Governments regarding the claim of the latter to the island. Further Mr A. Nicholson, British Charge de Affairs at Tehran wrote to Iddesleigh, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, that Russian First Dragoman had made a casual reference as to the position of the island in regard to Persian and England, and asked whether we had not completely annexed it.⁹² Nicholson was perplexed by this sudden enquiry and admitted that he was unable to report anything relating to it Nicholson also wrote to GOI about Shah's intentions stating he had sent following to FO:-"Shah asked me to convey his wish to establish his authority effectually over Bahrein either by sending Governor or possibly by instituting Shaikh as representative of Persian authority. Maritime police he would wish to continue in hands of British Naval forces. His Majesty considers that FO letter to Persian minister at London of April 1869 recognises his sovereignty over island."⁹³ The Shah was vague as to the mode by which he wished to carry out his proposal presumably a Governor would be sent there or an arrangement might be made with the Shaikh of the island with he acting as the Persian representative.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 7.

⁹² A. Nicholson to the Earl of Iddesleigh, No 114, 27 September 1886 (confidential), Tehran, CAEd, Records of Bahrain Primary documents, Vol. II, 1820-1892, pp. 417-418.

⁹³ Telegram Nicholson to Viceroy, (no pg), 27 Sept 1886, Simla, NAI, FD, Secret E, December 1886, Nos. 43-48.

⁹⁴ A. Nicholson to the Earl of Iddesleigh, No. 114, 27 September 1886 (confidential), Tehran, CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Primary documents, Vol. II, 1820-1892, pp. 417.

The Letter that Shah referred to was that of Lord Clarendon, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs General Mohsin Khan, the Persian Charge d' Affairs at London of 26 & 29 April 1869 in which reference was made to the engagements which the Indian authorities had with Bahrain. The part of the communication that the Persian minister now referred to was where a mention was made that: 'If the Persian Government are prepared to keep a sufficient force in the Gulf for these purposes this country would be relieved from a troublesome and costly duty; but if the Shaikh is not prepared to undertake these duties Her Majesty's government cannot Her majesty would wish that in those waters disorder and crime can be encouraged with impunity'.⁹⁵ The communication had ended with the assurance that, whenever possible the Persian Government will be informed in advance if the adoption of coercive measures against the Bahrain ruler became imperative and that British government had given due consideration to the protest.⁹⁶

The revival of Persian claims on Bahrain brought back GOI's concerns for the policy to be followed in view of Turkish and Persian activities in the Gulf particularly in this case Bahrain and the reaction of the Authorities in London. A. Nicholson, Her Majesty's Charge d'Affairs, Tehran seemed to have reason for believing "that it was merely a sudden caprice of the Shah instigated from foreign quarters..."⁹⁷ These 'foreign quarters' was no other country but Russia whose entry in the Gulf and interests in Persia were a constant reason for vigilance for the British authorities. Perhaps no other country bothered the British officials as much as Russia did presumably because of its proximity with the region. Nicholson in his demi-official note to Earl of Dufferin wondered the reason for sudden revival of dormant claim on Bahrain by the Shah suggesting that the reason could be Russians.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Foreign Department Notes, NAI FD, Secret E, December 1886, Nos. 43-48.

⁹⁶ N. 50, p. 109.

⁹⁷ Keep-Withs, No. 1, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1887, Nos. 54-60.

⁹⁸ From A. Nicholson to Earl of Dufferin, Keep Withs, 2 Demi Official, 28 Sept 1886, Teheran, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1887, Nos. 54-60.

The Shah, wished to establish his control but to let the maritime affairs remain in the hands of the British. Nicholson stated the British policy, “that it was impossible to violate treaty engagements or to hand over territory which did not belong to us (British) and to which the claims of Persia were of the most shadowy character...”.⁹⁹ The GOI endorsed the communication to convey it to PRPG.

Persian claims over Bahrain remained till the second half of the twentieth century till 1970, while Turkish claims over Bahrain continued in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In one way or the other the Ottoman authorities retained their claim over the island as their contention was that Bahrain was a part of their dominions in which case the Bahrainis were Turkish subjects and liable accordingly to all obligations as Turkish subjects. Their liability to serve in the Turkish army therefore followed as a matter of course. In June 1890 news reached the Resident at Baghdad about such an attempt on the part of the Ottoman Government. Thus the Ottoman government attempted to recruit for the army persons calling themselves ‘Bahreinese’ in Basra.¹⁰⁰ Around this time it was rumoured that these people were approaching the Persian Consul-General alleging that Bahrain used to be under the Persian Government and that the Persian Consul-General was representing the matter to the Persian Embassy at Constantinople. The GOI passed no orders on this matter as it was deemed questionable whether persons claiming to be subjects of Bahrain were really such and until the Shaikh called for any intervention, no action was believed to be needed.¹⁰¹

Treaty of 1892: Turkey and British Diplomacy

In March 1892, Major Talbot, the PRPG signed an agreement with the Trucial chiefs of the Persian Gulf as believed that a “fresh agreement embodying a provision against the cessation by the chiefs of any portion of their territories to any power but England” would amplify the assurances on the part of the Chiefs. He thus went ahead to obtain agreements from all Trucial chiefs and induced also the chief of Bahrain to sign one which he did on 13

⁹⁹ From A. Nicholson to Iddesleigh, No 153, 22 Dec 1886, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1887, Nos. 54-60.

¹⁰⁰ N. 3, p. 81.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

March 1892. Whether the text regarding Bahrain was made available to the Turkish ambassador at London is not clear though the text of the ones signed with Trucial chiefs was provided on his request.¹⁰²

In the year 1892-93 the Turks became very active in asserting their claim to sovereignty over Bahrain. Soon after the treaty was signed with the Chief of Bahrain, in December 1892, the Porte ordered the wali of Basra who then was near el Hasa with 500 troops, to consider Bahrain as Turkish territory. Apprehending the landing of the Turkish troops, the Resident proposed to prevent this with the help of the Senior Naval officer which the GOI approved.

In 1893 the Resident received the report of an action of the Turkish officials in compelling Bahreini subjects to accept Turkish flags.¹⁰³ The activities of the Turkish local authorities were a clear declaration of asserting their sovereignty over Bahrain. Their activities continued.

In the given instance it was the case of the status of the natives of Bahrain when in Ottoman territory. In August 1893, proclamation was found stuck up in the bazars and coffee shops of Katif by the *Kaim Makam* of that place regarding Turkish claims to Bahrain as Bahrain was considered a part of Ottoman dominions and stating that the local officials were within their right in issuing proclamation.¹⁰⁴ Qatif on the Nejd Coast had Turkish governor who was subordinate to Abdullah Pasha the Wali of Busrah. British accepted that it Qatif was certainly Turkish.

The Proclamation issued by *Kaim Makam* of Qatif ran thus: "That according to the signatures (i.e. orders) of the Committee of Science (i.e learned people or Ministers) the illustrious the English Government has no protection over Bahrein or its Government and that it (Bahrein) is subject to the mighty Ottoman Government.....(hence) According to

¹⁰² N. 3. p. 81.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p. 84.

¹⁰⁴ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1894, Nos. 186-248.

orders received from the Government, Home and Foreign regarding Bahrein, the British Government has no right to give either order or protection there. It is part of the Dominions of the Ottoman Government, and will be treated in the same way as the other subjects of the Ottoman Government there.”¹⁰⁵ This action of the Wali of Basra may not be considered as sporadic but rather as a reaction towards something that was an earlier event on part of some subjects in Bahrain. The event was as follows:

In January 1893, the Political Agent at Bussorah (Basra) received a deputation from persons who were residents in Basra and who claimed to be ‘Bahraini’ subjects asking for British protection. The Political Agent informed them that the protection would be given to them on production of letters from the Chief of Bahrein, Esa-bin-Ali to the effect that they were his subjects and that protection might be extended to them, and not otherwise.¹⁰⁶ Few months passed by for the Wali of Basra to have taken up this issue and put up notification in the public places.

The British government demanded removal of notices put up at Qatif and noninterference in the affairs of Bahrain. The British Embassy at Constantinople was requested by Lord Rosebery, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to inform the Porte that the natives of Bahrain when in Turkish territory were not to be treated as subjects of Ottoman government but they should receive British protection. The Turks however instead of prohibiting their officials from interfering in Bahrain affairs merely instructed them “not to enter into disputes or discussions with British officials in regard to Bahrein”.¹⁰⁷ These instructions clearly did not go quite as far as the understanding between the British embassy at Constantinople and the Porte. No action was considered to be needed on the part of GOI. Britain’s policy of refusal to recognize the sovereignty of the Sultan was consistent and undoubted as this was not the first time that Britain had insisted on its policy

¹⁰⁵ Foreign Department Notes, 21 August 1893, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1894, Nos. 186-248.

¹⁰⁶ Secretary, Political and Secret Department, India Office, No. 22, 2 June, 1893, London, NAI, FD, Secret E, July 1893, Nos. 290-293.

¹⁰⁷ Secretary Political and Secret Dept, India Office, No. 2, 5 January 1894, London, NAI, FD, May 1894, Secret E, Nos. 186-248.

decision. Earlier too In the year 1851, Sir G Canning, at that time HMS Ambassador at Constantinople, was instructed by Lord Palmerston to state to the Ottoman government that HMs Government could not acknowledge or acquiesce in any arrangement with a view to placing the island of Bahrain under the sovereignty or protection of the Porte seeing that the GOI had treaty relations with Bahrain as an independent state since 1820 and that Home Government must object to any arrangement which would transfer it to the dominion or Protectorship of any no other power.¹⁰⁸

In this instance, British protest seemed to have had no impact on the Wali as the Consul at Bussorah reported that the Wali informed him by letter that as Bahrain Island was formerly possessed by the *Kaim Makam* of Nejd, the British Consuls could not interfere in its affairs, Bahrein being a portion of the Ottoman Dominions.¹⁰⁹ The British protests however were meant for Constantinople.

Responding to strong British protests the Wali of Basra (Bussorah) was asked by Ottoman Government to respond to some things immediately: that the notices put up by the Governor of Katif were to be taken down; that the Government of Katif was not to interfere in the matters of Bahrain; that all inhabitants of Bahrain who came under Turkish territory were to be treated as Turkish subjects, the last part to which the British Ambassador had objection and he raised the question with the Grand Vizier.¹¹⁰ The Grand Vizier however maintained that 'Bahreinese' must be treated as Ottoman subjects.¹¹¹ In the entire correspondence the GOI was not consulted nor was any action desired or expected from it by the Foreign Office.

¹⁰⁸ Note Verbale sent by Sir Francis Clarm Ford, Ambassador to Constantinople to Earl of Rosebery, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Note no 55, 9th May 1893, NAI, FD, May 1894, Secret E, Nos. 186-248.

¹⁰⁹ Sir F. C. Ford from Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Telegram No. 195, 14 Nov 1893, NAI, FD, May 1894, Secret E, Nos. 186-248, p. 13.

¹¹⁰ Sir F.C. Ford, Ambassador at Constantinople to the Earl of Rosebery Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, No. 547, 25 November 1893, Constantinople, NAI, FD, May 1894, Secret E, Nos. 186-248.

¹¹¹ Sir A Nicholson to Mockler, no number, 29th December 1893, NAI, FD, May 1894, Secret E, Nos. 186-248.

Responding to these events, the Resident in the Persian Gulf suggested steps regarding action to maintain British authority in Bahrain by 'providing the inhabitants of Bahrein visiting Basrah, during approaching season with documents certifying them to be subjects of Bahrein in order that Consular protection may be afforded to them if necessary.'¹¹² The PRPG suggested that 'it was desirable to intimate the Porte of the action now taken, in pursuance of the right which has been consistently asserted by the British Government'.¹¹³ Wilson's suggestion was aimed at asserting British position in Bahrain and at the same time taking precaution against any such possibility that could occur again. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Kimberly however did not think of it as required in view of the representation been made at Constantinople and hence felt that there was no necessity to reiterate.¹¹⁴

Shaikh Qassim of Qatar too was instrumental in activities over land in Bahrain. In 1894 the Turkish Mutessarif of El Hasa went to Zobara and in concert with Shaikh Qassim took steps to form a settlement of 'Bahrainese' malcontents at that place under a Turkish flag. In May 1895 the PRPG received an information that the Al-bin Ali tribe under Shaikh Sultan bin Salema had deserted from the Chief of Bahrain, to whom they were subject, and were forming a settlement opposite Zobara with the support of Shaikh Qassim a settlement as this considered by the GOI to be of a serious menace to Bahrain and proposed to instruct the Political Resident to take such steps as would be necessary to prevent the realization of their project¹¹⁵. The GOI apprehended a danger for the Chief of Bahrain, his subjects, the numerous British Indian subjects, the protégés at Bahrain and the British position therein.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Colonel Wilson to Secretary to the GOI, FD, No. 68, 8 September 1894, NAI, FD, Secret E, November 1894, Nos. 6-11.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Under Secretary, FO to IO, No. 2, 28 August 1894, NAI, FD, Secret E, November 1894, Nos. 6-1.

¹¹⁵ Draft IO to Under Secretary, P Currie, FO, 30 May 1895, Island of Bahrein and the El Katr Coast Vol. VI, NALondon, FO 78/5110, 1895-1900, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ Report on the Attachment of Arms at Bahrein, Inclosure 4 in No. 1, NAI, FD, Secret E, July 1899, Nos. 94-248, p. 18.

The GOI authorized the Resident to warn Qassim that the settlements would not be allowed, but matters became complicated when the Resident reported that the Turkish official, the Mutasserif of Hasa had gone to Zobarah and that the settlement was pushed on, Sheikh Qassim acting in concert with the Mutasserif, who was preparing to hoist the Turkish flag.¹¹⁷ The Mudir of Zobara had declared Bahrain unconditionally and Qatar coast as partly subject to Ottoman jurisdiction.¹¹⁸ The Viceroy, GOI proposed in August 1895 that a demonstration against Bahrain and the Shaikh Esa bin Ali, might be resisted by fire if the fleet advancing was hostile and it was proposed by the FO to sanction the seizure of boats of Al-bin-Ali.¹¹⁹ The Home government however desired that before definite action is taken, due warning should be conveyed to Porte. The British Ambassador at Constantinople, was instructed accordingly.¹²⁰ The Foreign Office addressed a remonstrance to the Porte (dated 12 Aug 1895). Zobara was attacked by gunboats *Sphinx* and the *Pigeon* and a number of buggalows.¹²¹ Around forty-four *Ara* dhows were destroyed and several captured. Zobara was abandoned by the Turks and a large number of the Al-bin-Ali returned to their allegiance to the Sheikh of Bahrain, while Qassim flew flag of truce.¹²² The incident of Zoabara enabled the British to establish a certain stability however the GOI could not consider it as the end of it all since the Resident replied that ‘Turkish meddling’ was at the root of the whole difficulty.¹²³ The GOI proposed that Zobara be evacuated and that the Al bin Ali does not settle near Zobara.¹²⁴ The Hindu

¹¹⁷ IO to Under Secretary, FO, Island of Bahrein and the El Katr Coast Vol. 6, 22 May 1895, NALondon, FO 78/5110, 1895-1900, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ Viceroy to IO1, 18 August 1895, Island of Bahrein and the El Katr Coast Vol. 6, 22 May 1895, NALondon, FO 78/5110, 1895-1900, p. 39.

¹¹⁹ IO, Walpole to Under-Sec, FO, 22 May 1895, Island of Bahrein and the El Katr Coast Vol. 6, 22 May 1895, NALondon, FO 78/5110, 1895-1900, p. 2.

¹²⁰ Secretary of State to Viceroy, 8 June 1895, Island of Bahrein and the El Katr Coast Vol. 6, 22 May 1895, NALondon, FO 78/5110, 1895-1900, p. 9.

¹²¹ Report on the Attachment of Arms at Bahrein, Inclosure 4 in No. 1, NAI, FD, Secret E, July 1899, Nos. 94-248, p. 18.

¹²² N. 3, p. 87.

¹²³ Viceroy to IO, 27 July 1895, Island of Bahrein and the El Katr Coast Vol 6. NALondon, 78/5110, 1895-1900, p. 18.

¹²⁴ Foreign Secretary, to PRPG, Bushire, Telegram No 1840-E, 1 October 1895, Simla, Island of Bahrein and the El Katr Coast Vol 6. NALondon, 78/5110, 1895-1900, p. 145.

merchants and British Indian subjects approached the resident to express their gratitude for settling the disturbed state of affairs in Bahrain thus preventing the loss of British prestige, and the property and lives of the inhabitants of Bahrain.¹²⁵ These were some of the British measures at retaining their hold on Bahrain.

For long there had been a discussion in the British circles about Turkish responsibility over the Arabian coast. As regards Bahrain British position was more than once reiterated. The British government maintained its right of intervention on behalf of natives of Bahrain and continued to communicate the same with the Porte. In December 1895, the British Embassy in Constantinople received a telegram from the British Consul at Baghdad, stating about a subject of the Shaikh Bahrain, Abdul Aziz Bin Ali.¹²⁶ His property had been plundered by pirates while he was in board a sailing vessel in the Shatt-ul-Arab had appealed to him for assistance¹²⁷. This once again brought in the issue of British protection to natives of Bahrain. British Consul Captain White in this respect addressed the wali on the subject, but was soon intimidated by the Turkish Governor that that his action in doing so was improper, as the Turkish Government did not recognize the claim of British Consular authorities to intervene on behalf of the people in Bahrain.

Nevertheless they would remind the Sublime Porte that, as the Chief of Bahrain was under the protection of the Queen of England, it was quite inadmissible that that the natives of Bahrain should, when on Ottoman territory, be treated as Turkish subjects. It was felt that accordingly they should request that immediate instructions be sent to the wali of Basra to recognize the right of British Consul to intervene in cases in which natives of Bahrain were concerned.¹²⁸ As regards the situation GOI's observations were required by Secretary of

¹²⁵ British Indian Subjects to Captain J. H. Pelly, 14 September 1895, HMS Sphinx, Bahrein, Island of Bahrein and the El Katr Coast Vol 6. NALondon, 78/5110, 1895-1900.

¹²⁶ Mockler to Ambassador at Constantinople, NAI, FD, Secret E Pros August 1896, Nos. 115-19.

¹²⁷ Note Verbale- No 16, addressed by Sir Phillip Currie, Ambassador at Constantinople the 19th Feb 1896 to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 8th February 1896, Constantinople, NAI, FD, Secret E, Proceedings May 1896, Nos. 399-403.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

State for India on the whole matter. The question appeared to be whether Bahraini subjects were entitled to British protection in Turkish Territory.

The Indian Government opined that there was no doubt about Bahrain itself being under such protection. Apart from quoting from recent occurrences when the British ships took active steps against certain Arab boats which had at the instigation of the Turks been collected by Sheikh Qasim of El Bidaa for the purpose of attacking Bahrain, it highlighted on various treaties signed with the Chief. It stated that by article 2 of the Convention of 1861 the Bahrain Chief was entitled to expect the support of the British Government in the maintenance of security of his possessions against maritime aggressions and by article 3 of the same Convention the British Resident was bound to take steps for obtaining reparation for any injury inflicted by sea in the Bahrain territory¹²⁹. This however still did not explain the matter of British protection of Bahraini subject. There was nothing in the treaties to show distinctly that such a protection could, be given. But the agreements of 1880 and 1892 stated nothing that the Bahrein Chief was precluded from having any communications of transaction with other powers.¹³⁰

Governor General Elgin's government in India expressed its full concurrence to the attitude of the Queen's Government "in declining to admit these claims and in insisting on the rights of the British Consular officers to intervene in Ottoman territory on behalf of subjects of Bahrein Chief".¹³¹

The Ottoman Government at no stage accepted the British stand. As regards attack on the Bahraini subject though ordered to probe. Earlier on the 4th April 1896, a note was addressed to the Porte asking that the Turkish Government at Basra be instructed to obtain

¹²⁹ Keep-Withs, NAI, FD, Secret-E, January 1897, Nos., 50-74.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ GOI to Lord George Hamilton, Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India, letter no. 200, 30 Dec 1896, Fort William, NAI, FD, Secret-E, January 1897, Nos., 50-74.

restitution of the stolen property or that compensation be granted.¹³² The stolen property amounted to 300 dollars and 400 rupees in cash and some clothes.¹³³

When the British Consul approached the Wali of Basrah he was informed that “His Excellency had received no instructions from the Sublime Porte to recognize the right of Her Majesty’s Consul at Basrah to protect Bahreinese visiting Basrah but had been ordered to report on the case of the plundering of the property of the subject of the Sheikh of Bahrein on board a native vessel in the Shat al Arab only a few miles below the port of Basrah”.¹³⁴

The Porte appeared to be much pre-occupied with the question of British influence in Bahrain.

In 1898, the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs called attention of British Ambassador to the information which was said to have reached the Porte of the appointment of a British Vice-Consul at Bahrain and requested the British Government to apply to the Porte for his Exequatur.¹³⁵

The Porte was informed that the British Embassy had heard nothing of such an appointment, and that if the Porte desired further information it would be well to make application through the Ottoman Ambassador in London.¹³⁶ It was clear that the British government would not admit the right of Porte to insist on Consular Officers in that district being furnished with an Ottoman Exequatur. At that moment there was no decision on the question of appointing a British Vice Consul at Bahrain. However Britain remained firm on its right to protect the subjects of the Chief of Bahrain in foreign territory.

¹³² Keep-Withs, NAI, FD, Secret-E, January 1897, Nos. 50-74.

¹³³ Keep-withs, EP Chapman sent details of story to Deputy Secretary, 26 September 1896, NAI, FD, Secret-E, January 1897, Nos. 50-74.

¹³⁴ Mockler as Her Britannic Majesty’s Consul General Baghdad to Her Britannic Majesty’s Ambassador, Constantinople with reference to Dispatch dated 8 February 1896, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1896, Nos 115-119.

¹³⁵ NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1898, Nos 1-6.

¹³⁶ From Sir P. Currie Her Majesty’s Ambassador at Constantinople to Secretary of State Foreign Affairs, 19 January 1898, Constantinople, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1898, Nos. 1-6.

There was another case during this time regarding Lingeh in which a French protégé of Persian nationality ‘unjustly preferred’ a claim against a widow of Bahrain subject who had long enjoyed the protection of the Residency. In this respect the French Minister asked Sir H. M. Durand, KCSI, Tehran whether the natives of Bahrain residing in the ports of Persian Gulf were under protection of British; were such persons within the Indian protectorate and therefore subject to British Consular jurisdiction¹³⁷. Durand desired exact reply to be given to the French minister. The PRPG Lt. Meade in reply gave reference to earlier occasions stating that in December 1893 Her Majesty’s Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs informed Her Majesty’s Ambassador at Constantinople that the Chief of Bahrain was under British protection which would also be extended to his subjects whenever there may be occasion for it. In September 1894, the order to extend protection was repeated by India Office to GOI. The Shaikh has been precluded by Treaty since 1880 from having political relations with any other foreign power than British¹³⁸.

In February 1899 the GOI received information from Lt Col Meade about an application made to him by Mr. Zwemer an American Missionary, for assistance in obtaining a building site in Bahrain in Meade’s opinion the presence of missionaries in Bahrain was a source of danger. GOI suggested no assistance as it was a settled policy of the BG to ‘interfere in nowise with religious customs and beliefs’ and that the attitude of the BG was one of absolute neutrality.¹³⁹ The GOI did not agree with the Resident’s reply to Zwemer about the agreement existing between the ruler of Bahrain and the BG regarding the selling of property as it believed that the Agreement of 1892 with the Shaikh of Bahrain would suffice as an explanation to the query.¹⁴⁰ Zwemer was recalled later.

¹³⁷ Sir H. M. Durand, KCSI, Tehran to the Resident Bushire, Enclosure 1, Telegram 19 July 1899, NAI, FD, Secret E, September 1899, Nos. 181-182.

¹³⁸ Lieutenant Meade to Her Majesty’s Ambassador in Tehran, Enclosure 2, Telegram 29 July 1899, NAI, FD, Secret E, September 1899, Nos. 181-182.

¹³⁹ Island of Bahrein and the El Katr Coast Vol. 6, NALondon, 78/5110, 1895-1900 & ,GOI, to Secretary of State for India, no 118, 22 June 1899, Simla, NAI, FD, Secret E 1899, p 204.

¹⁴⁰ J.G. Lorimer (1908-1915), *Gazetter of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, Vol. & Part I, Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing; Reprint Archive Editions, 1986, pp. 935-936.

3.7. Bahrain Customs Issues and Appointment of Political Agent

The discussion on Bahrain's customs collection began in GOI circles in the late 1890s. Bahrain being located strategically was an important trade centre. It had a flourishing trade and a high collection of custom duties from the island of Bahrain including Manama, Muharraq (Moharek) and other ports of the island. The first Custom dues were levied at Bahrain by Shaikh in the year 1860. The Customs administration was initially in the hands of the Chief of Bahrain until 1888 when he leased it to a Syndicate of *Banias*, the Indian traders, who paid the Shaikh a certain amount that was prior decided between the two, and kept the rest of the profit for them. The rate of dues varied but did not exceed 4 percent *ad valorem* till 1898 after which 5 percent was levied, the extra rate of 1 per cent was farmed out to the second Syndicate of *Banias*.

The alteration in the rate of duty of one percent was not seen as a prerogative of the Shaikh though nothing bound him to seek a prior permission from the British government, but it was expected that he consulted the British authorities in Gulf.¹⁴¹ Apart from the customs the Shaikh also levied small dues and cesses on certain goods without reference to any. The money thus procured was not a part of the custom farm.¹⁴² Hence the Shaikh of Bahrain was collecting money without the consent of the British Government. Though this was an internal matter of the Shaikh's administration the British government wanted to have a say in it.

The GOI had tried through the PRPG to secure a foothold in the collection of customs by suggesting the appointment of British officers to supervise and collect the amount for the Shaikh. The imports in Bahrain were on an increase and thus the profit margins of the traders were high and increasing every year. The British proposal was that such an arrangement would benefit the Shaikh as he would have sufficient ready money to meet all the calls on him and the profits could add to GOIs collection.

¹⁴¹ Meade to Secretary, GOI, FD, Enclosure no 2, No. 27, 12 March 1899, Bushire, CAEd, Archive Editions, Records of Bahrein, Vol. 3, 1892-1923, p.154.

¹⁴² Ibid.

It would be erroneous to consider this as the ultimate British motive. The collection of Customs by a British officer was only a strategy towards enhancing British control and position in Bahrain where the foreign (read European) and Ottoman influence seemed to be on increase in the late 1890s.¹⁴³ It was a means towards establishing a near protectorate status over Bahrain. The beginnings of this suggestion came in October 1897 from the Resident Lieutenant-Colonel Malcolm Meade himself who had taken charge from Colonel Fredrick Wilson as the PRPG in June 1897. The following study explains the arguments.

The British India had established its Native agencies in Gulf in the early nineteenth century, wherein the Resident operated with the help of the local traders and merchants who were more in sync and well versed with the situation and politics in the Gulf; were influential with the local rulers; and effectively helped the Resident in acquiring information and dealing with various issues in the Gulf. They also willingly worked for nominal salaries which was one of the important reasons for their appointments. In return they enjoyed British protection, an enhanced social status and more power in the region that strengthened their position further for trade.¹⁴⁴

As far as Bahrain was concerned, Aga Muhammed Rahim Safar (1893-1900) was one of the largest traders on the island who owned considerable property. He was Britain's native agent in Bahrain. In his assessment of the agent Lt. Col. Meade found him to have a poor relationship with Shaikh 'Isa. Besides he had received complaints from the *Banias* that Aga Muhammad advanced his commercial interests over other merchants and traders by misusing his position as a British Native agent in the region, hence a conflict of interest between trade and politics. Meade regarded this as a bad time to have a non influential agent in Bahrain and suggested alternatives to the GOI. Meade's suggestion was either to replace Aga Muhammed Rahim with his Deputy Muhammad Khalil Sarif or, considering the pay allocated to the post (Rs. 1,200 per year) send a Residency clerk to act as agent in

¹⁴³ The Gulf was gaining attention of France, Russia and Germany. Ottoman attention too was diverted to Gulf and subsequently to Bahrain.

¹⁴⁴ James Onley, (2007), *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj, Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth Century Gulf*, London: Oxford University Press, p. 103.

Bahrain though who may not be able to keep up with the position enjoyed by Muhammed Rahim and which could also result in a loss to British influence in Bahrain or the third suggestion, to abolish the Native Agency and replace it with a political agency. Meade was strongly in favour of the last option. But he was also aware of the considerable cost that would be mounted for the Foreign Department of the GOI. Hence his plan was to persuade Sheikh 'Isa to hand over the management of customs to the British for a more efficient management thus giving him more profit and the new agent could be paid out of the increased revenue.¹⁴⁵

This however was too simple to be realized as the Shaikh resisted every move of the GOI and the Resident in a very diplomatic way. For the Shaikh, any alteration of his Customs system without his approval was an infringement on his internal sovereign rights which he must resist to the utmost extent of his capability. He feared that handing over the custom collection to a British officer would be a face off for him among the members of his tribe and would lead to confrontation with them that may affect his and his successor's position. Meade was willing to wait till the Shaikh relented but he was certainly not ready to wait to improve the present political arrangement in Bahrain.

Shaikh 'Isa was keen on securing British recognition for his son Hamad as a successor. The GOI agreed with the Resident to use this reason as a leverage to gain control over Bahrain's customs and engage the Shaikh in a situation wherein he would relent to hand over the charge of customs to the British authorities in the region. The British plan was full fledged however the Shaikh refused to relent year after year though promising to consider the matter every year. In 1898, Shaikh 'Isa forwarded his request for the recognition of his son Hamad as his successor and thus "prevent the otherwise inevitable struggle of Chiefship".¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. pp. 200-201. Also for an account on Political Agent in Bahrain, Briton Cooper Busch (1971), *Britain, India and the Arabs, 1914-1921*, London: University of California Press, pp. 137-141.

¹⁴⁶ Meade to Secretary, GOI, FD, Enclosure1, No 124, 5 December 1897, Bushire, CAEd, Archive Editions, Records of Bahrein, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 20.

The British government's general policy in the region, as projected, was not to interfere in the internal matters. The situation in Bahrain however demanded more and Meade thought that in view of the situation where there is an established control over Bahrain little more efforts would complete the control even if it may mean going against the established norm in the region. In his letter to GOI he stated that,

On the contrary such a recognition by GOI would so strengthen the position of Sheikh Hamed (sic) that his succession will take place without opposition or struggles...that are certainly prejudicial to our interests in Bahrein, and it is I consider worthwhile undertaking some additional responsibility to prevent them...¹⁴⁷

Meade had argued was that recognition of Hamed could effectively put an end to the pretensions of Turkey in regard to Bahrain.¹⁴⁸

Following a cautious approach in dealing with the condition of recognizing a successor for a protectorate in a region where the law of primogeniture was absent the GOI embarked on acquiring information from its own sources in the region before considering any comments of the Resident. Civil Surgeon Lt. Col. A S G Jayakar, Maskat, was one such British source to gain further information about the situation due to Jayakar's "long experience with Arabs".¹⁴⁹

Jayakar stated that the tradition was no different than the one so far understood that the eldest son of the Arab tribe was not necessarily regarded as a successor and that the usual custom was for the people to recognize the son or near relation who was regarded by himself and people as probable successor.¹⁵⁰ Jayakar further added "instances are not wanting to show that the largest purse and the longest arm are the most important factors in determining a contest for succession...though in Al Bahrein succession to the eldest son is

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Major CGF Fagan, Political Agent at Maskat forwarded to Political Resident, CAEd, Archive Editions, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923.

¹⁵⁰ Jayakar to Political Agent Maskat, Maskat, No 6, 17 May 1898, CAEd, Archive Editions, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 23.

agreed”.¹⁵¹ Accepting the demands of the situation and his position Jaykar accepted that he may not be in a position to form opinion as to the probable effect to the recognition but he opined that if the ‘consent is given by the people then the moral support...will thus materially strengthen our influence with them...’¹⁵²

Similarly W. McDuell, Vice-Consul, Mohammerah gave comments to Political Resident in the Gulf. According to him the succession to the Shaikhship, in the case of important Arab tribes to a great extent rested “with the grey-beards of the tribe, and the eldest and the most capable member of the ruling family as a rule succeeds independently of any nomination by the late Sheikh”.¹⁵³

The Chief of Bahrein was bound by the 1880 Agreement to abstain from entering into negotiations or making treaties. He was also entitled under certain circumstances to British support for the maintenance of security of his possessions and British subjects of every denomination could reside and carry on lawful trade in Bahrein territories. Considering these dimensions of relationship with the Shaikh of Bahrain, the GOI forwarded the case of acceptance of successor in Bahrain to authorities in London.

The GOI assented and the PRPG was asked to convey to the Shaikh of Bahrain that the GOI was “pleased to comply with his request to recognize his eldest son Hamad as successor designate to the Chiefship”.¹⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that even after this official decision and declaration on the part of GOI the recognition was not conveyed to the Shaikh immediately as the Resident still decided to take some time over it albeit with GOIs acceptance. The issue of Customs still remained at the core of the whole decision as at the same time the PRPG was asked by GOI to “simultaneously endeavour to induce the Shaikh

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ W. McDuell, HBMs Vice-Consul, Mohammerah to PRPG, No. 44, CAEd, Archive Editions, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol III, 1892-1923, p. 23

¹⁵⁴ Sir W.J Cunningham, Secretary to GOI, FD, to the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, No. 205-E.A., 7 February 1899, Fort William, CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 153.

to reform his Customs administration preferably by persuading the GOI for the loan of a qualified officer to control the department”.¹⁵⁵

In the discussion over Bahrain, the GOI or London in their correspondence referred to the term ‘protectorate’ informally but never formally as regards treaties or formal correspondence with Bahrain. One more time as the issue of recognition of successor of Bahrain’s Shaikh was being considered, the issue of a protectorate over Bahrain was also discussed by the GOI. In the same letter it wrote to the PRPG, “[W]ithout at this juncture, definitely extending a British Protectorate over Bahrein, the Government of India are prepared to consider proposals to improve the arrangement for the discharge of local political duties in the island. The appointment of an officer to superintend the Customs might afford a suitable means”.¹⁵⁶ The GOI desired an improvement in the arrangements for the discharge of the local political duties on the island. The primary concern here was the advantage that the whole altered arrangement could accrue for the British commerce. Hence, the Resident was asked to give proposals on the appointment of an officer and the customs issue in Bahrain.

As early as February 1898, the British Resident had a discussion with the Shaikh over the issue of customs collection and the Resident had suggested the Shaikh that in order to increase his own revenues, the Chief should ask the GOI to lend him the services of an officer to superintend the administration of his Customs’¹⁵⁷ The Shaikh had promised to carefully consider the proposals. However he soon informed the Resident that his lease of the Customs to the farmers had still fourteen months to run and that he will not make any fresh arrangement without first communicating with the Resident, but he surprised the Resident in his later meeting in February 1899 by mentioning that he had renewed the lease of his Customs six months ago to the same farmers (a firm of Banias) for the next couple of years and that they were engaged to pay him Rs. 1,10,000 per annum for the contract as

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Lieutenant. Colonel Meade to the Secretary to the GOI, FD, Enclosure 2, No 27, 12 March 1899, Bushire, CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 153.

against Rs 80,000 paid in the previous years since he had increased the rate of import and export dues from 4 to 5 per cent.¹⁵⁸ Bahrain's imports in the previous year were calculated at Rs. 55, 17, 410 on which the duty would come Rs. 2,75, 870. Thus the Resident believed that Hindu traders who had the customs farms were making large profits.¹⁵⁹ Hence it was at this juncture that he decided to withhold the intimation as to the GOI's recognition of his son Hamed, from the Shaikh as he felt that once it is done "he (the Shaikh) will consider himself secure, while as long as he is unaware of it, we (the GOI) have a certain means of pressing him to improve his affairs in the hope of obtaining the recognition".¹⁶⁰ The Sheikh, to a certain extent, was bound by this arrangement due to the availability of ready money and also an arrangement with the Banias to whom he was always indebted.

The Resident's way of dealing with the situation was different. He proposed to the GOI that a loan could be advanced to the Shaikh for him to pay off his debts on the condition that he would entrust the charge of his customs to an officer lent by the GOI. The Resident was of the opinion that "such an arrangement would effect a great improvement in our commercial and political relations with the island".¹⁶¹

The GOI reflected willingness towards the Resident's proposal of advancing a loan but demanded a more definite form of the arrangement and an approximate sum which might be necessary to lend to the Shaikh as an improved administration of the Customs "was desirable on various grounds".¹⁶² It could not object to the Shaikh increasing the duty from 4 to 5 per cent as he was within his rights as under Article 4 of the Convention of 1861 he could demand 5 per cent *ad valorem* duty on British goods.¹⁶³ However the GOI accepted

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 153-154.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 154.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Lieutenant. Colonel Meade to the Secretary to the GOI, FD, Enclosure 2, No 27, 12 March 1899, Bushire, CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 154.

¹⁶² Captain H. Daly, Deputy Secretary to the GOI, FD, Enclosure 3, No 616-E, 24 April 1899, Simla, CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 155.

¹⁶³ Lieutenant. Colonel Meade to the Secretary to the GOI, FD, Enclosure 2, No 27, 12 March 1899, Bushire, p. 154 and Captain H. Daly, Deputy Secretary to the GOI, FD, Enclosure 3, No 616-E, Simla, 24 April 1899, CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 155.

that the matters relating to Bahrain pointed to “the desirability of early measures be taken to secure better representation and more continues influence there than can be looked for from occasional visits by the Political Resident”.¹⁶⁴

In the meanwhile Lieutenant F. B. Prideaux, the First Assitant to the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf gave his report on the situation in Bahrain. He mentioned that for the past years, the Customs had been framed by the Sheikh to a firm of *Banias* named Gangaram Tikamdas and Company who made large profits from the business but also feared that the Shaikh at any time may refuse to renew the contract and sell it to a rival firm. Hence they always bought fresh leases some two years before the expiration of the one in force at the time. They secured these leases in advance by paying down considerable sum of money in cash to the Shaikh, who was generally in want of ready-money.¹⁶⁵ From 1895-1899 the Shaikh had received Rs.3, 46, 900 which was just two-fifths of the value of the Customs of his islands, the remaining three-fifths going to the Banias. When Prideaux pointed this to the Shaikh and urged him to get out of their hands and apply to the GOI for a loan of services of a customs officer the Shaikh promised Prideaux to consider the matter but soon in the second meeting informed him that it was impossible for him to back out of his contract and more importantly that he “did not like the idea of an Indian Government official working for him”.¹⁶⁶ The Sheikh made his usual promise to make no fresh contracts before first communicating to the British officer

Meade believed that “an able and reliable official on our part at the place will probably result in carrying out our wishes as regards control of the customs, that is if our representative is able to gain a proper influence over him”.¹⁶⁷ He proposed for two different people- a Customs Officer, “who would be, to some extent, in the employment of the

¹⁶⁴ Captain H. Daly, Deputy Secretary to the GOI, FD, Enclosure 3, No 616-E, 24 April 1899, Simla, CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 155.

¹⁶⁵ Prideaux to Political Resident Persian Gulf, Bushire, 28 May 1899, CAEd, Records of Bahrain, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p.158

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. pp.158-159.

¹⁶⁷ Meade to Secretary, GOI, FD, Encl.4, No 81, 5June 1899, Bushire, CAEd, Archive Editions, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, pp. 155-156.

Shaikh”.¹⁶⁸ Also a Political Officer “who would be able to visit Koweit and the Arab Coast”.¹⁶⁹ The Resident held to his reservations for Aga Muhammad.¹⁷⁰ He was 55 years of age and not in good health besides it was represented to him that “the attitude taken of late years by Sheikh Esa and his undoubted leanings towards the Turks (are) due to the ill-feeling between (our) Agent and himself”.¹⁷¹ Hence Meade believed that British relations with Shaikh ‘Isa “will become satisfactory if Aga Mohammed Rahim and his family have nothing further to say to them”.¹⁷² The appointment of a Political officer was now nearing its realization but not before the GOI acquired complete details about implementation of such a plan.

The Political Resident was requested by the GOI, Foreign Department to submit a report on the advantages which would accrue to British commerce from such an appointment, definite proposals for the appointment of Assistant Political Agent and the additional expenditure involved.¹⁷³ In the meantime in 1900, Shaikh ‘Isa once again prolonged the lease for customs to the *Banias* for a fresh term of two years and when questioned by the Resident about the same first denied but eventually accepted. The Resident disappointed at not being able to persuade him one more time, explained to the Shaikh that the “only object in advising him in this matter (is) to strengthen his hands as the ruler of Bahrein, and that his breach of faith towards me, the representative of the Government, was not worthy of an Arab ruler who has been so long in intimate connection with the British”.¹⁷⁴ Shaikh’s response was that of regret. “He said he was only an ignorant Arab, and hoped that the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p.156.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Some aspects referred to in the same section.

¹⁷¹ Meade to Secretary, GOI, FD, Encl.4, No 81, 5 June 1899, Bushire, CAEd, Archive Editions, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 156.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Captain H. Daly, Deputy Secretary to the GOI, FD, to PRPG, No 991-E.-A., 4 July 1899, Simla, CAEd, Archive Editions, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 161-162.

¹⁷⁴ Meade to Secretary to the GOI, FD, No. 3, (Confidential), 8 January 1900, Bushire, CAEd, Archive Editions, Records of Bahrain, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 162.

GOI, in whose favour and clemency he believed, would forgive him”.¹⁷⁵ The Resident could do nothing more but to “caution him” to be careful in future acts and that “if he desired assistance from the British Government he must keep faith with their representative, and adhere to his promises”.¹⁷⁶ It is obvious that the Shaikh was not willing to share the Customs administration with the British Government nor was he willing to hand it over to them. Evidently, he wished to avoid any direct confrontation on the issue with the Resident or any British officer who came up to him with such a proposal, and postponed the matter by pretending helpless.

Meade was of the opinion that the *Banias* had made considerable profits by farming the customs and their continued possession of the contract was not to the advantage of British interests. He argued that the Shaikh’s reluctance to employ a British officer was partly through ignorance and partly from the dread that it will prove an excuse for the British to interfere gradually in the internal affairs of the Chiefship and partly from the representations of the *Banias* who may demand what he owes them.¹⁷⁷ Accordingly for the Shaikh the arrangement with the *Banias* was most convenient as he could raise money whenever he wanted.

It was left for the Resident to wonder if the Shaikh of Bahrain may want to act similar as the Sultan of Muscat if the example of Muscat proved successful. The Customs of Muscat had formed a subject of similar proposal when in 1897 the GOI had asked the Resident to look in the matter as it argued that substantial benefit might accrue to the Sultan if management of his customs was entrusted to a capable official. The direct control by the GOI would have been in conflict with the independence of the Sultan secured by the declaration of 1862 hence the Sultan requesting for the appointment of a British officer was a more viable option. As the GOI’s pressure on the Sultan increased, refusing to succumb, the Sultan of Muscat cancelled the existing lease and entrusted the management of Customs “in the hands of two Muhammadans” who had experience in the Bombay Customs. Thus the Sultan in part complied with the wishes of the GOI but steadily stood out against asking

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 163.

for the services of a British officer. The Foreign Department was later to remark that the pressure which the GOI had brought upon him “was an unmistakable evidence of (our) intention to compel compliance by forcible measures”.¹⁷⁸ The question to be pursued in Bahrain however was one of considerable difficulty though not exactly on parallel lines as there was no declaration of independence of Bahrain, besides, as the Resident had advocated, an efficient officer to deal with the matters effectively as an immediate requirement of the time.

Appointment of Political Agent for Bahrain

In September 1899 Col Meade had suggested that the presence of a British officer was desirable at Bahrain in view of the great increase in British interests which has taken place in recent years. He drew attention to Ross remarks in 1881 about the increase in interest in the Gulf by the adjacent countries but added that even if it was for general Gulf “our interests in Bahrein are far more important than they were and, as government in India are aware, other nations are gradually waking up to the importance of the place.”¹⁷⁹ Meade advocated abolition of Native agency for Political Agency. India Office had approved Meade’s plan for appointment of a separate Political Officer for Bahrain in December 1899 but Meade was unable to find anyone for the new post of Political Agent in Bahrain. The short staffed Foreign Department was unable to spare a graded officer and for the want of choice Mohammad Rahim Aga continued till he fell terminally ill in January 1900. Meade was left with no choice but to appoint either of his assistants – Captain Francis Prideaux, an English and commissioned officer in the Indian Army and second class Political Assistant or J. Colcott Gaskin, an Anglo-Indian (a cause of deplore in the British GOI circles) civil servant, and an Extra-Uncovenented Political Assistant. Mead’s first choice was Prideaux because of his ethnicity and higher rank but later Gaskin was left as the only choice as he could speak Arabic and Farsi both fluently and was well acquainted with Bahrain. Besides, Lord George Hamilton had expressed his preference for appointment of an officer of the

¹⁷⁸ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1904, Nos. 72-74, p.3.

¹⁷⁹ Meade to GOI, No. 123, 24 Sept 1899, Bushire, Island of Bahrein and the El Katr Coast Vol. 7, NALondon, FO 78/ 5250, 1901-1902, p.1.

graded list of the Political Department.¹⁸⁰ J .Colcott Gaskin took charge as Bahrain's first Political Agent in February and the GOI made his appointment permanent in October 1900.¹⁸¹

In December 1900, after Lieutenant-Colonel Kemball (1900-1904) took over as the officiating Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, he advocated for the recognition of the Shaikh's eldest son that was earlier withheld by Meade for reasons of disagreement on Customs farming. Kemball believed that in the given circumstances there was no immediate likelihood of the Shaikh bringing about reforms of his Customs administration but, "at present no good will be done by pressing the matter on him any further".¹⁸² GOI had anyways recognized and accepted the succession of Hamad after Shaikh 'Isa. They once again were willing to comply though they had not made it a condition of their compliance that the Shaikh should reform his customs administration. GOI had no hesitation and argued that "[W]e have now an Assistant Political Officer at Bahrein and there seems to be no sufficient reason for withholding the recognition any longer."¹⁸³ Thus in 1901, the GOI publicly recognized the right of succession of the eldest surviving son of Sheikh Isa, Sheikh Hamad who took over responsibility for the administration of Bahrein as the fully empowered agent of his father.¹⁸⁴ Lord Curzon's government thus cleared the issue of succession in Bahrain which it was soon to repent.

Commenting on the situation the India Office recorded, "Sheikh Isa although no longer in fact the ruler of Bahrein, was understood to continue to carry weight locally, and his wife, a vigorous and unscrupulous lady in the sixties, who prior to his deposition was stated completely to dominate her husband, remains an important influence on the State."

¹⁸⁰ Lord G. Hamilton to Meade, Telegram, 9 July 1901, NAI, FD, Secret E, October 1901, Nos. 372, & Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1904, Nos 72-74, p.3.

¹⁸¹ N. 144, p. 212.

¹⁸² C.A. Kemball to the, Secretary, GOI, FD, 24 December 1900, Bushire, CAEd, Archive Editions, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, No 294, p. 163.

¹⁸³ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, January 1901, Nos. 108-110.

¹⁸⁴ N. 140, p.17.

The issue of Customs however remained undecided as attempts were made throughout the period to promote the idea of the appointment of a British officer to superintend the customs which the Shaikh resisted.

In 1901 at the instance of Sir Nicholas O'Connor it was suggested that the Shaikh should employ a British subject to supervise his Customs which was one more time declined by the Shaikh.

Persian Angle

While the discussion on Bahrain's Customs and inventing ways of controlling were on GOIs priority, news came up to suggest Persian interest in the same. Though nothing much happened on a serious note yet it ruffled GOI feathers for a while. In 1902 the GOI learnt that on 31 August, Belgian Director of Bushire visited the Sheikh of Bahrain representing that he came by order of the Shah of Persia with a view to concluding certain commercial arrangements with Bahrain authorities and obtaining the Sheikh's consent to the placing of Persian Customs official on the Island, and further intimated to the British Political Agent there, that unless these arrangements were agreed to by the Shah, ships calling at Bahrein would be repelled from Persian ports.¹⁸⁵

In actuality, M Simais, the younger brother of the late Belgian Director of Bushire customs, who was no longer alive, acted on his own initiative. He went to visit the Sheikh of Bahrein and made it sound that it was by the order of the Shah because he thought that "the Sheikh would be flattered at hearing that he came to him on behalf of Imperial majesty".¹⁸⁶

The protest regarding the same was conveyed by A. H. Hardinge British Minister in Tehran, to the Persian Minister Atabeg-i-Azam in Tehran stating that, no intimation was given to the Resident in PG of this Persian mission to an Arab State under British

¹⁸⁵ Hardinge to Atabeg-i-Azam, 5 Sept 1901, Gulahak, NAI, FD, Secret E, January 1902, Nos. 41-49.

¹⁸⁶ NAI, FD, Secret E, January 1902, Nos. 41-49.

protection and bound by special treaties of which Persian Government cannot be ignorant.¹⁸⁷

Hardinge in his note to Lansdowne stated that, “for some time there has always been a certain unvoiced (*sic*) reluctance on the part of the Persian government to formally acknowledge our protectorate over the island of Bahrein”, citing that originally it was conquered by Persia from the Portuguese in the time of the Safavid kings, and only lost to the Arabs during the period of anarchy which followed the overthrow of that dynasty.¹⁸⁸

Nevertheless as a result of the protest in Tehran M. Simais’ actions were entirely disavowed by the Persian government. He was reprimanded and warned by M Naus, the Belgian Minister of Customs to take no further independent or unauthorized action in any of the Persian Gulf ports. M d’Amrain who had gone to Arabistan in connection with affairs at Mohammerah was to take over soon.

As for the Bahraini Chief he, replied that he would give answer if necessary through Colonel Kemball and the incident as far as Bahrain was concerned ended for the moment, but the GOI protested strongly against the communication made by M. Simais to the Sheikh to state that it cannot acquiesce in any foreign interference in the affairs of Bahrain, or in those of any of the Trucial Chiefs on the Arab coast of the Gulf and that any attempt to disturb the relations established by the treaties of long standing between these chiefs and the GOI would be regarded by the latter as an unfriendly act.¹⁸⁹

In April 1902 comes a request from one British Indian subject for farming of customs.

The thought convenient for the FD was that the British government had delivered Bahrain free from the constant external aggression and intestine feuds and demanded no tributes in return of protection was in stark contrast against the exactions which the Khalifa family

¹⁸⁷ Hardinge to Atabeg-i-Azam, 5th Sept 1901, Gulahak, NAI, FD, Secret E, January 1902, Nos. 41-49.

¹⁸⁸ A.H. Hardinge to Marquess of Lansdowne, 18 Sept, 1901, Gulahak, NAI, FD, Secret E, January 1902, Nos. 41-49.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

appeared invariably to have submitted in return of the unstable support which they received alternately from the Wahhabi House or from the Imam of Muscat throughout the nineteenth century. Coercing the Shaikh into agreeing, not only to take the administration of the Customs in his hands, but also to receive a British officer to collect the revenues in such a situation was doubtless easy for the GOI. But it doubted whether the impression “which would be produced throughout the Gulf by such compulsion would not on the whole be conducive of more harm than good”.¹⁹⁰ By having under taken to recognize the succession of the Shaikh’s son the GOI felt it had lost “what might have provided a valuable lever”¹⁹¹ and which had put the Shaikh in the most comfortable position.

The situation in Bahrain was not very encouraging as far as British status was concerned. By the early twentieth century there were already numerous visits of the Frenchmen and Germans and a German trader was established on the island. The role of the newly appointed Political Agent was not found very satisfactory as he was unable to exert any pressure on the Shaikh regarding the decision on Customs Administration. In the first place his ethnicity as a “native of India or Eurasian” was a cause of strong objection as it was believed that he was not likely to command the respect of the Arabs, besides, over the next four years of his appointment the GOI had derived no benefit in his appointment as his influence over the Shaikh was *nil*. Similarly Kemball as a Political Resident had utterly failed too. Curzon minced no words to describe Kemball’s uselessness in this connection. This “obstinate old man” according to Curzon had played false inspite of “receiving substantial favours”.¹⁹² Curzon partly attributed the failure in Bahrain to the weakness of Colonel Kemball “who foolishly advised us to drop the Customs question at the time that we were recognizing the son”.¹⁹³ Curzon underlined the need for different men at Bushire and Manama.

¹⁹⁰ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1904, Nos. 72-74, p. 3.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid, pp. 5-6.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p.6.

Till this time Bahrain had never been declared as a formal protectorate by the GOI which took pride in recognizing that it had never demanded tribute and abstained from interfering in internal affairs, except at the Shaikh's request. The GOI under Curzon's Viceroyalty felt a greater need to impress upon the Whitehall about the position of GOI in Bahrain and the need for a stronger status in view of the change in the environment of the region where foreign players once again aimed to establish their presence and the Shaikh himself failing to oblige to GOI's conduct. In its letter addressed to John Brodrick, the Secretary of State for India, GOI once again emphasized the need for greater and stronger British presence in Bahrain as a policy requirement. It is interesting to note the wording chosen by the GOI to explain the case regarding Customs. Having accepted Hamed's succession and considered it as a wrong move the GOI however conveys to the Secretary that, "[C]ommitted, as we are, to the support of Sheikh Hamed, it is incumbent on us to take measures to ensure that, on his accession, he may find his house in order, and may not be burdened with a heavy legacy of debt accumulated by the improvidence of his predecessor", hence it argues that the question of customs cannot be allowed to drop, even if it has to overlook the Shaikh's "repeated breaches of faith"¹⁹⁴ It further added, "[I]n fact, the reform of the custom administration of Bahrein has become a test case of the nature and degree of the influence which the British Government may reasonably claim to exercise over the ruler of those islands". Coercing the Shaikh was never a problem for the GOI as he had no troops or ships, and the town of Manama and Muharraq where he resided, were completely open to attack from sea. This forcible measure however, "would be liable to arouse unnecessary suspicion and alarm as to (our) intentions in the Gulf".¹⁹⁵ GOI's suggestions were to appoint a suitable officer to secure proper influence over the Shaikh and to bring pressure on him in connection with the Customs. The establishment of a German trader in Bahrain and subsequently the growing interest in this quarter of the Gulf displayed by foreigners and other nationalities demanded a more definite assertion of British position, it felt. It suggested that officer posted at Bahrain should be invested with Vice consular powers for

¹⁹⁴ GOI to Brodrick, No. 85, 21 April 1904, Simla, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1904, Nos. 72-74, p. 2.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

the Turkish district of El Hassa and should take charge of British commercial interests with Qatif.¹⁹⁶

3.8. Issue of Pearl Fisheries and European Interests in Bahrain

The pearling banks in Bahrain were an issue of great interest and involvement for the natives, rulers and the regional as well as European powers. Bahraini pearls were world famous all around the world and Persian and Ottoman Empire's interests in Bahrain were often influenced by it. On the Arab side of the Gulf, were territories of the Trucial Chiefs, the peninsula of Qatar (El Katr), the island of Bahrain, the Turkish province of El Hasa and the domains of the Shaikh of Kuwait. The pearl banks were considered to have been from time immemorial open without distinction, and for centuries the Arabs of the littoral had worked on the banks. There were no definite intertribal limits but the external boundaries of pearl fisheries were well known and intrusion was resented. Various dimensions of the pearl fisheries in Bahrain explain its importance for those who were involved in it and those who derived benefits from it. The nineteenth century had created a pearl boom thus creating a multi layered organization that included the pearl divers, merchants, bankers or financiers. Manama in Bahrain was an important centre for Pearl trading and its nature as such a city housed important class of merchants in trade and grew in importance over Muharraq the political seat of Bahrain.¹⁹⁷

India was a market for a bulk of pearl trade that was done by Indian traders. The British Indian protected *bania*, financed the Arabs and took the profits of the fishery. Of course the local Shaikhs' involvement was equally high. Considering that this trade would attract the other European powers too, the British, had remained extremely vigilant. In the second half of the nineteenth century question relating to the transfer from conventional methods of pearl fishing arose and the first record was said to be of 1863 when a British steamer appeared in the Gulf with trained divers and scientific appliances to which the Resident

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁹⁷ N.7, p. 35.s

took objection and prevented the party from setting its operations, an action that was approved by the Bombay Government. A full enquiry was directed and Colonel Pelly, then the Resident, believed that the rights regarding the pearl fisheries were of “exceedingly undefined and complicated character”.¹⁹⁸ There onwards incidents of other parties making an attempt in pearl fishing continued in the Arab littoral but none materialized largely due to British efforts at keeping all prospective attempts of unauthorized traders at bay.

In 1857 the firm Messrs J. and W. Watson inaugurated the European private enterprises’ participation in the pearl fisheries and trade by expressing interest, but were declined by the Government of Bombay on the basis of report from the Resident Captain Felix Jones. In 1862 the steamer *Johnstone Castle* chartered by a Bombay syndicate proceeded without official sanction to the Bahrain pearl banks and stationed three Europeans with few natives. This had led to a full discussion between the Government of Bombay and the Resident at Bushire.¹⁹⁹

In 1872 the Wali of Baghdad had brought an expert English diver who quit the Turkish employ thereby avoiding complications expected between the Pore and the Arabs.²⁰⁰ In 1874 the Shaikh of Bahrain refused to grant a British Company (Messrs Smith & Co.) concession to exploit the fisheries. In 1883 a British Indian trader made an unsuccessful attempt trying to get several divers. In 1890 Mr. Streeter proposed to fish for pearls and shell in deep water on the Arabian coast of the Gulf. Streeter’s proposal aimed at using modern diving apparatus in sync with an improved system of administration through a well organized company to yield a much larger and finer output of shell and pearl. Streeter’s proposal also referred to the improvement of physical and social well being of the divers through the system. Streeter argued that the incessant plunging in the sea by the divers for

¹⁹⁸ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1904, Nos. 237-246, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹⁹ The Pearl and Mother of Pearl fisheries in the Persian Gulf, Appendix C, CAED, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, 1820-1960, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 508.

²⁰⁰ N. 3, p. 110.

the best pearls contributed to them being subjected to various ailments worst being madness, cramps and paralysis. These evils he further argued could be at once abolished.²⁰¹

The GOI opined that it was undesirable to encourage the introduction of European enterprise. In October 1891, Mr. Starsburgner was sent out by an Anglo-French syndicate to report on the possibilities of the pearl banks In the Gulf. He visited Bahrain and other ports but the result was not considered to be favourable for the introduction of European capital.²⁰²

In December 1891, Shaikh gave a concession to British firm at Bushire for the exclusive right to export shells, but withdrew it on the protest of the inhabitants and the merchants of Bahrain on the understanding that it would not be re-granted elsewhere and that the purchase and sale of shells should be free to all. The chief has imposed heavy duty on the export of shells.²⁰³

In 1899 there was a reference to Persian Government granting contract for pearl fisheries to a firm and was informed by the Legation in Tehran that no contract could be recognized which would interfere with the rights exercised by Chiefs under British protection. Similarly in 1901, there was a consideration of Porte taxing the pearl fisheries in the Gulf and British government took objections to the grant of any concession for pearl fisheries in Gulf which would interfere with the prescriptive rights of the protected tribes. In 1902, a British Indian subject obtained pearling concessions from the ruler of Abu Dhabi but the political agent at Bahrain pointed out that since the pearling banks were regarded as common property of the Arab divers no chief could grant concession to any individual to employ modern diving appliances in pearling operations off the Arabian coast in Gulf.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ The Pearl fisheries of the Persian Gulf by E.W. Streeter, Keep Withs No 3, NAI, FD, Secret E, June 1890, Nos. 155-159, pp.2-7.

²⁰² Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency for the year 1891-92, Selections from the records of the GOI FD, No CCXCIII. FD serial no. 51. CAEd., The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947, Volume IV, 1890-1899.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Foreign Department Notes, C. L. S. Russell's Note, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1904, Nos. 237-246, pp. 4-5.

In 1903 the issue of pearl fisheries and European enterprise was dealt with elaborately as two Frenchmen by the name Joseph Dumas an 'enterprising trader' and Castelin, his assistant, arrived in Bushire from Bahrain in March 1903, bearing a letter of introduction from the French Vice-consul at Bushire to meet the British Resident. He showed an interest in embarking on the enterprise in pearl trade with a given understanding that the fishing of pearls in Bahrain was open to all. In his meeting with the Resident, he declared that he neither had political motives nor any desire to infringe on the rights of the native pearl divers, but proposed to operate in waters where the native divers who had no mechanical diving appliances could work.²⁰⁵

Dumas' plans in Bahrain were not limited to pearl fishing alone. He also wanted to embark on a steam-launch service for landing cargo in Bahrain harbour and convey passengers between Manama and Muharrag (Muharraq), a scheme which he believed to be very remunerative and for which he would have no difficulty in procuring the requisite funds, and apart from that, he also intended to go for the shell business for which he was certain of obtaining ready market in France.²⁰⁶ The interests of the French trader were not casual and perhaps encouraged some engagements in the region by other traders. J. C. Gaskin, British Political Agent in Bahrain reported that Tikchand Dwarkadas a British Indian trader had been visiting Dumas frequently and the discussion was largely about obtaining a concession from the Bahraini Chief for pearl diving which the Chief had incidentally refused.

The right of fishing was free to all inhabitants of the coast but as far as pearls were concerned, the British policy in this regard was to consider the pearling banks as the common property of the Arab divers and that no chief could grant a concession to any individual to employ modern apparatus to pearling operations.²⁰⁷ The policy aimed at

²⁰⁵ Kemball to L.W. Dane, Secretary to the GOI, FD, No. 49, Bushire, 26 March 1903, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1904, Nos. 237-246.

²⁰⁶ Kemball to L.W. Dane, Secretary to the GOI, FD, No. 49, 26 March 1903, Bushire, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1904, Nos. 237-246.

²⁰⁷ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1904, Nos. 237-246, p. 2.

discouraging any interference from outside. The response in the GOIs circles was all about keeping British interests intact though they were aware that it could not be a long term arrangement. “Firstly in our interest we do not want any other European nation to acquire a footing in Gulf, and the longer foreigners can be kept away the better. In the last resort, it seems impracticable to offer resistance to legitimate foreign enterprise”.²⁰⁸

There was a question of their ‘obligation’ towards those who already had ‘vested’ interest in pearl fisheries which GOI identified as the Trucial chiefs; the Sheikhs of Bahrain and the Shaikh of Kuwait. In the case of Bahrain, the GOI believed that “our obligations are more extensive”.²⁰⁹ Under Article 3 of the Convention of 1861, the British Resident is bound to “take necessary steps for procuring reparation for every injury proved to have been inflicted, or in course of our infliction by sea upon Bahrein, or upon its dependencies in the Gulf”.²¹⁰

C. L. S. Russel, Deputy Secretary in foreign department commented that ‘the only part in which at present we have reason to apprehend foreign interference is in Bahrein, and “it seems certain that unless Mons. Dumas or some foreign associate is permitted to reside in Bahrein or unless he can induce natives of the island to enter his service, he will be unable to make in progress with his adventure. It is highly improbable that he would endeavour to find a base for his operation on the Katr coasts, and it is unlikely that he could at the start direct his plans from Bushire”’.²¹¹

The maintenance of Gulf waters free of any intrusion was of paramount importance for the British. They prohibited the use of armed boats by the Chiefs and policed the waters themselves. A necessary corollary of this policy was that the Chiefs could not themselves adopt forcible measures for the preservation of their monopoly connection with the pearl-fisheries. The GOI thus retained its authority as a ‘duty’ and ‘obligation’, a “duty (that

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid. p. 3.

²¹¹ Ibid, p. 4.

carried) with it incidentally the advantage that, if (our) right to police the pearl banks is recognized, a large area of the Gulf becomes at once practically British waters”.²¹²

For GOI it was high time that the matter was considered. The important questions involved were both of policy and international law although it believed that both had not reached an acute shape. The immediate concern was about the shoals lying in the Arabian side of the Gulf. The GOI held the view that Arabs alone were entitled to exploit the shoals. In its letter to the Secretary of State for India the GOI mentioned the background of the issue and its policy.

The principal Chiefs in the past expressed the view that the fisheries were a common property and that no Chief had the right to grant any concession to outside parties; and believing as they do that the shallower waters are dependent on the deeper for their supply of shells, their objections relate not only to interference on the shoals which they are habitually fished by their dependents, but also to the exploitation of the deeper waters beyond.²¹³

The entire discussion on pearl fisheries in the foreign department file of 1904 makes for an interesting reading. The Legislative department stated the other aspect of the issue that there was nothing in the treaty of 1853 to bind the GOI to interfere in the event of pearl fisheries in the Persian Gulf being encroached upon by French or other powers. Each Chief on the coast shared a right in pearling (whatever they are) but there was nothing in the Treaty to bind him not to transfer his interest or to employ labour or skill in the enterprise. Since the Chiefs have been taken under British protection would justify in warning other powers that any intrusion on the fisheries could be regarded as an unfriendly act. There was no support for GOIs action for keeping other Powers at bay in international law but the matter could be decided as the one of ‘high policy’. H. W. C. Carnduff’s in the FD, stated that, “we are taking a strong position in the Gulf on political grounds, and such grounds must be made the basis of any action”.²¹⁴

²¹² GOI to Brodrick, No. 63, 10 March 1904, Fort William, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1904, Nos. 237-246, p. 2.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ H. W. C. Carnduff’s note, Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1904, Nos. 237-246, p. 6.

Until now GOI had staved off outside interference but it was unsure if it could retain the same success in the future. There were two significant aspects of this case that deserved attention. As long as the Frenchmen had not invoked the support of their government to their venture, there was no reason to interact with the French government. As for private, the matter was for the moment taken care of as the Shaikh of Bahrain had declined them the permission. Bahrain had for long been recognized by the British for “intents and purposes, a British protectorate”.²¹⁵

The GOIs rights in restraining the foreign interference were at any rate commensurate with those of Arab tribes concerned with which it had established treaty relations. The question now remained that of the rights and jurisdiction possessed by the Arab Chiefs and how that can be contested in international law and practice. The GOI feared that possible detriment to the pearl banks in which they held prescriptive rights would furnish no valid ground for objecting to legitimate foreign enterprise outside the sphere of Arab occupation but it could use its leverage over the Chiefs.

‘[B]y authorizing the chiefs to abstain from all intercourse with such interlopers and to utilize the powers which they possess of interdicting the importation of foreign diving appliances, of refusing to lend any assistance in men, boats or in any other form, or, if necessary in the last resort, of removing any such foreigner from their, territories, we might succeed in putting such serious impediments in the way of such enterprises as would discourage outsiders from engaging in them’.²¹⁶

Though the matter was well within the limits of GOIs deliberations at the moment but future course had to be identified. This seemed to be essential as in July 1904 a request came from the French Government to London authorities relating to the Consular

²¹⁵ GOI to Brodrick, No 63, 10 March 1904, Fort William, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1904, Nos. 237-246, p. 2.

²¹⁶ Ibid. p.3.

representation of France in Bahrain.²¹⁷ They wished to know if their proposal to include Bahrain in the Bushire Vice-Consulate was objected to by the British.²¹⁸

The French had established a Vice- Consul at Bushire in March 1893. French subjects had come to Bahrain to carry on pearl-fishing, the reason for the French government to make enquiries. The Secretary of State had no objection provided that any representation by the French Vice-Consul was to be addressed to the British Political Agent considering that the foreign relations of the Sheikh were in the British hands.²¹⁹ GOI demanded explanation from the Political Resident. The officiating Political Resident provided alternatives in dealing with the issue which could help British position in the long run. Accepting the views of Secretary of State for India he believed in any other condition “would perhaps be a useful recognition of (our) *quasi*-British protectorate over Bahrein”.²²⁰ Though the motive for the French merchants to gain access to pearl-fisheries was an issue of great difficulty to decide and that “the future prosperity of the Persian Gulf (will) be vitally affected by any decision come to now”.²²¹

The participation of French merchants in pearl fisheries and jurisdiction of French Consul would mean presence of French man-of-war on pearl banks to protect the dhows and diving gear of French subjects. The subject thus required deliberate investigation. The alternatives suggested by the Officiating Political Resident were either to inform the French Government that Bahrain’s foreign relations were in British hands, and a fully qualified Agent was appointed in Bahrain, the good offices of Agent and equality of treatment with British subjects would be ensured. However since French Government never had any commercial treaty with Bahrain there were objections to bringing Bahrain within the sphere of French Consulate. As for pearl fisheries there had been a fundamental principle of

²¹⁷ FO to IO, 4 August 1904, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1904, Nos. 237-246, p. 5.

²¹⁸ Secretary of State for India to Viceroy, Telegram, 17 August 1904, NAI, FD, Secret E, October 1904, Nos. 691-702.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Officiating Political Resident to Foreign Secretary, Simla, Telegram, Nos. 691-702, 25 August 1904, Bushire, NAI, FD, Secret E, October 1904.

²²¹ Ibid.

British policy in the Persian Gulf to preserve the pearling rights of maritime tribes of the Arabian coast immune from foreign intrusion, and that the British government was bound to maintain that disinterested policy by strong obligations to the Shaikh which, he stated, “we are neither able nor prepared to set aside”.²²² The Resident thus ruled out any consent to be given to facilities for foreign firms or European methods to compete with Arabian pearl-diving industries as they had always denied such facilities to British subjects too.²²³

The other alternative suggested by the Resident “if the above alternative was held to be impracticable”, was to accept the supposition that “consequent connection of Bahrein with Bushire may indirectly cause the Persian Government to revive their old claim to right over the island which is still impotently cherished by them” besides, the Resident suggested that any concessions granted to the French could be forthwith claimed by German Consul in favour of Wonckhause and doubtless the Russian Consul would also follow suit and demand equality of treatment. Furthermore any grant of facilities to foreigners will naturally be followed by an outcry from British subjects like Streeter, London, and Malcolm, Bushire whom they had so far kept out.²²⁴ One more time bringing up the issue of Bahrain’s customs and protectorate, the Officiating Resident recommended that “we should inform the Shaikh of Bahrein, regarding French aspirations and explain to him that the only manner in which he can be effectively helped by us is by the establishment of a formal British Protectorate which must include control over his Customs which must be forthwith taken over by us”.²²⁵ Taking a cue from this situation of possible foreign intrusion, the Resident also suggested that Shaikhs of Bahrain, Qatar, and Sultan of Muscat be “induced confidentially to give us formal documents, in which they would appeal and authorize us to protect their time-honoured pearling rights and methods”.²²⁶

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

The GOI proposed to postpone the entire question of allowing a French Consular representation in Bahrain until the British position regarding pearling banks was sufficiently established, until the British Political Agent had established his influence in Bahrain and they had secured authority from the Shaikhs. In case of immediate action the GOI proposed to only recognize French Vice-Consul at Bushire as Vice-Consul of Manama on the clear understanding that (1) An Exequatur for him be obtained from the British Government;(2) that his dealings shall be with the British Political officer alone; and (3) that no extra territorial jurisdiction shall be acquired by the French Vice-Consul.²²⁷ Mention of the intended pearling operations in a way afforded a convenient opportunity and seemed to make it imperative to explain to the French Government the views held by GOI in regard to pearl fisheries, believed the GOI.²²⁸

At the India Office, the opinion differed on some issues. Secretary of State Brodrick was unsure on the issue of Exequatur for the French Vice-Consul at Bushire to discharge his consular duties at Bahrain which would not be covered by his Exequatur from the Persian Government but believed that with regard to whether opportunity should be taken to explain to the French Government the views of GOI and their obligation in regard to pearl fisheries, such communication was premature until the opinion of Law Officers was received though at the same time it can be conveyed to the French Ambassador M. Cambon that any foreign intrusion on the pearl banks may undoubtedly give rise to serious local disturbances.²²⁹

From the above mentioned events it is clear that the GOI was keen on the non intrusion on Gulf waters by any powers. The pearling banks and trade were of significant measures, which attracted attention of other powers thus adding an element of vulnerability to British position. In such a situation the course resorted to was to curtail the contacts of the local Shaikhs with the interested parties.

²²⁷ Viceroy to Secretary of State for India, London, Telegram No., 2856 E.-A, 1 September 1904, Simla, NAI, FD, Secret E, October 1904, Nos. 691-702.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ H. Walpole, IO to FO, 8 September, 1904, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1904, Nos. 237-246.

Captain F. B. Prideaux, of the Indian Army took over the duties of the Bahrein Political Agency on 18th October 1904, relieving Mr Gaskin who proceeded on tour with Mr. J G Lorimer, ICS.²³⁰

A new drama was to unfold in Bahrain which soon grabbed GOIs and London's attention. On 29 September 1904, Sheikh 'Isa's nephew and son-in-law Sheikh Ali bin Ahmed and his numerous Negro retainers exacted 'Sukhra'(corve system, forced labour) from some coolies actually working for Herr Bahnson, the local representative of the German Merchant Robert Wonckhause²³¹ who ran an import export firm with a branch in Bahrain. Bahnson filed a case with the German Consul in Bushire that wrote a letter to the ruler of Bahrain asking justice. Around the same time, some Persians working for a prominent Persian merchant, were assaulted by Shaikh Ali's men that brought in the question of British protection of the Persian traders. In Manama around this time there were between, 50-100 Persian subjects engaged in trade, owning small shops in the bazar. Haji Abdul Nabi, a Persian merchant conducted a cargo landing business on behalf of Vizier Abdurrahman who had a monopoly in this work from the Sheikh.²³² In November 1904, disturbance arose between the Persian servant of Haji and Negro servant of Shaikh Ali in the busy market area that led to few Persians getting assaulted. For the next couple of days the Persian shops remained closed out of fear of security. When confronted about the happenings and the lack of security Shaikh of Bahrain commented that he will have none of the interference from the British Agent "in cases between Arabs and Persians who were all

²³⁰ Administration report on the PGPR and Maskat Political Agency for 1904-1905 Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1906.

²³¹ Robert Wonckhaus was a German merchant who originally came to Gulf in 1897 and was a partner in the Persian Gulf branch of the business of Hamburg House of Traun, Sturken & Co. that dealt with mother-of pearls business. J.G. Lorimer (1908-1915), *Gazetter of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, Vol. & Part I, Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing; Reprint Archive Editions, 1986, p 937-938.

²³² Cox to Secretary GOI in FD, 17 December 1904, Bushire, CAEd. Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, No 481.

Mohammedans” and settle the case by Sunni Sharia court, which the Agent felt would not uphold justice for the Shia Persians.²³³

Shaikh ‘Isa’s decision to shun British involvement and ignore Sheikh Ali’s acts suggested that all was not well between the Shaikh and the British with the Sheikh being weary and almost willing to keep British presence out of any internal security and administrative matters. The case of German however the Shaikh referred to the British. The Political Resident had taken immediate steps and passed a judgement asking the defendants to pay a compensation of Rs 1000/-, leaders of the strife were sentenced to flogging in public and banished from Bahrain. The Resident P.Z. Cox, returned in February 1905 with naval force, passed further judgments and a verdict for expulsion of Shaikh Ali from Bahrain and even passed an order prohibiting the subjection of all foreigners in Bahrain to forced labour.²³⁴

The Resident expressed that, “I unhesitatingly express the view that we have a virtual Protectorate over Bahrein, it is politically necessary and advisable that we should protect Persian (Shiahs), as well as other foreigners, at all events to the perpetration of injustice upon them”.²³⁵ Almost questioning Shaikh ‘Isa’s authority he stated that the Shaikh owed his existence, position and maintenance in that position entirely to the British and in order to strengthen his hands they even took the ‘unusual step’ of recognizing his son Hamed as his heir but both have been unable to “appreciate either their obligations to the British government which has fathered them, or their own obligations to themselves as rulers”.²³⁶ Deposing Shaikh ‘Isa for his son Hamed seemed to be hardly of any advantage, proclaiming Bahrain as a Protectorate was an option that would alarm others in the region.

²³³ Prideaux to Cox, No 270, 17 November 1904, Bahrein, CAEd. Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p.203.

²³⁴ Cox to Secretary GOI in FD, No. 481, 17 December 1904, Bushire, CAEd. Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p.199.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid. pp.199-200.

The Resident even suggested change of hands as far as seat of power was concerned though aware that such a step may perhaps not suit the policy of GOI.²³⁷

On 25th March 1905, brought the news of Shaikh Ali's men threatening his two Persian peddlers in the north-west corner of the town of Manama. Understanding that Shaikh Ali had landed in Budeya (place near Manama) with a large escort of Bedouins and come to wreck attack on the Persians as the reason for his troubles, thus Haji Abdul Nabi had 'begged' to warn the leaders of the Persian community to protect themselves²³⁸.

GOI demanded expulsion or imprisonment of ringleaders; payment to sufferers; formation of special guard for maintenance of order in Manama; banishment of Sheikh Ali; abolition of 'Sukhra' as far as employees of foreigners are concerned.²³⁹ Shaikh Ali was in the custody of Shaikh 'Isa whom the Resident gave an ultimatum for Shaikh Ali's departure from Bahrain. However Shaikh Ali escaped on February 26th with 8-10 followers to eastern extremity of the island, opposite Qatar. Resident Cox's feeling was that it all happened in connivance with the Shaikh and his sons Shaikh Khalid and Shaikh Hamed. Nevertheless Captain Cox took Hamed in custody as a hostage as a proof of Shaikh 'Isa's proof of his own faith, till Shaikh Ali's house and property was annexed and two native crafts of Sheikh Ali were burnt. Even though the Resident was unable to completely fulfill the ultimatum the event, he believed that the action "thoroughly brought (the Shaikh of Bahrain) to his bearings, while loss of life and local upheaval have been obviated".²⁴⁰

The Resident had taken action without resorting to arms. In this entire case, more important for the GOI was the recognition of its position in the region. S. M. Fraser, Deputy in the

²³⁷ Appointing one of the sons of Sheikh 'Isa's deposed uncle, Mohammed-bin-Khlaifa with a binding treaty with the GOI. Cox to Secretary GOI in FD, No. 481, 17 December 1904, Bushire, CAEd. Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 200.

²³⁸ Captain Prideaux, to the PRPG, No. 104, 31 March 1905, Bahrain, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1905, Nos., 523-556, .

²³⁹ Memorandum of demands made by the Officiating PRPG upon Shaikh Isa Bin Ali, Chief of Bahrain by order of the GOI, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1905, Nos., 523-556, p. 6.

²⁴⁰ Cox to Officiating Secretary to GOI in FD, No 119, 4 March 1905, Bahrain, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1905, Prog. Nos., 523-556.

Foreign Department comments upon the incident as the one “nevertheless most beneficial to our prestige in Bahrein and all along the Arab coast”.²⁴¹ Lord Curzon, the Viceroy and GG did not attach much importance to the incident and dismissed it off as “on the whole satisfactory” as against “completely satisfactory” as the GOI was unable to lay its hands on Shaikh Ali.²⁴² Whatever may be the views of Foreign Department and the Viceroy, the incident proved a catalyst for firmer British control over Bahrain dismissing the Shaikh as the one who showed no control over the situation.

The most important thing was emphasizing the British authority in the region as far as any regional or European powers were concerned. This incident seemed to have given that opportunity to the Foreign Department of the GOI. That the Shaikh of Bahrain personally referred the German consul at Bushire to the British Government in connection with the assault; that Lord Lansdowne instructed Mr. Whitehead to inform the German minister for Foreign Affairs that the British Government will make enquiries into the Bahnsen Affair; that the German Consul at Bushire thanked Major Cox for the action taken; that Mushir-ed-Dowleh informed the Persian traders that the British authorities would secure them redress; that the British Legation apprised the Persian Court of the action taken by the British Government and that Lord Lansdowne has informed the Turkish Ambassador afresh that Bahrain and its *natives* were under British protection were good enough reasons to notify the foreign powers in the region about the British relations with Bahrain. These were considered by the GOI, to be “sufficient proof as regards a pronouncement of the fact that Bahrein (was) practically a British Protectorate...”²⁴³

Yet the issue of Bahrain’s official Protectorate remained unacceptable to the Home Government. In view of the activities of European in Bahrain this was an issue of a constant botheration for the GOI. The Officiating Resident preferred a stronger action for the situation,

²⁴¹ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1905, Nos. 523-561, p. 4.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid. p. 6.

The next step was to reduce the importance of Shaikh 'Isa in the general administration of Manama and subsequently Bahrain by conveying to him that he failed in the protection of security of trade and lives of Europeans and was unable to prevent 'rowdiism' in the town; to keep the offenders out or arrest them or prevent their escape; and by suggesting that his son who was recognized by the British government as his successor for which the British Government "had gone to the unusual course of publicly recognizing..."²⁴⁴ was possessed with no adequate ideas or responsibilities of his position. The Resident suggested reducing active participation of the Shaikh 'Isa and handing it over to a vizier appointed by the GOI on a fixed salary and on the immediate guidance of the Political Agent and to assist the Vizier keep a small force of police either imported or locally trained and placed under the subordinate Native Police officer of the GOI.²⁴⁵

There was another part to the plan. The GOI under reference from the then Resident and Political Agent in Bahrain had agreed to the appointment and recognition of Shaikh 'Isa's son Hamed as his successor who according to the Resident had so far hardly shown any inclination towards playing an active role in the administration. Thus the Resident suggested that an alternate plan be in hand in case of further breakdown in the situation of Bahrain wherein Shaikh 'Isa's grandson Khalifa who was of 14-15 years of age be encouraged to be sent to India for education and training by asking the Political Agent to influence the Shaikh for the same. 'In this way', Cox stated, "should anything happen to Sheikh Hamed or should his future demeanour oblige us to withdraw our recognition from him, another and more satisfactory candidate would be ready to hand".²⁴⁶

The GOI seemed not to agree with all the views expressed by the Resident. Establishing a firm rule over Bahrain was GOI's plan of policy too. However in the present situation the GOI seem not to digress from the issue of establishing stability and perhaps doubtful of the Home government even considering to look at the suggestions it wrote back to the Resident that "it would be superfluous to discuss, or even contemplate, a contingency calling for any

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 3.

measures so distasteful to the views of His Majesty's Government, and so foreign to the policy which they are pursuing in the Persian Gulf".²⁴⁷

As for the Chief of Bahrain's inabilities and deficiencies as it perceived them to be, it believed that the recent demonstration of British authority should not be sacrificed and the Shaikh should be influenced to introduce reforms into his administration for which the Political Agent need to establish a proper position with the Shaikh. A warning to Shaikh Hamad and pursuance to send the Shaikh's grandson to India was approved but on the appointment of Vazir by GOI, it needed more information as it would accrue additional finances.²⁴⁸

The Chief of Bahrain was believed to be going through financial difficulties that were assuming a marked phase and there seemed to be no hope of him improving his position by himself. Procuring a stable financial administration before introducing any reforms was essential and with the appointment of a Vizier in Manama it was believed that "the introduction of improvement in customs would follow in the natural order of things".²⁴⁹ The appointment of Vizier was however a difficult proposal as only in the previous year (1903), the Secretary had sanctioned the appointment of a graded officer for the post of the Political Agent for Bahrain. Nevertheless suggestion for few proposals to be submitted to the Secretary was discussed in order to increase British pressure over the Shaikh.²⁵⁰

The GOI was confronted with a situation where if it tendered formal advice and were the Shaikh to reject it, as he had done in the past in respect of Customs questions, the GOI had

²⁴⁷ Secretary to the GOI in the FD to Major P. Z. Cox, No. 1873 E.-B, 17 May 1905, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1905, Nos. 523-561.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1905, Nos. 523-561, p. 7.

²⁵⁰ Some of the proposals that came from the circles of FD to be put to the Secretary of State was to put pressure on the Shaikh to appoint as mentioned in the text, a Vizier at Manama for a definite term of years and the person to be selected and approved by GOI; to appoint a Muhammadan Native Police Officer of the GOI and station the Shaikh's guards in the bazaar at Manama in his charge; Political Agent should influence the Shaikh to send his grandson Khalifa to study in India and use it as a check on behavior of 'Isa's son Hamed who in presence of such a powerful rival, should feel that his chances of succeeding are small, unless he succeeded in conciliating both the British Government and Shaikh Esa. Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1905, Nos. 523-561, p. 7

alternative of either being compelled to resort to fresh coercive measures to enforce its demands, “or of seeing the Shaikh further confirmed in his old contumacious attitude”.²⁵¹ The most urgent question for the GOI was that of Customs administration which it believed that the appointment of Vazir would help but it was hardly reasonable that the Sheikh would be ready to accept it.

In October 1904 Captain Prideaux had assured the Shaikh that he would not suffer loss either of dignity or of income; that he was not asked to hand over the administration of the Customs to GOI; nor to promise always to employ a British official and that all the profits reaped would be handed over to him direct by the Custom Superintendent and that the Political Agent had no desire that any of the money should pass through his office.²⁵² The purpose of GOI acquiring permission to appoint a Political agent after the inability of Gaskin in Bahrain was for the purpose of Customs administration and his first object was to suggest the reforms as soon as he had established his influence.

Customs: An Issue of Pursuance

In the meanwhile the local disturbance came in culminating in the ultimatum due to the Shaikh Ali incident. The India Office was somewhat alarmed at the incident in the region but did not want to overtly react given that regional and European powers were involved albeit in two different situations. In a situation as this, the GOI received instructions from the Secretary of State not to mix up the Customs question in Bahrain with these incidents, lest it might be thought that, British, “while affecting to vindicate international rights, they were really looking after their interests”.²⁵³ Nevertheless Curzon differed from this position. He was of the view that it was not the right time, particularly when the Shaikh was “reduced to a proper degree of subordination, (due to the recent incident) to give a go-by to all our previous warnings and declarations, and to permit him to resume his attitude to

²⁵¹ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1905, Nos. 523-561, p. 9.

²⁵² Ibid. p. 10.

²⁵³ Foreign Department Notes, Curzon’s comments, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1905, Nos. 523-561, pp. 10-11.

inveterate but calculating obstinacy”.²⁵⁴ Curzon demanded that Cox be indicated that “it is hardly inconsistent with our dignity to abandon in the hour of success that which we have throughout insisted upon as the first condition of reform...”²⁵⁵

The issue of Customs in Bahrain was the issue of great importance for GOI, a matter which could not be permitted to be dropped. Projecting it in view of greater foreign rivalry and thus push in for more and earlier control over Bahrain and greater reforms in the administration of Bahrain. In the Viceroy’s visit to Bahrain this issue had been given most preference similarly in the reconstitution of the agency in Bahrain the Home government had demanded attention to it. Curzon was keen to know, “whether we are likely to be confronted with renewed obstinacy necessitating fresh coercion”.²⁵⁶ The manner in which the Shaikh may be expected to grant different proposals for reform, how far he was likely to prove amenable to the authoritative advice and influence of his Political agent, and in what manner the Resident proposed to apply pressure was what the GOI was keen on.²⁵⁷ The GOIs had set its face against any such extreme measure as being altogether opposed to the policy of the imperial government and aimed at a gradual personal influence of the Political Agent and friendly advice to the Sheikh to further its policy of greater control over Bahrain.

The PRPG till now somewhat unsure about the exact policy to be followed in Bahrain, after GOIs response now set upon the task of building pressure over the Shaikh with the help of the Political Agent. The Political Agent’s assessment of the situation was that two issues of great importance had to be sorted out even before the Customs issue was discussed. Firstly, the treatment by the Al Khalifa family upon the Shaikh’s own subjects and secondly the hordes of Beduins who came from Hasa and Qatar every summer and were fed at the Sheikh’s expense and permitted to commit a variety of crimes and to harass the people in

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Secretary to the GOI in the FD to Major P. Z. Cox, No. 1873 E.-B, 17 May 1905, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1905, Nos. 523-561, p. 3.

Manama without the slightest check.²⁵⁸ Thus Captain Prideaux felt, the Chief of Bahrain should be firmly told that the GOI cannot use the protection which they gave him to be used as a shelter from which he may tyrannize over and ill-treat his subjects without let or hindrance, as thereby an undesired stigma is liable to become attached to government's name, at the same time the government on their part maintaining their right to offer friendly advice for the increased welfare of the chief and his subjects are quite ready to leave undiminished the internal sovereign rights of the Chief, where the dishonor of the GOI was not involved.²⁵⁹ Captain Prideaux viewed a temporary policy of complete inaction in regard to Customs and other reforms but contemplated that the British Political Agent should abandon the policy of non-intervention in internal administrative cases not involving foreigners, and should seize every suitable occasion of interposing in any bad cases of oppression and exaction.

GOIs honour in the region and Bahrain in particular, was a serious matter; the issue of Customs was an issue of persuasion over a period of time. The official declaration of a Protectorate over Bahrain was out of question at this juncture and the entire reliance to bring about any reforms in the island now rested upon the persuasive skills of the newly appointed Political Agent who was expected to work towards increasing his influence over Shaikh 'Isa "without exciting suspicion, of his general authority in the island of Bahrein with a view to the reforms being ultimately carried through".²⁶⁰

The Resident with a few reservations about Prideaux's line of thought wondered, if there at all existed a 'middle course' between the extreme ones of "treating Bahrain (a) as a British Protectorate, and (b) as an independent principality".²⁶¹ Referring to British rule in India, the Resident quipped, "I grant that if King Log does not give satisfaction there is presumably nothing to prevent us from changing him for King Stork, but it seems to me that we cannot at one minute insist that the Ruler is an independent sovereign and expect

²⁵⁸ Prideaux to PRPG, No 204, 24 June 1905, Bahrein, NAI, FD, Secret E, October 1905, Nos. 508-511.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 5.

²⁶¹ Cox to S. M. Fraser, No., 331, 16 July 1905, Bushire, NAI, FD, Secret E, October 1905, Nos. 508-511.

him to assume responsibility as such,...and at another treat him like a petty Indian Raja and intervene in his internal administration to the extent suggested by Captain Prideaux”.²⁶²

As per GOI's policy in Bahrain a 'middle course' did indeed exist, but for the interpretation of a full British Protectorate over Bahrain as involving right to intervene in the internal administration of Bahrain to the extent contemplated by the Political Agent, the GOI kept its stand clear that “there (is) no authority for the supposition that Great Britain would necessarily possess such a right, even were (*sic*) she formally to notify a British Protectorate over Bahrein to Foreign Powers”.²⁶³ In its proposed letter the GOI attempted to explain its policy position to the PRPG. The analogy between the Indian Raja and the Chief of Bahrain was misleading, felt the GOI, it drafted, as “in the case of native States in India the British Power is the sovereign, and not merely the Protecting Power, and that, in the same degree as they has lost the majority of attributes of sovereignty as well as of independence, reciprocal rights and obligations had been created between them and the GOI, which as yet has no exact counterpart in the relations of Great Britain to Bahrein”.²⁶⁴

The issue of declaring Bahrain a British Protectorate was a matter of serious consideration and the exact interpretation a general question of international law. Bahrain, although under British protection, was *de jure*, an independent State. But GOI affirmed that could be considered under the Protectorate of Great Britain in the following sense:

- (i) The British Government alone as distinct from Turkey, Persia, or any other power, controlled the foreign relations of Bahrain and the Shaikh was bound not to enter into relations with any other power therefore the British government undertook the protection of foreigners in Bahrain.
- (ii) The reciprocal aspect of this was that Great Britain was bound to protect the islands from any external aggression or assault.
- (iii) Thus it resulted that British influence and authority were and must be an ascendant in Bahrain and that this influence was political both in character and

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Draft of proposed letter, from Secretary to GOI in FD to Major Cox, Appendix A, NAI, FD, Secret E, October 1905, Nos. 508-511.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

origin: and it gave Great Britain the right to claim that in any matter she attaches high importance her advice must be followed. The acceptance of an advice in such circumstances paid was the return paid by the State for the advantages which British protection conferred. The acceptance of advice also followed that action in contravention of it, whether it takes the form of vacillation, of bad faith, or of open contumacy, cannot be tolerated, the Protecting Power being the judge of the manner in which it will prohibit, reprimand or punish such action.

- (iv) The British paramountcy (sic) in Bahrain was commercial as well as political in character. This followed partly as a consequence of political predominance, but still more in case of Bahrein, from undisputed commercial predominance of Great Britain in the islands and ports of Persian Gulf.
- (v) The political position of Great Britain in Bahrein has given her not merely an interest, but a recognized right of interference in the succession....The exercise of this right was inconsistent with independent sovereignty: and it may be said to involve in a sense direct interference with the internal affairs of the State. It is understood that no such right is claimed in the case of any of the Trucial States on the Arab coast of the Gulf and its frank admission by the chief of Bahrein is the most explicit evidence yet supplied of the dimensions which the Protectorate has already assumed.
- (vi) The case of Customs may be brought within the prerogative of the Protecting power...the insistence of Great Britain upon the measure may be regarded as an illustration of the advice which, in virtue of her general controlling authority, she deems it necessary to give, and which the Shaikh is not at liberty to permanently disregard.²⁶⁵

Interference or pressure on the Shaikh in any forms with a view to forcing the Sheikh to adopt premature reforms was prohibited. The GOI advised Political Agent to work towards “building up a position which will enable him to tender advice for the gradual amelioration of the internal administration” in Bahrain”.²⁶⁶

The matter of Customs reform was something that the GOI was not ready to lay to rest till the Shaikh agreed to it. As for the Issues of the intervention of the Political Agent in matters of the behavior of the Al-Khlifa members who were office bearers; extravagant entertainment of Bedouins by the Shaikh; reforms of land revenue administration; and legal disputes between the Shaikh and his subjects, were matters that involved important

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

questions of international law about which the GOI awaited the consent of Home government as they bore “indirectly on the general subject of British position in the Persian Gulf”.²⁶⁷

IO responded with alarm and apprehension. It believed that “the time (had) not yet arrived for defining in strict terms the position of the Sheikh of Bahrein towards the protecting British Power”. It believed that in the given circumstances it would suffice that the Political authorities in the Persian Gulf should, “by steadily, and, as far as possible, unobtrusively, increasing their influence and the confidence of the Sheikh in their advice and power to direct and control his external affairs”.²⁶⁸ Lansdowne in the Foreign Office added no further dimension to the matter agreeing to Brodrick’s view²⁶⁹. The IO or the FO made no changes in the policy suggested by the GOI. All the offices however agreed to look into the issue and demanded further information on the Resident.

One more time Percy Cox set upon to defend his earlier stand on the issue strongly. Since 1898 Shaikh ‘Isa had been authoritatively approached no less than nine times in all, by three Residents and one Viceroy in person yet he continued to resist the pressures not give reasons for his denial and practically refusing to discuss the question. The Resident could hope no further for the issue to be solved so easily given the Shaikh’s ‘stubbornness’ and refusal to respond to their “friendly advice”. He suggested that either the GOI elect to drop the question altogether during ‘Isa’s lifetime or take the requisite measures through without consulting him further.²⁷⁰ The Shaikh’s obstinacy was perceived by Cox to have come from ‘the desire to play to the gallery and to save his *amour propre*’ though he would be relieved if the British indeed did take over the charge.²⁷¹ The broad considerations of International

²⁶⁷ GOI, FD, to John Brodrick, No. 178, 14 September 1905, CAEd., Simla, Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents Vol. III, 1892-1923, pp. 220-221.

²⁶⁸ Secretary of State, IO to GOI, No 34, 10 November 1905, London, CAEd., Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents Vol. III, 1892-1923 , p. 284.

²⁶⁹ FO to IO, Enclosure. 2, 27 October 1905, CAEd., Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 285.

²⁷⁰ Cox to Secretary GOI in FD, No. 74, 25 February 1906, Bushire, CAEd., Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 302.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

policy was an area of concern for the Home authorities in London, but not for the Resident who suggested that in the given circumstances GOI took immediate charge of the Customs and not worry about the hostile criticism from unfriendly quarters as greater delay would increase the criticism anyways. Besides, the Resident argued, their action in Bahrain will have an immediate impact on few things- it would influence the parallel question of Muscat.²⁷² Similarly, given the fact that Persian Foreign Office ‘tutored by Russian Legation’ was attempting to revive the old assertion of Persian rights over Bahrain and the European merchants time to time discussing their claims of ex-territoriality and Consular intervention in regard to their affairs, the assumption of the Bahrain Customs would in all probability put a stop to any such indications. He added “if we do not nip them in the bud they will gather force as time goes on”.²⁷³

Relations between the Shaikh and British had clearly deteriorated and the Shaikh demanded justice.²⁷⁴ Reminding the British of his agreements of December 1880 & March 1892 with the GOI the Shaikh expressed his discontent about the British Agent who then “was mussalman knowing the exigencies of the religion of the principality people and all the mussalmans between whom and him the relations were extremely easy”, but the replacement for an English on, “who meddled himself with the home matters, and arrogated to himself the competency in what was no business of his, though he was ignorant of the religious law and customs of the Mussalmans”.²⁷⁵ Shaikh expressed his concern about his role in the sale of arms, “your representative obliged me to interdict the sale of arms, and I became deprived of this advantage, I am only one, among the Arab Chiefs; for it is a free trade elsewhere on all Arabian coast”.²⁷⁶ While the Customs question required time for solution and involved the good offices of the British Political Agent by gaining confidence

²⁷² Muscat had been going through a similar case where the Sultan took charge of customs without letting the British play a role. The Resident believed that once the case of Bahrain displays favourable financial results, the Sultan of Maskat will willingly agree to the reforms.

²⁷³ Cox to Secretary GOI in FD, No. 74, 25 February 1906, Bushire, CAEd., Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 302.

²⁷⁴ Petition from Sheikh of Bahrein, Enclosure. 434, NAI, FD, Secret, E, June 1906, Nos. 421-450.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

of the Shaikh to introduce internal reforms the British position in Bahrain, the Shaikh's attitude towards it once again came to the forefront with renewed discussion over the issue of Persian right over Bahrain.

Arms Trade in Bahrain

The Arms trade in Gulf made the British take quick decisions as the trade flowed through Bahrain. Shaikh of Bahrain had agreed to put a brake to the trade. In 1895 Shaikh Qassim bin Thani of Qatar had planned an attack on Bahrain when Sheikh Isa asked for British help. The troubles were ended by destruction of Zobara by *Sphinx* and *Pigeon* and an attack on Bahrain was dealt by the intervention of the British.

It was during that period that British put an embargo on the import of arms in Bahrain. At that time there were 100 rifles and sheikh wished to get more. He granted concession to his Vizier Abdur Rahman permitting him to import arms and ammunition- vizier was to supply sheikh annually with 30 rifles and 6000 rounds of ammunition. The arrangement was subject to the express condition that arms were not to be sold in Bahrain or on the neighbouring Arab coast.²⁷⁷ The objective was to curtail any possible import of arms that could have been used against him and his family, however in spite of the prohibition the situation did not improve and the sale of arms continued when importation was altogether stopped. In January 1896, the Sheikh issued a notification forbidding the sale of arms and ammunition to his subjects. In February 1898, GOI desired to completely prohibit the traffic of arms thereby suppressing the trade in arms and ammunition between Bahrain, India and Persia and in April 1898 the Sheikh of Bahrain absolutely prohibited the importation of arms and ammunition into and exportation of the same from the Island of Bahrain. Shaikh Isa however felt that he has been left out of the advantage of procuring and selling arms unlike the Shaikh of Kuwait and the Shaikhs of Trucial coast.

²⁷⁷ Report on attachment of Arms to Bahrain in January 1898, Enclosure No. 4, NAI, FD, Secret E, July 1899, Nos. 94-248.

GOI expressed surprise over the Shaikh's comments that he did so under pressure from the British representative suggesting that he himself agreed so for his own safety. The Assistant Secretary to the GOI, R. E. Holland added, "people of Bahrain in general have no need for more arms than they possess, and that it is always open (to you) to procure the consent of the Government of India to import whatever arms you may yourself need for special reasons...".²⁷⁸ The GOI showed interest in cancelling or modifying the agreement but insisted that "it is essential for the preservation of public peace that the traffic in arms along the Arabian coast should be rightly confined and limited".²⁷⁹ As for the change of British Agent it was conveyed that the political and commercial condition in Bahrain had considerably altered in recent years and thus it had become necessary for the GOI to have a more efficient representative on whose advice the Shaikh could more confidently rely reminding the Sheikh that the great increase of trade enjoyed by the merchants in Bahrain was largely due to the presence of British officer his island.²⁸⁰ GOI's response to the Shaikh, to be conveyed through the Resident, explained its policy in no unclear terms. Under no condition could it afford to lose its control over Bahrain. The arms embargo, the presence of British Agent instead of local trader and the pursuance of Customs issue, all suggested a steady attempt to encourage British participation thereby discouraging the Shaikh to play a less active role. In this situation however, the GOI suspected a foreign hand. The Frenchman M. Goguyer, leading dealer in arms in the Gulf, had been reported to be frequenting Bahrain and regularly meeting up with the Shaikh. Goguyer was also reported to be contributing to "Al Ahram and other papers of a Quasi- political character" and was "adept at literary effusions".²⁸¹ The GOI suspected that Shaikh 'Isa was not capable of writing a letter as this and suspected that the French arms dealer may have had a considerable hand in the letter. L W Dane, Secretary to the GOI in FD commented, "I am afraid we are in for a trouble in Bahrein, but in view of its strategic importance, especially

²⁷⁸ E. Holland to Major P. Z. Cox, No. 2111-E.B., 22 May 1906, Simla, CAEd., Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 308.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid. p.309.

²⁸¹ NAI, FD, Secret E, June 1906, Nos. 421-450, p. 3.

if a little blasting is done at the entrance to Khor Khayla, we must try and maintain our position there at all costs”.²⁸²

The Persian Claim

The British position in Bahrain and the Shaikh's attitude towards it once again came to the forefront with renewed discussion over the issue of Persian right over Bahrain in 1906 when the Persian government on the basis of an agreement signed more than eight decades ago. The Persian government laid claim to Bahrain citing the Agreement made between Captain Bruce and Hussain Ali Mirza, the Prince of Shiraz in 1822 which according to the British, was not ratified.

In 1905 a Russo Japanese war was fought in which Japan defeated Russia. It was understood that tone in the Persian Court was very anti-European. The Russo-Japanese war and the success of Japan on the mighty Russia seemed to have had effect on the Persian morale and thought. Grant Duff reported, “the Shah and his courtiers apparently believe that what Japan can do Persia is also in a position to accomplish Japan has shown Western Powers what Orientals can do...impertinence should be promptly checked”. He added, “In a country where the administration is hardly on a level with that of Hayti or San Domingo, and where chief power is in the hands of sovereign compared to whom Bomba was an enlightened patriot, such pretensions can only excite mirth...”.²⁸³ Persian Government was conveyed of British inability of recognizing its claim. The question reopened two years later in March 1908, in consequence of flogging and imprisonment of a Bahraini subject by the Persian Deputy Governor of Lingeh, who refused to accept British Agent's intervention when one more time Persian government reiterated that the propriety right of the Persian government over the island was not a matter of dispute.²⁸⁴

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Grant Duff to Grey, No. 11, 27 January 1906, NAI, FD, Secret E, June 1906, Nos. 421-450.

²⁸⁴ Note on Status of Bahrain by Godley, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, pp. 363-364.

3.9. Bahrain Order In Council

The German interests in Bahrain had shown distinctive growth. The German Consul informed the Officiating Resident at Bushire that he considered his jurisdiction in the Gulf were to extend wherever that of the British Political Resident's did believing that those were the instructions from his government.²⁸⁵ The Political Resident and the British authorities used to exercise absolute judicial powers which were not only restricted to foreigners but at times extended to Bahraini subjects as well.²⁸⁶ Political agents had been exercising magisterial and judicial functions since 1905. The influence of the Europeans and the cases where Bahraini subjects were treated by the Turkish or the Persian authorities as their own, had alarmed the British authorities not once but many times brought in the issue of increasing the powers and authority of the Resident and later that of the Agent in Bahrain.

The advice for the Order in Council in Bahrain first came from the Resident in the Gulf. It was in relation to the Lingeh case in which the French minister had posed a question to the British Ambassador in Tehran Sir H. M. Durand, as to whether the natives of Bahrain residing in the ports of Persian Gulf were protected by the British and whether such persons were within their Indian protectorate and therefore subject to their Consular jurisdiction.²⁸⁷ Thus the case was referred to British Legation in Tehran in consequence of certain charges of misconduct made by the French Vice-Consul at Bushire against the British Resident taking matters on international level and making them more complicated for the British

²⁸⁵ Kembal to Secretary GOI, No. 10-S.A, 2 July 1902, Shiraz, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 424.

²⁸⁶ Hassan Ali Radhi, *Judiciary and arbitration in Bahrain: A historical and analytical study* http://books.google.co.in/books?id=3gkHLMay35gC&pg=PA23&lpg=PA23&dq=persian+coasts+and+islands+Order+in+Council&source=bl&ots=FRULYxuwN_&sig=LVNBMfDrqjnw5LS48-8pEvhVHwo&hl=en&ei=xnzOToHtAcLyrQfjoJndDA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CCcQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=persian%20coasts%20and%20islands%20Order%20in%20Council&f=false, on 24th November 2011, 11.01pm

²⁸⁷ Telegram from H. M. Durand to the Resident, 19 July 1899, Tehran, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Vol 3, 1892-1923, p.422.

Resident to deal with. The Shaikh was precluded by Treaty since 1880 from having political relations with any other foreign power than the British.²⁸⁸

Bahrain and the coast belonging to the Arab Chiefs were outside the operations of the Persian Coast and Islands Order in Council. Other orders in Council that existed in the Gulf, were the Maskat Order in Council and the Ottoman Order in Council- the latter providing for the coast belonging to Turkey. Bahrain and the coast belonging to the Arab Chiefs were not affected by the Consular commission held by the Resident in the Persian Gulf. The Resident was the Consul-General for Fars and Khuzistan and the Coasts and Islands of the Gulf being within the dominion of Persia and certain officers hold consular commissions under him within the limits of Consular sphere. Other officers held consular commissions in territory to which Orders in Council of Muscat of Ottoman apply. But no officer had consular powers as regards Bahrein, the coast belonging to the Arab Chiefs.

The Criminal jurisdiction was confined to Native Indian subjects, the Resident being sessions judge and his First Assistant being a First class Magistrate. As for civil matters the Resident had no civil powers nor his first Assistant had them. In May 1901, Curzon agreed.

The Resident had reasserted the stand taken earlier that Bahrain was under British protection and the same was extended to its subjects. But apart from the issue of dealing with the foreigners in Bahrain or Bahreinese or British Indians in Persian or Ottoman territories the Political Resident Lieutenant Colonel C. A. Kemball, was increasingly becoming conscious about the other functions that he had to perform which did not strictly fall into any defined powers or duties. Similarly he identified the inadequacy of the existing position of the Political Agent in Bahrain who he believed “should be appointed....to be a Notary Public for the islands of Bahrein and authorized to levy fees to be credited to the

²⁸⁸ Meade to Minister in Tehran, 21 July 1899, Bushire, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 422.

Government of India, in accordance with the scale of fees levied under the provisions of the Persian Coasts and Islands Order in Council”.²⁸⁹

The GOI was willing to give it a thought. It was aware of the peculiar status of Bahrain and rendering The Political Agent Gaskin with consular powers, a somewhat anomalous proceeding, but they were disposed to think that no practical difficulty needed to be apprehended and they could see advantages in providing for the exercise of power and jurisdiction over European subjects and others in Bahrain.²⁹⁰

The Consular jurisdiction of the Resident at Bushire did not extend beyond the Persian side of the Gulf and the islands. The question of Consular jurisdiction for Bahrain and the Arabian Coast of the Gulf was considered at a time in July 1887 when the Persian coast and Islands Order in Council was drafted. The Officiating Resident’s suggestion was to simply extend the Resident’s Consular jurisdiction in the required direction without the issue of a separate Order in Council who then could issue a warrant appointing Gaskin to be Vice-Consul at Bahrain.²⁹¹

Turkish-Persian Claims

While the Consular jurisdiction was being discussed fresh claims of Persia over Bahrain were communicated. So did Turkey.

In August 1908, The Acting Consul Arthur Geary in August 1908 wrote to the British Ambassador in Turkey, Sir G. Lowther from Bussorah that the Ottoman Government attempted to enforce military service in the Turkish army on certain subjects of the Chief of Bahrain which led them to express a desire to be registered at the Consulate. These Bahraini subjects were in possession of passports from their Chiefs and also a document

²⁸⁹ Kemball to H. S. Barnes, No 7, 16 January 1902, Bushire, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 423.

²⁹⁰ J. B. Wood to Kemball, No. 914-E.A., 6 May 1902, Simla, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 424.

²⁹¹ Kemball to Secretary GOI, No. 10-S.A, 2 July 1902, Shiraz, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 424.

signed by Major Prideux, Political Agent at Bahrain recommending them to the good offices of British Consular officials. Lowther reported to Grey the cause of appeal for protection at the British Consulate. Geary declined them British help since he believed, “they would appear to have no shadow of claim to British nationality...”²⁹² Lowther questioned the Acting Consul’s refusal insisting that, since the beginning of the last century the British Government had on nine occasions repudiated Persian claims to sovereignty over the Island of Bahrein and on nineteen occasions the claims of Turkey while in 1871 the Grand Vizier gave a formal assurance, “that the Porte entertained no intention whatever of obtaining the supremacy over Bahrein”.²⁹³

The question regarding the forced enlistment of natives of Bahrain into the Turkish army was not a first time instance. Earlier in 1873 similar incident had occurred wherein British Government had protested, distinctly stating that Turkish claims over Bahrain to consider it as a part of Turkish Empire were not admissible and that if the natives of the island applied to British Consuls in Turkey for protection, the latter could not refuse their good offices. Similarly in 1892, 1893 and 1896 British Government had refuted Turkish claims over Bahrain. Geary was therefore asked by Lowther to extend British protection.²⁹⁴

The Ambassador’s letter to the Consul at Basra seemed interesting and important as it summarized the policy pursued by the British Home government in regard to Turkish claims to sovereignty over Bahrain and to the question of protection to be afforded by the British Government to Bahrain subjects in Ottoman territory. In 1896, the GOI expressed their full concurrence with the attitude of Home Government in declining to admit Turkish claims over Bahrain and in insisting on the right of British Consular officers to intervene in Ottoman territory, on behalf of Bahrain subjects.

²⁹² G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey, 2 September 1908, Constantinople, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1909, Nos. 352-380, p.11.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Lowther to Grey, 2 September 1908, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1909, Nos. 352-380, p. 11.

In 1909 the wali of Basra who, while inclined to deny that the British government have any rights in the supremacy there admitted that he had been instructed not to protest against, but at the same time not to accept, any assertion regarding the status of Bahrain.²⁹⁵

By Article 13 of the Anglo-Turkish Convention the Ottoman Government renounced all its claims to the Islands of Bahrain, the independence of which they recognized; the British Government declaring on its part that it had no intention of annexing the Island. By Article 11 of the same convention the British Government undertook not to allow the Shaikh of Bahrain to disturb the autonomy of the peninsula of Katar, or to annex it, in Article 14 that the Sheikh should not discriminate against the Ottoman subjects in the matter of dues levied upon the Pearl fisheries, while the Turkish government accepted the reservation of right of the population of Bahrain to visit Zakhnuniyeh Island for fishing, and recognised the rights of subjects of Sheikh to British Consular protection in Turkey.

Persian Government too laid its claims to Bahrain. In fact, the Persian government kept its claim over Bahrain in spite of the “nine repudiations enumerated in the FO memorandum of 1908.”²⁹⁶ Representations made by the British Minister at Tehran to the Persian government in 1908 in regard to the punishment of a Bahrain subject at Lingah produced a reply that instructions had been sent to Lingah “to make representations and to do the man justice,” but that as to the question of Bahrain the Minister “will admit the proprietary right of the Persian Government over the island is not a matter to be disputed.”²⁹⁷

The GOI and Home government demanded a withdrawal of the note which was met by reply from the Persian government that a further strong note could be issued to the BG. The BG considered it inopportune to raise the question of Bahrain in its general aspect and “a somewhat gentler line was taken with the Persian government than was perhaps altogether

²⁹⁵ Sir G. Lowther to Grey, No. 100, 21 February 1910, Constantinople, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1910, Nos. 426-431.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

consistent with the attitude adopted before and since”,²⁹⁸ by the BG, hence the proposed arrangement was accepted. The British Government on its part closed the matter by the British Minister dated 13 May 1909, reaffirming that the British Government maintained, as regards the status of the Bahrainis in Persia, the position that the island of Bahrain and its inhabitants were under the British protection, and that they would be guided entirely by their own views of the position should any action of the Persian Government make representations necessary.²⁹⁹

The issue was about the arrest, confiscation and sale by Persian customs Authorities of a dhow owned and commanded by subjects of Bahrain.³⁰⁰ This was another example the Ambassador believed, to the list in the last few months where Bahreinese had received improper or harsh treatment at the hands of Persian authorities. Mushir-ed-dowlah, Minister for Foreign Affairs re-affirmed the Persian claim to the sovereignty of Bahrain by referring to previous notes of the Foreign Ministry regarding the island of Bahrain and its inhabitants going as back as 1822.³⁰¹

When the British official pointed out that the agreement of 1822 was not ratified, the Persian Minister commented that even if the agreement of 1822 was not, put into execution, it did not affect the object of Persian Government concerning the agreement in question since the responsible officials of the British government at that time recognized the position of the island and the rights of Persian over it. If, in the meantime, an agreement had been made by them, and even that agreement may not have been put into force, the fact would have no bearing on the recognition by the British officers of the rights of this point that the Persian government expected justice of that friendly power who has from ancient times recognized her rights over that island, not to refrain from giving necessary assistance when

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ahmad-bin-Qasim-bin-Jodar a Bahreini, had a boat, a boom. Ali-bin-Abdallh Qatani was its Nakhoda who ended up paying more custom duties at Lingeh and harassed by Persian officials, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1909, Nos. 352-380.

³⁰¹ The renewal of the claim to the sovereignty of the island was on the ground that a British officer acknowledged the claim as valid in 1822 which was rejected by British then.

the occasion arose.³⁰² He commented that the British Government would be quite enlightened as to the arguments of the Persian Government, but added that as every endeavour has always been made for the administration of justice and the inquiry into the claims of persons who are wronged, at that same time strong telegraphic instructions were issued, and that it was evident that the Persian Government officials will not fail in the necessary endeavours for the administration of justice.³⁰³ Barclay returned Mushir-ed-Dowleh's note of the 9th April 1908, as being altogether inadmissible. He believed that this would raise general question of Bahrain for which the moment according to him was clearly inopportune, and he therefore accepted the proposed arrangement. The GOI hardly played any role in the entire discussion that was largely handled by the Foreign Office based on GOI's considerations of the issue earlier. For the final deliberations the GOI only endorsed the action of British Ambassador to Tehran.

In March 1910 it was reported that the Director of Customs at Bushire received orders to refund the passport fee to persons who, on proceeding to Bahrain had hitherto been compelled to take out passports identical with those issued to persons proceeding to a foreign country. They were now to be granted a pass as if going to a Persian port. This practice was reacting inconveniently in Colonel Cox's jurisdiction on the Arab coast. It was held to constitute a fresh attempt on part of Persia to claim Persian sovereignty over Bahrain. The Karguzars were obliging the Bahrainis and the Persians proceeding to Bahrain to take passes on which are printed the words "this pass is especially for persons proceeding from one Persian port to another. For this pass only two *krans* were charged but the passenger is also required to leave behind a cash deposit or good personal security which on return of the pass visa'ed by a certain Persian merchant in Bahrain was released".³⁰⁴

³⁰² Muhammad Ali, Ala-es-Sultaneh, Persian Minister for Foreign Affairs to Sir C. Spring Rice, Despatch No.179, 10 August, 1907, NAI, FD, Secret-External, Proceedings, April 1908, Nos. 192-198.

³⁰³ Saad -ed -Dowleh to Barclay, 12 January, 1909, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1909, Nos. 352-380.

³⁰⁴ Cox to GOI, 2 July 1910, NAI, FD, Secret- E, proceedings, Aug 1910, Nos. 12-17.

It thus turned out to be an attempt on the part of a Persian merchant who also issued similar passes (“Ilm-o-Khabar”)³⁰⁵ to Persians proceeding from Bahrain to Persian ports. The Resident believed he was a man who in the past had been troublesome to the Shaikh and British officials and has frequently written articles for the vernacular press urging that the Persian claim to sovereignty over Bahrain should be revived. The Political Agent was of the opinion that the Shaikh would be glad of an opportunity to expel this man from Bahrain and recommended that course.³⁰⁶ It was approved by the Home Govt.³⁰⁷

The India Office though reluctant in granting any such permission at an early date agreed to Indian Government’s argument that there was an increased competition to the British trade in the Gulf that wasn’t merely commercial but had a distinct political objective.³⁰⁸ The British claim to political predominance was based mainly on the fact of their commercial interests being predominant. Any foreign influence with the aim of establishing a strong presence would affect the British situation. The argument was that the British trade would be impaired and the political influence would proportionately diminish as a result of a German forward commercial policy. Thus a purely political action such as extension of consular activities without the objectives of development of material British interests was feared to have prejudicial effect, both politically and commercially and which could raise reason of suspicion among the other powers.³⁰⁹

The GOI’s proposal of the extension of the jurisdiction of the Political Agent at Bahrain fell in the lines of the Home government’s policy. GOI’s suggestions, it replied, “would mark another stage in the development of the virtual protectorate which we exercise over Bahrein, to which the growing importance of the island as a centre of trade may be

³⁰⁵ J.G.Lorimer, Confidential, Notes on Bahrein 1908-1928, Political and Secret Department by IO B.396/P.4231/28, IOR/L/P&S/18 B391-420, p 20.

³⁰⁶ Cox to GOI, 201-691, 2 July 1910, NAI, FD, Secret- E, Aug 1910, Nos. 12-17.

³⁰⁷ J.G.L. Confidential, Notes on Bahrein 1908-1928, Political and Secret Department, IO B.396/P.4231/28, IOR/L/P&S/18 B391-420, p 20.

³⁰⁸ IO to Governor General of India, Secret No. 11, 21 May 1909, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 426.

³⁰⁹ IO to Governor General of India, Secret No. 11, 21 May 1909, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 426.

attributed...It will strengthen our position in Bahrein, and to remove risks of interference by other Powers, if jurisdiction over foreigners is placed in our hands”.³¹⁰

A certain way had to be devised to mark Bahrain as a British dependent which could avoid an alert other powers that aimed at establishing an influence and negotiate profit from the flourishing trade activities. GOI's policy suggestions aimed to close down on the contentions of the other regional or European powers over the island. Turkey and Persia's claims on the island were repudiated for long from time to time, thus notifying them about the British protectorate status of Bahrain and preclude the necessity of any further discussion of the question with them. That however did not discourage both the regional powers from formally abandoning their claims. The British declaration of protecting the Bahrainies in Persian territory had so far met with an equally vehement assertion from the Persian government to recognize them as Persian subjects in Bahrain.

None of the European powers had been conveyed about British virtual protectorate over Bahrain in an effort to avoid antagonism and any further activity that could undermine British interests. The IO argued, “[T]here is also the risk that the formal declaration of a protectorate might be regarded as a challenge by other Powers than Persian and Turkey, who might raise the question of our rights in a provocative form”.³¹¹

IO thus provided a contrivance. Rather than declare an open protectorate that could encourage contentions from other powers it requested the GOI to demand a request from the Shaikh of Bahrain himself. “[I]n the event of controversy arising with other Powers as to the assumption of jurisdiction over their subjects by the Political Agent, it will be preferable that our action should be based on a request from the Sheikh to be relieved of the responsibility of exercising jurisdiction over foreigners. When this has been arranged, an

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid. p. 427.

Order of council can be issued. It does not seem expedient to make the Order of Council the medium of formally declaring a protectorate over Bahrein...”.³¹²

Accordingly the Political Resident was instructed to approach the Shaikh, with the object of obtaining from him, as a necessary preliminary to the issue of Order in Council, a ‘request’ that the British Government would ‘relieve’ him of the responsibility of exercising jurisdiction over foreigners in the Island.³¹³

The task was not difficult as within two months of IOs demand for a formal request in writing, that he should be relieved by HMG of the responsibility of exercising jurisdiction over foreigners in his country, the Sheikh of Bahrain signed a letter handing over responsibility of the foreigners in his island to the British Government in 1909.³¹⁴ By signing the document, the Sheikh of Bahrain distinctly surrendered all civil and criminal jurisdictions over foreigners in Bahrain to the British Government. In effect it meant that the cases related to Bahrainis and the foreigners would be disposed by the Joint Court that would give the foreigners the same treatment that British subjects received.

The term “foreigners” included (i) Subjects of Christian Powers; (ii) Subjects of Turkey and Persia and other non- Christian Powers (iii) dependents of petty Mohammedan Rulers on the shores or hinterland of the Gulf of Persia and Oman, such as the Trucial Coast Shaikhs and the Ruler of Kuwait enjoying a greater or less measure of protection from the British Government and (iv) the natives of Qatar or other semi-independent tracts enjoying any measure of British protection outside Bahrain.³¹⁵

The Resident’s word of caution towards the Order in Council was about the effect it which the grant would upon the working of the machinery that was then employed for the disposal

³¹² IO to Governor General of India, Secret No. 11, 21 May 1909, London, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 427.

³¹³ Deputy Secretary, GOI in FD to Major P.Z. Cox, No.1350 – G, Simla, 15 June 1909, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Vol.III, 1892-1923, p. 428.

³¹⁴N. 140, p 17.

³¹⁵ Cox to Officiating Secretary to GOI in FD, No. 3134, 27 November 1910, Bushire, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 436.

of civil claims in Bahrain and the extent to which those powers if granted need to be published for the given times.³¹⁶

The draft of the Bahrain Order in Council that was prepared by the GOI in 1909 was based on the Persian Coast and Islands Order in Council, 1907 with certain modifications taken from Zanzibar Order in Council of 1906 and the Somaliland Order in Council of 1899.³¹⁷ In the Gulf, the PRPG Lieutenant-Colonel P. Z. Cox, Captain Mackenzie and the Political Agent in Bahrain, Major Prideaux, who as a British agent in Bahrain from 1904 to 1909, had been chiefly identified with the marked consolidation of the British position that had taken place since the presentation of the ultimatum to the Sheikh Esa in February 1905.³¹⁸

The Resident demanded that the Court of the Resident in the Persian Gulf be constituted as the “Chief Court” for the Appeals under the Order in Council and not lie to the High Court in Mumbai as by the Convention of 1861 and by the right of well established usage the disputes between British subjects and dependents on one hand Bahrainis on the other were always dealt by the Resident. Besides, the Resident argued, “as per the understanding of Maritime Arabs...the Resident (was) the Chief Authority to settle all their disputes in the Gulf. A reference to the High Court in Mumbai, that was greatly disliked by the Gulf Arabs on account of the long delays the heavy expenses and the practical impossibility of attending in person settlements apart from the distance between Bahrain and Bombay would affect the prompt justice hence, could be avoided”.³¹⁹

Bahrain was becoming a curious case. Due to the opportunities in trade, British subjects and other Europeans were steadily increasing in numbers. The British presence in the Gulf was well established in the early twentieth century, and the European powers often took help of the British consular agencies to deal with some matters. Similarly the Arabs in the

³¹⁶ Cox to Secretary GOI in FD, No.1863, 31 July 1909, Bushire, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol.III, 1892-1923, p. 434.

³¹⁷ Deputy Secretary to the GOI in FD to Major A.P. Trevor, No. 1-G, 16 November 1909, Fort William, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol.III, 1892-1923, p. 435.

³¹⁸ Cox to Officiating Secretary to GOI in FD, No. 3134, 27 November 1910, Bushire, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Primary Documents, Vol.III, 1892-1923, p. 435.

³¹⁹ Ibid. pp. 436-437.

Gulf turned to the British Resident as the highest British authority in the Gulf, the Resident had more demands in regard to the notary services which the British resident and the Agent often had to comply with. In 1911 the Political Resident strongly advised the GOI to equip the British Agent in Bahrain with powers of Notary Public either by Order in Council or by separate notification as the other Powers had no Consular Offices and the British Government provided none.³²⁰

The Order in Council was approved by the King in 1913, the introduction of which was postponed till 1919, limited the jurisdiction of the Political Agent to “foreigners with respect to whom the Sheikh has agreed with His Majesty for, or consented to, the exercise of jurisdiction by His Majesty.” Certain minor administrative improvements were effected (*sic*) by the Sheikh from time to time under strong pressure from the Political Agent; in 1911 the Sheikh agreed not to allow any Foreign Power to open a Post Office in Bahrain and not to grant pearl fishing concessions to foreigners.³²¹

In 1913 Ibn Saud captured Hasa from the Turks thereby establishing his contact with Bahrain but later by a treaty concluded with the GOI on 26th Dec 1915 undertook to “refrain from all aggression on or interference with the ...territories of Bahrein...”³²²

The effect of the Anglo-Turkish agreement was that Turkey renounced her claim to Bahrain and recognized its independence, while HMG declare that they have no intentions of annexing it. Bahrein subjects will be entitled to British protection in Turkish territory on the same footing as British protected persons, but not as British subjects. At the same time it was not proposed to establish a protectorate over Bahrain, and the new Order-in-Council did not do that though it assumed jurisdiction over foreigners in Bahrain.³²³ Hence the agreement was not ratified.

³²⁰ Cox to Secretary GOI in FD, 19 April 1911, Telegram No. 357, Bushire, CAEd, Records Of Bahrain, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 438.

³²¹ N. 140, p 17.

³²² Ibid. p. 21.

³²³ Parliamentary notice, in response on a question by Mr. George Lloyd asking the Sec of State for foreign affairs whether he can state any alteration of the status of Bahrein will take place under the new agreements

Bahrain had been in the designs of Persia and the Ottoman, and of the British. Bahrain trade had increased during the period under study. It rivaled the likes of Basra, Kuwait and Muscat in trade. Though pearling remained an important occupation it was not the only item of trade. The Shaikh of Bahrain Mohammad bin Khalifa had trade interests in the pearls and thus aligned with the Persians. Not accepting this the GOI removed him to bring his brother Ali who was more willing to accept the British terms and conditions. GOIs strategy was to consistently disclaim Turkey in the region, and discredit its presence, first by suggesting it takes responsibility of the waters and later claiming it to be ineffective. The GOI aimed at establishing a status of Protectorate over Bahrain. For all practical purposes Bahrain was a British protectorate except that Britain refrained from stating formally in the international community. GOI on the other hand was keen on declaring the status in order to keep the other powers at bay. The similar policy efforts of GOI were in process in Qatar where once again the GOI aimed at establishing a protectorate by a much elaborate arrangement with the Al Thanis.

relating to PG; whether a native of these islands will be entitled to British protection; and if not whose subjects will they be. Thursday 18 June 1914, p. 295, IOR/L/PS/11/28, 1912 P 3100-3300.

British Policy towards Qatar and Saudi, Ottoman and Indian Merchants' Issues

The Agreement of 1868 between Shaikh Mohammad bin Thani, of Qatar and the British India was a reflection and recognition of the changing status and importance of the island for the British. This was in fact the first agreement signed between the people of Qatar (particularly the Al Thanis) and the British thus recognizing Qatar as a separate entity, for the British, than Bahrain. Earlier the reference to Qatar came only when Bahrain and 'its dependencies' was mentioned in the treaties of 1820 and 1861 signed between the Shaikh of Bahrain and the British. The Al Khalifas who from Zubara (in Qatar) migrated to Bahrain and having based their headquarters there, claimed the territory surrounding Zubara as Bahraini. Throughout the early nineteenth century, for any incidents in the towns as Huwailah, Fuwairat, Wakara, Khwar Hassan, Khwar Odeid, Bida'a and Doha in Qatar, the ruler of Bahrain was held responsible by the British. A Governor of the Al Khalifas remained at Bida'a.

Apart from the Al Khalifas of Bahrain, the Wahhabis also kept their stake in the peninsula though not actually controlling it but collecting tithes for not attacking the region. As the rift between the Shaikhs of Bahrain and their nominal subjects in Qatar grew, a full blown war broke out that changed the events for the Gulf and for Qatar in particular. Bahrain with the help of the Shaikhs of Abu Dhabi routed the Qataris and the town of ad 'Dawhah' (Doha) was completely destroyed. The British installed Mohammed ibn Thani Al Thani, scion of the leading family in Qatar as ruling Shaikh and signed an agreement with him in

1868. Very soon the time was to come when Ottoman interests were to become active in the Gulf and Doha to become a base for Ottoman garrison.

The chapter will discuss British interest in Qatar to challenge Ottoman designs and their efforts to detach Qatar from Ottoman influence and being used for aggression against Bahrain. It will also look into the role of Al Thanis in the emergence of a separate status of Qatar and the GOI's role in ensuring the status. The chapter will explain the Saudi-Wahhabi interest. The Shaikh of Qatar entertained trade interests in pearl business that clashed with the Indian merchants who operated in the region. The chapter will discuss the position of the Government of India in relation to this. The GOI was not satisfied with the treaty of 1868 and keen on a more elaborate and comprehensive treaty with Qatar. It thus initiated discussion for it with the Home government. The Chapter will explain the same. The role of Political Resident will also be analysed.

4.1. Background

Qatar was dependent on pearl banks, some camel breeding and fishing. The economy was based on pearling industry and agriculture was impossible as even date palm production was limited.¹ In the second half of the 19th century the Al Khalifa Governor was withdrawn for circumstances not fully explained and the Shaikh of Maadhid tribe, Mohammed bin Thani, moved from Fuwairat to Doha.

From here onwards the history of Qatar began to change as Mohammed bin Thani soon rose to eminence among the other chiefs of Qatar, and Doha emerged as a town of prime importance. It is believed that it was also this time when the, "British relations with Qatar developed significantly and local British officials began to come into direct contact with the local Qatari chiefs".² Mohammad bin Thani's move to Doha from Fuwairat was "politically

¹ Jill Crystal (1990), *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 113.

² H. Rahman (2005), *The Emergence of Qatar the Turbulent Years 1627-1916*, London, New York: Kegan Paul, pp. 61-62.

and economically motivated....retaining the chieftaincy of Fuwairat, (he) moved there with the aim of filling the political vacuum and playing the decisive role in the affairs of Doha and developing his pearl trade. By the end of 1851, Shaikh Mohammed bin Thani had emerged as the most important figure in the Qatar peninsula”.³ However the Shaikh of Bahrain continued to insist on his authority over Qatar. In the next decade, the series of events that changed the situation of this region was the increasing assertion of authority by Chief of Bahrain over the lands in Qatar that was periodically challenged by the people in Qatar and the culminating attack of 1867 by the combined forces of Muhammed bin Khalifa of Bahrain and Shaikh Zayid Bin Khalifa of Abudhabi “who seized the opportunity to attack the Qataris whom he regarded as allies of Wahhabis”.⁴ In this devastating attack Doha and Wakrah were sacked and looted, their inhabitants escaping death by scattering in all directions.⁵ The situation in the region continued to remain tense. The British took the opportunity to interfere and on the pretence of managing the peace in the Gulf waters, moved towards the recognition of Qatar as a separate political entity from Bahrain. Shaikh Khalifa of Bahrain was accused of disrespecting the treaty of 1861 and causing a disturbance in the Gulf waters and Shaikh Muhammad bin Thani was recognized as the Chief now bound by the agreement of 1868 to keep maritime peace and maintain cordial relations with the Chief of Bahrain.

By the agreement of 1868, the British treated the chief of Qatar as an independent maritime chief, pledged to observe the maritime peace of the Gulf, possessing a claim of support from the British if he did so or retribution if he did not. The agreement was in line with a similar one that the British signed with the Trucial Chiefs but the chief of Qatar signed it independent of all six Trucial chiefs. Henceforth the British were to hold Mohammed bin Thani responsible for acts of unlawful proceedings at sea near the coast. The status, “not only (did it) give him some form of recognition which he had not known hitherto; it also gave him a new dimension of power, one that was to become increasingly stratified with

³ Ibid. p. 62.

⁴ Rosemarie Said Zahlan (1979), *The Creation of Qatar*, New York: Croom Helm, p 42.

⁵ Ibid.

time because of the responsibility of Treaty conditions”.⁶ By the treaty of 1868, Shaikh Mahomad bin Thani bound himself not to put to sea with hostile intentions and in the event of dispute or misunderstanding arising, to invariably refer them to the Political Resident. Through the treaty the British achieved three things. They limited Bahrain’s interference in Qatar, granted a separate political status for Qatar and recognized the Shaikh Mohammed bin Thani as the most influential and leading of all the Sheikhs of Qatar.

The Chief of Qatar soon consolidated his position and followed an independent foreign policy much to the appreciation of the British Resident who wrote to the Chief:

‘You are not a British subject but an Arab Chieftain in friendly communication with Her Majesty’s Indian Government. Continue to conduct your affairs peacefully and with common sense and you will always find me ready to befriend you’⁷

Post Anglo-Qatari Treaty of 1868, however, Qatar was promptly forgotten by the British. This continued for the next three years till the Ottoman expedition of 1871 to Hasa that once again diverted British attention to Qatar.

4.2. Ottoman interest in Qatar and British Relations with Turkey

Saldana in his ‘Precis on Qatar Affairs’, has commented that the period of 1873-1904, was marked by constant efforts on the part of the Turkish government to bring the peninsula within their sphere of influence.⁸ The Ottoman Empire as a nominal suzerain of the Arabian peninsula in the nineteenth century endeavoured to station troops in Qatar. Qatar was included in the Ottoman *vilayet* of Basra. The British government at first almost welcomed the establishment of a civilized Government among some of the most turbulent Arab tribes of the Persian Gulf, as tending towards order and peace; but as in its stead the

⁶ Ibid. p. 43.

⁷ Pelly to Shaikh Mohammad bin Thani, Enclosure No. 3, August 1869, L/P& S/9/15 in H.Rahman, *The Emergence of Qatar*, p. 81.

⁸ J. A. Saldana, Persian Gulf Gazetteer, *Précis of Katar Affairs, 1854-1904*, 28 September 1904, Introduction, Part I Historical and Political Materials. IOR/L/PS/20/C243, p. 1.

presence of Turkish power, nominal only as it was, increased the old disorders, and as the British found that the Porte had aims against the independence of the Chief of Bahrain, the continuous policy of the British Government was to disclaim the Turkish claim to jurisdiction in Qatar.⁹

The GOI in its letter to the Naval Commander-in Chief gave a statement of the political geography of the Arabian Coast of the Gulf. "From Koweit to Katif town Ottoman rule had long been recognized and infact (*sic*) though this has never been explicitly admitted, it would be difficult to dispute Turkish claims to exercise jurisdiction as far as, and inclusive of, Ojair. South of this place, and on the El Katr peninsula, His Majesty's government have declined to recognize Turkish sovereignty, though the Turks actually have a garrison at El Bidaa..."¹⁰

Ottoman claims on the Qatar peninsula were never given up though most of the times the local Shaikhs were left on their own without much interference from the Ottoman government. However in 1871, by aiding Abdullah bin Feysul, of the Wahabi reigning family in his conflict for throne of Nejd with his brother Saud Midhat Pasha, the Turkish governor of Basra expanded Ottoman authority along the Arab littoral of the Persian Gulf as far as Qatif.¹¹ The Turkish army soon occupied the district of 'El Katif' and the inland oasis of el Hasa which were the adjoining regions on the west to the promontory of Qatar. In the meantime, though Mohammad bin Thani continued as the ruling Shaikh of Qatar, due to his old age, his son Qassim soon took charge of the affairs. In June 1871, a Turkish force landed at Qatif for the conquest of Hasa and in July a deputation was sent by the Turks to Bidaa, and Shaikh Mohammad bin Thani was persuaded to hoist the Turkish flag and to accept the Sultan's suzerainty.¹² A body of Turkish troops was quartered at Bidaa and the Turks even claimed the island of Bahrain as tributary to them and encouraged Nasir

⁹ Ibid. Preface.

¹⁰ R. Ritchie, *British Interests on the Coast of Arabia, Koweit, Bahrein and El Katr*, 30 January 1905, B133A-160, B151, IOR/L/P&S/18 p.1

¹¹ N. 8, p. 2.

¹² Chronological précis of Katr History, NAI, F.D., October 1905, Nos. 527-530, p. 8.

bin Mubarak, a leading member of the rival branch of the family of Shaikhs of Bahrain.¹³ Hence Midhat Pasha extended Ottoman jurisdiction as far as the Qatari town of Bidaa after he had established his authority firmly at Nejd.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Qatar was now considered as a dependency of Nejd by the Turkish Government. It was Abdullah bin Sabah of Kuwait who as an envoy, carried the Ottoman flags to Qatar. Shaikh Mohammad bin Thani aware of the British reaction to his actions, declined and continued to hoist the Arab flag above his house but sent the Ottoman flag to Wakra. However the heir apparent, Sheikh Jasim noticing the advantages in gaining recognition from a great power hoisted one above his own house.¹⁵ The third flag was handed over to Ali bin Abdul Aziz, the Chief of 'Khor Shaiq', a town north of al- Bidaa and the fourth flag was sent to 'Khor Odaid'.¹⁶ Qassim's move was farsighted. With Shaikh Mohammed still alive and his position insecure, he gained an official legitimacy as an administrator by the 'region's new overlord' and a step towards succeeding his father.¹⁷ This continued to remain Qassim's strategy throughout the period of his rule. He sided with the Ottomans and alternatively with the British whenever it suited him.

The British Resident's reaction was quick as he dispatched his Assistant, Major Grant, to Doha. Qassim stated that the reason he accepted the Turkish flag was because, "he lived on the mainland and that the Turks were a land power, also that the British government had failed to do his subjects justice in a certain case of piracy".¹⁸

¹³ N. 8, p.1.

¹⁴ N. 2, p. 9. Consider the reference to Curzon's claim that the Turks never went near to Nejd but that they continued to keep possession of Hasa and Qatif, represented by an official who resided in Hufuf in Hasa bearing the 'absurd title of Mutaserrif of Nejd' mentioned in chapter One.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 94; Fredrick Enscombe, "The Ottoman Role in the Gulf" in Lawrence G. Potter (ed), *The Persian Gulf in History*, New York, 2009, p. 266.

¹⁶ Smith to Pelly, No. 25, 20 July 1871, L/P&S/5/268 in H Rahman, p. 94.

¹⁷ Fredrick Enscombe (2008), "The Ottoman Role in the Gulf" in Lawrence G. Potter (ed), *The Persian Gulf in History*, New York, p. 266.

¹⁸ Lorimer J.G. (1986), *Gazetter of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, Vol I , Part I Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing; Reprint Archive Editions, 1986, p. 803.

Post Qatar campaign, Midhat Pasha established a governorship at Nejd and in January 1872, Qatar was designated as a 'Kaza' (district) under the *sanjak* of Nejd which was under Hasa province. Soon, around 100 troops and field guns landed in Doha. Later in 1876, Qassim was appointed as the *Kaim Makam* or Deputy Governor, without a salary, as Qatar was not expected to remit any revenue.¹⁹ In fact Qatar was exempted from paying all taxes except for *Zakat* as there was no cultivable land in the country.²⁰ Later Qassim did pay taxes though and which also became a cause of conflict between him and the Ottoman authorities in the region. The Turks maintained a guard of 250 regulars, a coal depot and a steam launch at Bidaa, the principal port of the Qatar coast.²¹

It was obvious that the Turks preferred to deal with Qassim bin Thani despite the existing authority of Mahomed bin Thani who appeared to be friendlier towards the British. Colonel Ross had reported to C. U. Aitchison, the Secretary to the GOI, in Foreign Department, that Shaikh Mahomed Bin Thani was "sincerely anxious to remain on friendly terms. The proceedings of his son, Jasim however, and his relations with the Turks (made) his course difficult to steer."²² For the larger reason Qassim's tactics were meant towards maintaining his stronghold over the region and making independent decisions. Curzon had noted of him as, "a mischievous and disorderly character, who parades or denies his independence according as he is likely to profit by the one or the other assertion."²³

As for the Resident Colonel Ross, Shaikh Mahomed Bin Thani was easier to have discussion with although Shaikh Mahomed bin Thani remained fearful of the reactions of the Turkish power towards his interactions with the British on his territory. The Shaikh avoided any confrontation with the Turkish authority though continued his association with the British in Gulf. In a situation that had given a recent authority to the Chief,

¹⁹ N. 17, p. 266.

²⁰ N. 2, p. 96.

²¹ George N. Curzon (1892), *Persia and the Persian Question*, London: Longman's Green & Co., p.453.

²² Ross to C.U. Aitchison, No. 623-162P, 18 June 1875, Bushire, NAI, FD, Political A, September 1875, Nos. 59-67, p. 1.

²³ N. 21, p. 452.

consolidating his position and ascertaining his status among his tribesmen was necessary to maintain the power for long.

On an occasion when he was asked by the Assistant Resident Lieutenant E. A. Fraser, to meet him, Mahomed Thani regretted that he was unable to call on board a British vessel as he was too afraid of the Turkish power.²⁴ Fraser imagined that Mahomed bin Thani, “though now averse to, and desirous of freeing himself from the thralldom (sic) of the Turkish control, is afraid of exhibiting outward symptoms of disaffection, which would probably result in his removal to Constantinople and detention there for an indefinite period”.²⁵

In the meantime, Ottoman efforts at retaining their hold over the Turkish territories in Qatar continued in the face of increased discomfort to the British. In 1875, a small force of Turkish Gendarmes, 50 in number was stationed at Bidaa and commanded by a Turkish officer and Kazi.²⁶ Lieutenant. Fraser, had reported, to the PRPG that “Jasim Agha, the Turkish officer, is consulted in all matters connected with the Chiefs policy and administration, and nothing could be done without his concurrence. Such curtailment of power was extremely irksome to Mahomed bin Thani, and also to his ambitious son, Jasim however heartily he may have welcomed the advent of the Turks at first, would now gladly rejoice at their departure.”²⁷ The realization of the situation was much earlier grasped by the Al Thanis, considering that they had acquired the role in Qatari politics with the help of the British. In view of the strength of the British in the region they maintained the face of Ottoman power in Qatar for the British. At the same time, elude for the Ottomans the sense of superiority in Qatar with the continued British reference. Neither the Ottomans, nor the British were willing to relieve themselves of the control over the region, a fact apparent for the Al Thanis. The history of the events in the next nearly four decades unfolds the constant

²⁴ Lt. E. A. Fraser, Acting 2nd Assistant Resident PG to Lt-Col E. C. Ross, No 4, Enclosure no 3, 5 June 1875, *on board Hugh Rose* off Bidaa, NAI, FD, Political A, September 1875, Nos. 59-67, p. 3.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. pp. 4-5.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 4.

exercise of the wily Al Thanis to keep both the powers at bay to continue their hold of power over the other tribes in Qatar and maintain their political authority. On the other hand the Ottomans aimed at continuous engagement of their power in Qatar.

At first the Government of India was inclined to view the presence of the Turks in Bidaa with some complacency, expecting the Turks would cooperate with the British in maintaining order in the Gulf but as the Turkish intentions became more aggressive, the Government of India took every opportunity to disclaim the Turkish claim to the jurisdiction. The developments in Qatar continued to be a cause of concern for the British authorities. If the Turkish initiation of authority in the region was a result of British presence, the introduction of the Turkish element into the Qatar peninsula thus encouraged the later sequence of events that eventually contributed to the formulation of British India's policy towards Qatar.

GOI's Concerns

The active presence of the Turks in the Gulf, the question of sovereignty over Qatar and the status of Qatar in the British diplomatic designs in the region, was never conceded as an immediate threat for the GOI in the initial period. As Colonel Ross conveyed to the GOI in, 1873 “[I]t has perhaps been a debateable (sic) land, between Oman on one side and the Wahabee power on the other. At one time, the Chief of Aboothabee is said to have exercised authority in Katar. Later the Uttoobees having settled there and at Bahrein became paramount. These in turn had to pay religious tithes to the Wahabee Ameer who established a governor of his own at Bidaah. Since the Turkish occupation of El Hassa, the whole line of coast as far as Odeid has fallen under Turkish influence, and the Chiefs in general have been forced or induced to accept the Turkish flag. Bida has been actually occupied and a body of Turkish troops are (sic) now quartered there.”²⁸

²⁸ N. 8, p.2. and Ross to GOI, No. 411, Letter No. 115-135, 4 September 1873, FD, Political A, December 1873.

Years later, Colonel Pelly when asked for his remarks insisted that the GOI should “avoid as far as possible for the present mooted questions of territorial sovereignty” and that “the time for effectively dealing with the questions of boundary and supremacy would be when Turkish aggression had taken permanent form or been abandoned”.²⁹

British domination over the Gulf region was a foregone conclusion. The intrusion of any power- local, regional or European was lamented upon. The British had identified the tribal leaders and established treaty relations with them. This had given the GOI a sense of security for the maintenance of the British position in the Gulf. The interactions of the British authorities in the region reflect that the sense of security was not complete in the decade of the 1870s as there was a challenge to this position and which came from the local and regional power interests.

By the end of the decade of 1870s, the officiating Political Agent in the Persian Gulf Captain Prideaux expressed his concern to the officiating Secretary, GOI in the Foreign Department, regarding necessary steps to be taken, “to check proceedings which may not only seriously affect British interests, but may possibly arouse the old lawless spirit, which under overwhelming pressure, has long lain dormant among the Arabs but which it would take but little encouragement to resuscitate.”³⁰ Captain Prideaux insisted that, “These proceedings have up to the present been confined to a small stretch of land and its neighbouring waters, and the reason that they have been committed is that British influence is no longer paramount in that quarter, as it formerly was. Until our influence is regained, I fear there is but little chance of securing permanent tranquility upon the Gutter (Qatar) coast.”³¹ In such a situation the possibility of enhancing British control was not without the consideration of Turkish presence in Qatar and the ambitions of the Al Thanis.

²⁹ Ibid. p.2.

³⁰ Capt..W. F. Prideaux to T.H. Thornton, Enclosure 10, No 212, 16th September, 1876, Bushire, CAEd, Records of Qatar, Primary Documents, Vol. II, 1853-1879, p. 678.

³¹ IO to FO, confidential, 17th September, 1879, CAEd, Records of Qatar, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1879-1896, p. 38

The Turkish presence at Bidaa was a matter of insecurity for the British. It was possible that the Turkish soldiers and a Turkish officer who were stationed at al Bidaa were not prepared to assume responsibility for the maritime proceedings of the Chief or the people of Bidaa. At the same time Qassim Bin Mohammed would evade direct responsibility for maritime peace by pleading his subordinate status under Turkish authority. Hence it was necessary to pin the responsibility of the maintenance of peace on someone apart from the fact of limiting Turkish as well as Qassim's influence in the matters. Prideaux reminded the GOI about the earlier Resident's remarks (those of Captain Ross), and explained that it was in these conditions that Captain Ross in 1874, believed it to be, "a matter for consideration whether the Turkish Government should not be asked to state clearly for what portion of the coast they undertake to be responsible."³²

Turkish Pretensions

The intentions of Turkish officials were to extend the Ottoman influence as far as possible. After all, the Empire did include the Arabs and the Gulf region. The British were a power they had not apprehended to take charge of the region and dictate terms. Though Turkey did not enjoy the sea power and authority of the British it considered its position and power in the Gulf as rightful. Considerations apart the presence of Britain was in all consideration to be opposed, a policy that seriously affected the GOI interests in maintaining the British power.

Explaining that the British government could confine the limits to Turkish pretensions on the coast where "El Bidaa, Wakra, Odeid and one or two little ports are situated", Captain Prideaux believed that, "[t]he possession of this coast would confer no advantage whatever upon Turkey, whilst the shadowy kind of supremacy which she at present claims over it, and which is represented in a concrete form by the petty force at El Bidaa, is beginning to cause great injury to our interests by interfering with that protectorate over legitimate trade which we have exercised with such beneficial results for nearly sixty years, and by exciting

³² Capt.W. F. Prideaux to T.H. Thornton, Enclosure 10, No 212, 16th September, 1876, Bushire, CAEd, Records of Qatar, Primary Documents, Vol. II, 1853-1879, p. 679.

a lawless and defiant spirit among the Arabs of the coast.”³³ He added, “the British Government should in some formal way recognize pretensions of Turkey to territorial sovereignty upon the Arab Coast up to a certain point and no farther.”³⁴ He stated, “if in a spirit of friendly concession the Turkish Government could be induced to waive their claims to all that portion of the Arab coast which lies beyond a point somewhat to the south ward of Ojair in the elbow of the Bay of Bahrein, it would be very advantageous to our interests...”³⁵

Retaining its position, engaging its policy concerns and discouraging any immediate actions in Qatar and the region, were factors that had guided GOIs actions so far. The GOI decided to take cautious steps. After all, disclaiming the action of Turks would have been a hasty decision. Besides, it was not clear as to how far the Turks could take their authority that would mar the British interests. At this juncture the GOI avoided the extension of its authority over Qatar in a full swing and evaded to convey the same to the Ottoman authorities. It did not wish to agree to such an action and believed, “that the state of affairs...(was) not of sufficient gravity to warrant the adoption of so important and delicate step as the opening of negotiations for the purpose of marking off exact limits of Turkish supremacy on the Arabian coast.”³⁶ The Turkish endeavours at strengthening its position on Qatar were persistent and meager. The constant Turkish demands on its position in Qatar, now that the forces had landed and been stationed there, were not coupled with the resources to challenge the British interests. The Turkish representative Jasim Agha, notwithstanding the smallness of the force of only 50 gendarmes at his disposal continued to play a role in Qatar’s political affairs and insisted on being consulted by the Shaikhs in every matter and recovered considerable amounts of money from the inhabitants of Doha.³⁷

³³ IO to FO, confidential, 17 September, 1879, CAEd, Records of Qatar, Primary Documents, Vol. III, 1879-1896, p. 38.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Letter from F. Henvet to Capt W.F Prideaux, Enclosure no 11, No. 207 SP., 7 November 1876, Simla, CAEd, Records of Qatar 1820-1960, Vol. II, 1853-1879, p. 680.

³⁷ N.18, p. 804.

The year 1878 was marked by the death of Shaikh Mohammad bin Thani, and the subsequent formal assumption of authority by his son Qassim who took charge of the affairs completely. Shaikh Mohammad bin Thani had maintained his friendly inclination towards the British in order to retain his authority and rarely challenged the British position in the region. This came from the realization that to a great extent he owed his position of authority to the British. His son Qassim bin Thani, however shared no such pretensions of his late father. He was shrewd enough to understand the situation and most of the times let off one power against the other in the case of British and Ottoman Empire and shrugged off responsibility or feigned ignorance whenever he had to explain for the disturbances or acts of piracy. He too at times rendered unconditional surrender when situation seemed difficult to handle.

Qassim bin Thani's position as the most influential and strong ruler among the other Shaikhs of Qatar could not be questioned and done away with. Hence no matter how difficult the British or even the Ottomans found him to be, he remained the only one they had to turn to for interaction or on pinning on the matters of responsibility of the peninsula.

Would the Turkish authorities have been keen on the interaction with Qassim in absence of the British? Would they have ever felt the need to retain forces, though handful, in Qatari town if British presence was not considerable? How much would the British attention to the region have contributed to Turkish policy? Was Qatar really all that important for the British to regard as a protectorate in future, had the Ottomans not revived their interests? These are some questions for further discussion.

The power of Qassim during the rule of his father, Mahommed bin Thani was recognized both by the British and the Ottomans. With the complete knowledge of the British treaty with Qatar, the Turkish *Mutessarif* of Hasa had come to Doha and in 1879, formally appointed Shaikh Qassim as the Governor of Doha town. This involved Qassim's consent. With the increasing Turkish presence in Qatar, one more time the discussion of determining the responsibility for the Arab coast made rounds in the GOI circles. Colonel Nixon, the British Political Agent in Turkish Arabia had suggested that the Turkish government be

held responsible for any disorders occurring on Arabian coast; that disputes with the tribes in Hasa be referred to the Baghdad Agency and; that direct interference be avoided.³⁸

Nixon's letter, displayed his lack of understanding for accuracy in identifying the territories that were under authority of Turkey. He was neither well versed with the situation in the Gulf nor was he able to identify the exact limits of Turkish influence. The Persian Gulf Resident Colonel E. C. Ross informed the GOI about the situation giving possible suggestions and correcting Colonel Nixon's statement about the territories under Ottoman sway. Turkey's military occupation of Hasa it was to be understood, involved the establishment of Turkish authority at Qatif and Ojair but not at Qatar, "where the footing of Turkey is somewhat different and acquired later, by different means, namely by invitation of the local chiefs of El Bidaa".³⁹ Even if the Turkish guard was maintained at El Bidaa, the administrative authority still remained in the hands of the local Arab Shaikhs and except for Bidaa nowhere in Qatar or its immediate neighbourhood steps had been taken to establish Turkish authority.

Ross reported on the situation. The obvious conclusions of this report were, if not for the British intervention there was nothing that could stop Turkish occupation as far as Bidaa; that British Government was not bound by any existing engagements to oppose that proceeding; if not for the British Government, the Turkish Government should assume responsibility and take measures to maintain order and; that British government can limit the extension of Turkish rule and influence but a line should be drawn.⁴⁰ Considering that the existing political status and relations of Qatar were undefined and unsatisfactory, Ross insisted that, "it would be most conducive to our interests and to the maintenance of our prestige that the government should take the initiative in promoting a more settled and durable state of affairs...and open negotiations (with the Porte)...in view to demarcation of

³⁸ GOI to Viscount Cranbrook, No. 127, 22 May, 1879, Simla, CAEd, Records of Qatar, 1820-1960, Vol. III, 1879-1896, p. 34.

³⁹ Ross to Lyall, Sec. to GOI, FD, No 30, Bushire, 20, January, 1879, CAEd, Records of Qatar, 1820-1960, Vol II 1853-1879, p. 707.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

limits of the different jurisdictions and spheres of influence and responsibility”.⁴¹ He however clearly stated that, “ any formal recognition of Turkish jurisdiction in El Katr should be dependent on the reciprocal recognition of the British position in the Gulf, as that may be intimated by the British government,” and that “the right of repressing disorders by sea should, under all circumstances be retained”.⁴²

Things were not very well in Qatar too. Lorimer states that, the Al Thani Shaikhs who had at first welcomed the Turkish occupation as a means of shaking off British control in maritime matters, were now thoroughly tired of it; but for fear of being deported to Constantinople, they concealed their dissatisfaction.⁴³

The Government of India did not agree with Colonel Nixon’s suggestion as conveyed to them by Julian Pauncepote, Under-Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs in London. The GOI’s policy was obvious. In the letter to Viscount Cranbrook, Secretary of State for India, Lord Lytton and his officials stated:

To admit that the Turkish Government is responsible for disorders throughout the full length of the Arabian Coast, and to direct local British authorities to abstain from interference and to refer disputes to the distant authority of the Political Agent at Baghdad, would be entirely contrary to the whole current of our policy in that region, and undoubtedly be most prejudicial to British influence and interests in the Gulf.⁴⁴

The important questions that the GOI had to deal with regard to their position in the Arab part of the Gulf vis-à-vis the Turkish governance was whether all direct interference with disorders within acknowledged Turkish jurisdiction was to be excluded and if yes then should this non-interference be complete or only limited to cases not affecting British interest. The fact remained that even though Turkish officials were keen on expanding their authority in the region they were unable to prevent the disturbance on the coast caused by

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid. pp. 708 & 712.

⁴³ N. 18, p. 804.

⁴⁴ GOI to Viscount Cranbrook, No. 127, 22 May, 1879, Simla, CAEd, Records of Qatar, 1820-1960, Vol. III, 1879-1896, p. 34.

acts of piracy and hence if the GOI should, “be content with the indirect and not very effective procedure of representations through Baghdad”.⁴⁵ Non-recognition of Turkish claims of sovereignty over Qatar remained the cornerstone of the GOI's policy. This it maintained so in regard to claims of Bahrain over Qatar too.

The Gulf region was undergoing a change in respect to delineating political boundaries. In view of restricting the power and authority of the Shaikhs, GOI's policy was to curtail the power and territorial ambitions of the Gulf Shaikhs after recognizing their status as ‘independent ruler’ for their respective state. In its earliest treaties with Bahrain, Qatar was recognized as the dependency of Bahrain, but very soon Qatar was separated from Bahrain never to be identified with the claim of the ruler of Bahrain.

During the early period of this study, the Chief of Bahrain claimed his right over Qatar at regular intervals, particularly asserting his sovereignty over Zubara. As early as 1873, Colonel Pelly had written to the GOI, that “the Chief of Bahrein should adhere to the arrangements made in 1869, and while acknowledged to possess certain rights of pasturage, &c. on the Katar coast, he should not therefore be held to be empowered to put to sea for the purpose of coercing any port in Katar.”⁴⁶ In any turmoils on the land of Qatar, the Chief of Bahrain was counseled to remain strictly neutral and to keep aloof from all the complications on the mainland with the Turks, Wahhabis and others. He was dissuaded from acting contrary to this stand.⁴⁷

The policy changes that occurred in the GOI circles are very evident in respect to its earlier stand on the issue. These changes may not be very radical and departing from its overall policy decision yet they were becoming more pertinent in the reaction towards the situation. In 1871 and the early part of the decade of 70's, the GOI was not too keen to involve Turkey in any matter of discussion regarding the limits of authority in the Gulf but

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 35.

⁴⁶ IOR/L/PS/20/C243, J.A.Saldana, *Précis of Katar Affairs, 1854-1904*. 28 September 1904, Persian Gulf Gazetter Part I Historical and Political Materials, p.2. & Pelly to GOI, No. 420, 27 October 1873, FD, Political A, December 1873.

⁴⁷ N.8, p 2.

by the end of the decade it was keen on posing a direct demand to the London office to look into the matter and open discussion with the Ottoman power about the same. The GOI was fully aware of the complications that would have risen out of such discussion. It apprehended that in the Gulf, “the main object of the Turkish Government will be found to be not so much the definition of its responsibility as the extension of its nominal rule.”⁴⁸

Hence the suggestion put forth by the GOI was that the sea line of the Hasa district as far south-east of Ojair may be recognized on land, with some reservations, but that at sea the British Government should continue to exercise some concurrent protectorate in dealing with pirates through the resident of Gulf as limits of Turkish authority and she be held responsible for maritime disorders but not recognize its authority beyond that or upon any part of the coast of Qatar except at El Bida, “where the Turks appear to have some real influence and representation”.⁴⁹

The GOIs apprehension about Turkish abilities at maintaining peace may not be unfounded. At every stage the British alarm at Turkish extension (or for that matter any power’s) in the Gulf sent a frenzy in GOI circles. The Ottoman officials however continued to expand and insist on their authority in the region. Gulf was their territory, the British were intruders. The Turks rarely bothered to explain their actions to the British unless questioned, but frequently protested. They maintained that the region was under the Turkish ruling to which even the local Shaikhs agreed.

As for the GOI, it was more about the presence and interference of other power in the Persian Gulf and the British policy to be pursued in response to it. It stated:

It is due to the policy, which the British government has pursued for many years at heavy expense, and to the efficient naval police which it maintains, that piratical outrages have ceased on all that part of Arab coast subject to British influence. In consequence of this condition of permanent security, the commerce of the Persian Gulf has developed to an extent which a few

⁴⁸ GOI to Viscount Cranbrook, No 127, 22 May, 1879, Simla, CAEd, Records of Qatar, 1820-1960, Vol. III, 1879-1896, p. 36

⁴⁹ Ibid

years ago would have deemed impossible, and it continues steadily to increase...”⁵⁰

The important problem thus was to determine speedily, with whom shall rest the responsibility for order along the coast, whether with the GOI alone or with the Porte alone or with the two governments conjointly.

No matter how vehemently the GOI argued its case regarding the expediency of defining the limits within which Turkish jurisdiction on the coast of the Persian Gulf should be recognized and no matter how strongly it refused to accept Turkish presence in the Gulf waters, the India Office and the Foreign Office believed differently. Accepting that such a move would no doubt be convenient in view of British interests, but which offered few or no corresponding advantages to Turkey, Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs believed that, “in the absence of inducements, the Porte is not likely to assent to the suggested limitations of its sovereignty or jurisdiction, or to independent action of another power in territory or waters admitted to be Turkish.” Sir Julian Pauncefote, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs conveyed Lord Salisbury’s response to Sir Louis Mallet, Under-Secretary of State for India, “it would be more practical, and more in accordance with usage that having settled for ourselves the limits within which Turkish jurisdiction may be exercised and beyond which it should be rejected and look to the Turkish authorities to exercise proper police in those limits...”⁵¹ Even Lord Cranbrook, the Secretary of State for India agreed with Salisbury’s views. According to him the principle objection to the course recommended by GOI appeared to be that, “it involves a previous understanding with Porte...which is scarcely possible of attainment”⁵² This discussion also involved matters of Bahrain which are already discussed in the previous chapter.

British domination in Gulf was not smooth and without challenges from the local quarters. In the case of Qatar, Qassim proved to be deterrent for GOI’s complete control over Qatar’s

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 37

⁵¹ Julian Pauncefote to Louis Mallet, Foreign Office, London, 23August, 1879 (confidential), CAEd, Records of Qatar 1820-1960, Vol. III, 1879-1896, p 117.

⁵² Ibid. p.118.

politics. A submissive ruler may have left the GOI to deal freely with Turkey but not with the shrewd tactics of Shaikh Qassim who retained his position but refused to let any power be in control of his territories. Qatar's relations with Turkey were turning sour by this time. Unlike his father Mohammad bin Thani, Qassim had often ignored British directions and openly interacted with Turkish officials, at times inviting them to maintain security. He had willingly hoisted Turkish flag and on being questioned by the British, explained that the land was under Turkish authority. Qassim was now the *Kaim Makam* and even paid a tax to the Ottoman government. He had adapted this strategy to earn repute among the tribesmen and strengthen his position by associating himself with the Ottoman Government. Qassim soon realized the futility of the association as the Ottoman authorities who, in spite of collecting taxes were neither able to deal with the attacking tribes as Beni Hajirs nor provide him support for his actions.

In 1879, the year when Qassim was recognized as the Governor of Doha, the al-Bu Kawara tribe of Qatar, instigated by the Shaikh of Bahrain went ahead to settle in Fuwaiyet, a town in Qatar, thereby questioning Qassim's supremacy and ties with the Ottoman. In the next year Beni Hajirs captured a vessel in Doha and the Manasir and the Awamir tribes made a series of attacks on Doha. The strength of the Turkish detachment at Doha that time was about 130 men.⁵³ The other problem that Qassim encountered as a result of his allegiance to Turkey was the gradual growth of the interference of the Ottoman officials in his affairs and administration, particularly in the revenue collection. Besides, the permanent stationing of troops in Doha entailed significant expense though the garrison was of a modest size.⁵⁴

Apart from the fact that Midhat Pasha aimed at expanding Ottoman influence in the Gulf, Qatar's status in pearl trade was another reason of interest for the Ottoman Empire to establish its control over the territory. Pearls were a great untapped resource for the Ottoman administration in the Gulf, and until such time that they were able to displace the

⁵³ N. 18, p 805.

⁵⁴ N. 17, p. 266.

British as protectors of Bahrain, Qatar was their only possible source of significant income from the trade and Qassim's position at times challenging the Indian traders, only increased Ottoman interest.⁵⁵ In 1879 Captain Woodroffe with Residency Agent in Bahrain, complained to the Shaikhs of Qatar about the piracy acts. The lack of support for Shaikh Qassim despite his pleas to the Turkish officials had disturbed the relations between the two and Sheikh Qassim by now had "lost his patience with the Bedouin".⁵⁶ He complained to the Resident about the disorder and the want of security.⁵⁷

The GOI had established treaty relations with Qatar, but it in the absence of clear directions from the Foreign Office it had kept itself away for a while from the internal politics and arrangements. The GOI awaited the response from the Foreign Office in matter as this. Integrated policy issues were a matter of time. The response from London would help the GOI decided on matters. Whether the response to the call of help by the Shaikh of Qatar would prove fruitful in the long run was a deep policy decision for the GOI. Such a response would involve certain agreement between the two, a decision that could have far reaching consequences, besides in 1881 there was news of apprehended attack by Nasir bin Mubarak, the son-in-law of Qassim, over Bahrain with the help of Qatar.

The GOI would have been too glad to establish a complete control over Qatar in order to take free decisions about both Bahrain and Qatar without being bothered about the Turkish element but they were unsure of the response of the London authorities which it was believed would certainly disagree for such an arrangement. H. M. Durand, then the Under-Secretary to the Government of India, in his remarked, "I doubt whether the Home government would support us in treating El Katr (sic) as wholly independent. In fact it seems to me almost certain that they will not".⁵⁸ The Home Government, as Under-

⁵⁵ Ibid. reference to the Indian traders and Shaikh Qassim in a separate section in the chapter.

⁵⁶ Translated purport of a letter from Jassim bin Thani to Haji Abdul Nabee Enclosure 16, 16 April 1879 CAEd, Vol. p. 713.

⁵⁷ Translated purport of a letter from Jassim bin Thani to Resident, Enclosure 16, 16 April 1879, CAE, Vol... p. 713.

⁵⁸ Foreign Department notes, NAI, FD, Secret, June 1881, Prog. Nos. 10-47, p. 10.

Secretary Durand felt, was not interested in dislodging Turkish claims and GOI had qualms about the Turkish authority being interpreted as “actually and firmly established”⁵⁹

In early 1878, when Shaikh Mahomad bin Thani, the Chief of Qatar with whom British had signed the agreement of 1868, had died his son Qassim had requested the British for a continuance of the agreement. The GOI then refused on the ground that, “Jassims relations with the Turks were such to render an agreement with him inexpedient”.⁶⁰ Irritated perhaps at the rejection of his overtures, the Shaikh proceeded to ill treat British Indian Merchants residing at El Bidaa.⁶¹ This led to the Resident proceed with two ships of war. The Arabian coast of Persian Gulf continued to remain disturbed by the Beni Hajir’s raids and consequently the Political Resident gave a warning to the Shaikhs of Qatar. Qassim by this time had developed serious misgivings with the Ottoman as he avoided paying the tax arrears and there were complaints of his high-handed ways as also that he was communicating with the British.⁶²

The British Government accepted the establishment of a Turkish garrison at Bidaa but consequently declined to admit that by the virtue of garrison, the Turks had acquired any sovereign rights on the Qatar coast.

The entire period from the early 1870s to the late 1880s indicated towards the unfolding of events in which Turkish presence and/ or its response was noted. The Turkish presence at Bidaa had become an irritant for forward British policies that aimed at complete control over Qatar. Repeated requests from the Resident had been registered with the GOI, but actions over the same were delayed. In 1887 Resident Ross urged that the Porte should

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Godley to IO, 795-800, 23 January 1904, NAI, FD, Secret E, March 1905, & Persian Gulf, Turkish claims on the Arabian Coast, IOR/L/P&S/18 B133A-160/ B141 p. 29.

⁶¹ A separate mention of Qassim bin Thani and the Indian merchants is made in the chapter ahead.

⁶² N. 17, p. 267.

withdraw altogether the Turkish garrison at Bidaa but the GOI and Home government believed that it would be useless to press the question.⁶³

Shaikh Qassim's response and direction towards the Turkish power was that of detachment. The Shaikh was insistent on lesser Turkish force and even lesser Turkish controls in his territories. The report of the Residential Agent of Bahrain to PRPG in October 1888, stated that the Turkish officer 'Zaboor Agasee' arrived in Bahrain from Qatif. And that among other things he said, one was that Qassim complained to Turkish officer Zaboor Agasee that the Turkish soldiers stationed at Bidaa had misbehaved; that he did not want them and instead wanted a small body of *Zabeteeyah*. But Nafiz Pasha, the Turkish governor, had retained the regular soldiers to check Qassim because he used to trifle with Gendarmes.⁶⁴

Qassim's relations with the Turkish authorities were increasingly getting difficult. On one of the occasions, arrivals from Bidaa stated that when the Turkish steamer arrived there, the quarantine officers on board placed in quarantine a boat which arrived from Bahrain and another from Persian port; Qassim had an interview with the quarantine officers, who replied that imposition of quarantine was according to the orders of the Government, and if he did not accept it he could write a representation sealed by the people and by the *Kaim Mamkam* of the place and that the officers would forward it to the government. So was done but when it came for Qassim's signatures he said there was no need for such a representation and informed the officers through a letter that they must refrain from enforcing the measure, or else inhabitants would abandon the country and leave it to the Turks. Qassim further observed that all the food supplies used at Qatar were imported from Persian Gulf ports, Qatif, Bahrain, and Basra and no sooner these supplies that were subjected to quarantine the people will disperse, owing to the vexation caused by the stoppage of communication. Another version was that Qassim observed to the captain of the steamer "is there anything else besides what you say is the order from the Wali of Basra or from Muteserif of Hasa? But they have no authority over me, and if you possess an order

⁶³ N. 8, p.32.

⁶⁴ Translation of purport by the Residential Agent of Bahrain report to Political Resident Persian Gulf, no 127, 7 October 1888, NAI, FD, External A, November 1888, Nos. 174-175.

from the Sultan himself show it to me”.⁶⁵ By claiming to defy the local Turkish authority in Qatar, the Shaikh displayed his sense of power over his region derived from his position and skillfully avoided any formal confrontation with the higher Turkish authorities.

However when the British contacted him he stated that his authority did not extend to the whole of Qatar coast and that he was only responsible for Doha and Wakra under the Agreement of 1868 and that he can be answerable only if people from Fuwairat and Ruwais be compelled to settle in his territory.⁶⁶ The Ottoman designs and persistence on claims of authority and Shaikh Qassim’s assertion of his political power demanded a fresh look at the British policies towards Qatar.

Deliberations over New Agreement

The British Government wondered whether the treaty of 1868 that was signed by Qasim’s father Mohammed bin Thani “on account of his personal character and the subsequent assumption by the Turks of authority at Doha, be regarded as binding on Shaikh Jasim.”⁶⁷ One more time the discussion ensued in the GOI circles about the validity of the 1868 Agreement. The Resident was more aggressive in the demands and Colonel Ross opined that Shaikh Qassim should be compelled to acknowledge the validity of the Agreement of 1868, but the GOI wary about the reaction of the Turks preferred to obtain only a verbal assurance.⁶⁸ Hence, Qatar with the Turkish base at Bidaa continued to interact with the British for maintenance of peace at the seas with the representation of Shaikh Qassim.

⁶⁵ Translation of letter from Residency Agent, Bahrain, to the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, No. 133, 30 September 1889, NAI, FD, External A, November 1889, Nos. 122-123.

⁶⁶ N. 18, p. 809.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 810

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 810-811

During this period the affairs of the Indian traders in Doha kept the GOI and London, busy for a while as Qassim refuted his hand in the affairs and even complained to the Ottoman authorities as he shifted his base from Bidda to Dha'ayeen (Doha to Odaid).⁶⁹

Turkish policies in Gulf now acquired a more contemplated consideration. New ways were being contemplated for the further consolidation of position one of which was an announcement for the Turkish proposal of establishing a custom house at Bidaa in the summer of 1887. The Turkish move could not be repelled easily but Qassim was aware that the establishment of such an office would mean continuous Turkish presence and loss of his authority. Unable to do much in opposition he aimed to diminish importance of the town by ousting the foreign traders, an act that made him answerable to the British and ended in payment of compensation.

Turkey protested and as a result of the events Turkey became aggressive about its claim on Qatar. In 1889, the Turkish Foreign Office informed the British Ambassador at Constantinople that the garrison at Qatar would be reinforced from the Baghdad Army Corps. The British government reminded the Porte about the British position in the region and that it could not be indifferent to the interference of Turkish authorities.⁷⁰ Shaikh Qassim's attempts at expansion remained unabated. In 1889 he sent munitions of war by sea with the intentions of hostile designs against the Chief of Abu Dhabi. The GOI directed the Resident to warn him for these acts.⁷¹

The Turkish authorities did not wish to remove Qassim from the post of *Kaim Makam* in the absence of any other stronger Shaikh. The Turkish garrison at Bidaa on the other hand did nothing to ease Qassim's problems whereas Qassim's inability to reconcile with Turkish demands brought him in constant struggle with them. Qassim had resisted Turkish scheme of establishing a custom House at Doha similarly the Turks were frustrated at Qassim's inability to comply.

⁶⁹ Explained ahead.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 814.

⁷¹ N.8, & No 303, External A, Aug 1889.

Qassim continued to respond the situation by the pretence of surrendering power. In the mid of 1893, Qassim met Muhammed Said, the Nakib, the Mufti, and the *Kaim Makam* of the Turkish forces in Bidaa, he requested to be allowed to resign and have nothing to do with disturbances there by land or sea or with its administration and that his brother Ahmed be the *Kaim Makam* of Turkish Government in El Bidaa and its dependencies.⁷² In the meanwhile he also addressed letters to the PRPG and the Chief of Bahrain appealing for British protection and of the Chief of Bahrain and applying for permission to reside in the northern parts of Qatar within the latter's jurisdiction. The GOI had understood that even if haughty and obstinate at times, Qassim's resignation and the subsequent surrender of his authority would fail to contribute towards an undemanding situation to deal with. Discussions continued in the Foreign Office and the India Office on report of the PRPG to GOI regarding situation in Qatar.

The PRPG had reported to the GOI that the interests of Qatar pearl fisheries and the Bahrain trade depended on peaceable and durable settlement with Shaikh Qassim and that if the Porte would promise then this was essential to the future peace of Qatar coast it might be sufficiently satisfactory. If the promise be declined and an expedition threatened, the PRPG Colonel Colbott suggested that the Porte be warned that Shaikh Qassim will receive British protection in some Qatar port other than Bidaa.⁷³

The GOI maintained its policy of refusal in recognizing Turkish jurisdiction over Qatar and adhered to it throughout the later decades too. It had observed that though the Turkish authorities maintained a garrison at Bidaa, they (the Turks) appeared to have practically no hold on the country. Hence, in its response to whether the GOI should continue the policy laid down in 1883 of denying Turkish jurisdiction over Qatar, the Secretary of State for India accepted that, "so long as they did not move beyond the limits of town, the nominal suzerainty of the Porte is recognized but any attempt to extend Turkish authority is

⁷² Resident Agent, Bahrein to PRPG, No., 92, 16 June 1893, NAI, FD Secret E, January 1894, Nos. 14-43.

⁷³ Sir J. A. Godley, Under Secretary of State for India to Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, IO, 14 June 1893, London, NAI, FD, Secret E, January 1894.

resisted.”⁷⁴ A significant response of the Secretary was related to treaties wherein he continued that, “(Hence) no need to make official communication with Turkish government but no need to stop making treaties with El Katr”.⁷⁵

Towards the end of 1893, the Wali of Busra, accompanied by 300 cavalry marched towards Qatar and summoned Qassim to his presence at Doha. Fearing arrest Qassim remained at Wajbah, 12 miles west of Doha. A collision occurred in which the Arabs overpowered the Turks though the Wali remained at Doha. Shortly before that Qassim had written to the British Political Resident imploring his protection and also applied to the Sheikh of Bahrein for leave to settle, under his jurisdiction in the northern part of Qatar.⁷⁶ The British relations with Qassim or the Turks were not satisfactory. The Turks continued to refer to Qatar as a “Turkish sub-governorship” and a “dependency of Nejd” which the GOI drew attention to in communication with the London Government.⁷⁷ Accordingly, the British Resident, on the request of Lord Rosebery, the British Minister for Foreign Affairs, tried to mediate between the Turks and the Shaikh Qassim to which the Wali declined to discuss in the absence of any order from the Porte. The GOI, with the approval of the Home Government laid down instructions for the naval authorities that Turkish rule should not be recognized at Doha and, “it was desirable that no opportunity should be given to Turkish officials of asserting by overt action such nominal authority as the Porte might possess in the locality and that, therefore MHGs ships should refrain from visiting the harbor of Doha except when special occasion for doing so should arise.”⁷⁸

The Resident moved to Qassim for discussion when, Ahmed, Qassim’s brother, now the plenipotentiary, accepted to agree to any decision by the British Resident and asked to be

⁷⁴ Secretary of State for India, IO to GOI, No., 35, 8 September 1893, London, NAI,FD, Secret E, January 1894, Nos. 14-43.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ N. 18, pp. 824-825.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 827

⁷⁸ Ibid.

provided with a place of refuge on the Qatar coast and where he might renew the Agreement of 1868. The discussion however ended here for the British.⁷⁹

The GOI now wanted to relook at its policy in Qatar. In its letter dated 11th July 1893 it wrote to the Secretary of State enquiring “whether the policy laid down in 1883 of denying Turkish jurisdiction over Katar should be continued. The GOI are not aware of any circumstance which could justify a departure from it in the present state of affairs in the peninsula. We therefore recommend that the line of action hitherto adopted by Her Majesty’s Government may continue to be followed; and we have, at the same time, the honour to state that the proceedings of the local Turkish authorities have caused and are still causing injury to the trade in Bahrein.”⁸⁰ The government at London maintained the policy of denial but did not think it necessary to make any official communication on the subject to the Porte, “unless the question is (was) raised officially by the Porte”.⁸¹

However, in 1893 the GOI authorized the Political Resident in the Gulf to inform the Senior Naval Officer, Aden Division, that the ships of Royal navy were not to recognize Turkish rule at Bidaa and that British naval commanders had long been empowered to act at Bidaa, as at other places on the Qatar coast, in such manner as might be necessary to prevent, or punish disturbances of the maritime peace.⁸² It was explained however that the Governor General in Council was desirous that British Naval officers should avoid giving Turkish officials any opportunity of asserting by overt action such nominal authority as the Porte possesses in the locality, and consider that to this end, ships should refrain from visiting harbours of Bidaa, except when special occasion arose for so doing.⁸³

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 824

⁸⁰ N. 8, & GOI to Secretary of State, letter no 141, dated 11 July 1893, NAI, Secret E, July 1893, Prog. Nos 124-231.

⁸¹ Ibid. p.41 & Secretary of State to GOI, No.156, 1 August 1893, NAI, Secret E, January 1894, Prog. Nos. 14-49.

⁸² GOI to PRPG, No. 564, Simla, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1894, Nos. 558-569 .

⁸³ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, Proceedings May 1904, 234-293.

In June 1895 information was received by the GOI about the Al bin Ali tribes' intention of forming settlement at Zubara with the support of Turkish *Mutessarrif* of Hasa who was further reported to have sent troops to Zubara under the command of the Mudir of the Bidaa. The incident of Zubara had more to do with affairs in Bahrain however as far as Qatar was concerned the Viceroy recommended, "strong remonstrance to Porte on proceedings of their local officials on Katr coast over which we admit no Turkish jurisdiction."⁸⁴

In 1898, Qassim was supposed to have taken a leading but secret part in Arab rising in Qatar against the Turks and Shaikh Ahmed in a private interview with Lieutenant Robinson stated that it was their wish to turn out the Turks and they would be pleased to "enter into the same treaties with the British government as have the Trucial chiefs".⁸⁵ However no action was taken on the offer of Ahmad bin Thani by the GOI.

Nevertheless a settlement happened between the Turkish Government and the Shaikh, affected by the Naqib of Basra that Qassim may resign from the *Kaim Makamship* in favour of his brother Ahmed and should receive a free pardon.⁸⁶ Qassim nevertheless continued to be treated as the *Kaim Makam* of Qatar, probably due to the consideration that "he was less dangerous as an official than he might be as an irresponsible free lance"⁸⁷. A regular Turkish official was posted to Doha as Assistant *Kaim Makam* and a strong Turkish garrison maintained at Doha after 1893 and by 1906 the Garrison was nominally 200 men but mostly stood half its strength on account of dissensions. Subsequently Qassim's relations with the Turks became much strained owing to their support of Kuwait, which had raided a tribe professing allegiance to Sheikh Qassim.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Viceroy to IO, 4 August 1895, 1895-1900, Island of Bahrein and the El Katr Coast Vol 6, NA London, 78/5110, p. 20.

⁸⁵ N. 8, p. 46.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Persian Gulf. Turkish claims on Arabian coast, IOR/L/P&S/18 B133A-160, B141, p. 30.

Turkey's attempt at consolidation of its position in Qatar was not well received by Qassim nor by the GOI. Shaikh Qassim pretended to resign from the Kaim Makam position whereas the GOI maintained the policy of denying Turkish jurisdiction over Qatar.

4.3. Issue of Indian Traders in Qatar

The Indian traders had been long operative in the pearl trading business in the Gulf including Bahrain and Qatar. They had British protection for their trading operations. The persons actually connected with the fisheries were of two kinds - financiers and operatives. The money required to equip the pearl fleet for sea and maintain the pearl fleet and the crews was partly advanced from private means and partly borrowed from special class called *Musaqqam* or *Musaygum*. Sometimes the *Mussaqaamin* would themselves borrow loan from a wealthy Arab or Indian merchants at 10-12 percent, interest. At times even the Indian merchants, particularly the banias, acted as *Mussaqaam*.⁸⁹ Streeter's proposal on pearl fishing refers to the "Indian Bunneah", in this context in the Gulf as, "who is found equally at home here as in the wilds of the northern ranges beyond the Indus, and carrying on a thriving trade with far less risk to himself of personal annoyance, an immunity due to the protection he receives here as a British subject".⁹⁰ The *baniya* thus supplied the *Nakhoda*, or the headman of the boat, with necessities required for his trip and on return the *Nakhoda* made over his packet of pearls to be valued of the advances and deduct the amount. gross and the *baniya* took the lot at 20 percent below the appraisal. The price of the 80-85 per cent of value paid by the *Mussaqaam* was divided among the owner and the crew of the boat. The *Mussaqaam* would be adverse to part with more money, thus he would total up the account of the advances and deduct his amount and further even supplied much of the

⁸⁹ The Pearl and Mother of Pearl fisheries in the Persian Gulf, Appendix C, CAEd., Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents, 1820-1960, Vol. III, 1892-1923, p. 490.

⁹⁰ Mr. Streeter's proposal to fish for pearls in the Persian Gulf, K.W. No. 3, NAI, FD, Secret E, June 1890, Nos. 155-159, p. 4.

balance in good and stores to the *Nakhoda*. On this the computed gain was between 25-30 percent.⁹¹

In Qatar, Qassim himself was involved in the trading of pearls and enjoyed a large share in the trade making him weary of the presence of the Indian Banyans who traded in Bidaa. His abhorrence for the Indian traders was due to the division of share in the profits of the pearl trade. Qassim's status, wealth and authority were challenged by these merchants who were increasingly seen as thorn in his operations.

This was a period of Ottoman presence in Qatar. Since Qassim was not bound by any such agreement with the British regarding the Indian merchants nor could the British impose their authority on him during the Ottoman garrison and presence, he precisely chose the period to question the dealings of the Indian merchants in the Qatari trade.⁹²

In 1874 British Indian subjects (*Mashwa* of Abdul Kareem) residing at Bahrain were plundered by 6 Beni Hajir people bound for Ojair who seized their vessels, plundering 2,000 dollars, property of Qassim and some dates and clothes of the *banians*.⁹³ Qassim, with a view to recover his money, imprisoned 7 men of Beni Hajir tribe on account of the said plunder. Qassim was believed to have harboured the Bedouins and connived at their seizure of boats in Bidaa district. The GOI attached the responsibility to the Bidaa chief Mahomed bin Thani. Resident E. C. Ross was in a dilemma regarding the demands to be made on the Chief as the chief had accepted the authority of Turkey, thus suggesting a change in his status. He conveyed the same to the Secretary to GOI. The issue was of the Chiefs position vis-à-vis Turkey. It was obviously unadvisable, Ross believed, to make a demand on him for satisfaction, as might have been done when his "status" was different.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² A. K. Pasha,(2010), "Qatar's Sheikh Jassim and India", Occasional Paper, Gulf Studies Programme, CWAS,SIS, JNU, New Delhi, p. 26.

⁹³ CAEd., Records of Qatar, Primary documents, 1820-1860, Vol. II. 1853-1879, p. 568.

Nevertheless the Chief accepted his responsibility for the restitution towards the Indian merchants.

In October 1874, complaints were received from the *banians* residing at el Bidaa, about “unjust exactions” imposed by the Chief of Bidaa. Qassim had insisted that the Banyans paid for their own safety as no money could be spent on their protection from the Bedouins and others.⁹⁵ The *banians* felt that Qassim had treated them unjustly and ordered their shops to be shut. That particular year Mahomed bin Thani had taken 40 dollars from the *banians*, Chayla and Rama and 7 dollars from 3 other *banians* whereas he only taxed his other subjects 2 dollars a head.⁹⁶

On the behest of the Resident, Ross, the Indian traders made a petition. Accordingly they forwarded it to the Resident in which they expressed a wish to leave the place with regard the fact that Qasim took exaction from the *banians* for the purpose of protecting them and their property from the robbers to prevent injury. Mahomed bin Thani replied to the petition by stating that he did not see a reason why the Indian traders should be exempted from the same local dues as levied on the other inhabitants of El Bidaa. Shaikh Mahomed bin Thani was aware of his son’s, Qassim’s dislike for the operations of the Indian traders in Qatar. Hence he noted in his letter to the Resident, that, “in future if the banyans consent to pay what I levy from my own subjects, I shall be happy to keep and protect them, else I cannot spend my own money to protect the Banyans from the Bedouins and others. And if they do not consent to pay this small contribution, I should be pleased if you wrote to them to proceed elsewhere, for I fear some difficulty will arise some day, and I do not like complaints being made against me.”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Ross to Aitchison Secretary, FD, GOI, No. 623-162P, 18 June 1875, Bushire, NAI, FD, Political A, September 1875, Nos. 59-67.

⁹⁵ N. 8, p.11-12.

⁹⁶ A summary of statement made by the Banians of Bidaa before Lt. E A Fraser, Acting 2nd Assitant Resident Persian Gulf, 5 June 1875 on board Hugh Rose at el Bidaa, NAI, FD, Political A, September 1875, Nos. 59-67.

⁹⁷ Translated purport of a letter from Mahomed Thnai Chief of Bidaa to Lt. Col. Ross, Enclosure No. 6, 5 June 1875, NAI, FD, Political A, September 1875, Nos. 59-67, p. 5.

Colonel Ross saw no reason why the traders should be exempted from the same local dues as levied on other inhabitants of El Bidaa, but feared that the traders might suffer annoyances at the hand of Qassim. Eventually Mahomed bin Thani paid Rs 378 on indemnity of the plundered boat and also the 40 dollars he had taken from the two *banians* Cheyla and Rama. Qassim was furious when he got to know of the payments made to the traders by his father. He wrote a threatening letter to the *Banians* of Bidaa to the effect that he considered their presence in his territory as obnoxious; that there was a British vessel lying in the harbour, and that they had better go on board of her with their goods and chattels at once. Mahommed bin Thani however recalled this letter and told the banyans not to heed to his son's menaces.⁹⁸

The GOI concurred that "in any matters in which British interests are not directly concerned, (the Resident), should continue as occasion may require, to correspond in an friendly manner with Sheikh Mohammed bin Thani on matters such as the interests of the British Indian traders and the like".⁹⁹ As for the communication to the *Banians* at Bida, 'His Excellency does not consider that it is incumbent in the GOI to advise the traders whether to leave or to remain at Bidaa. If they remain they must confirm to local laws and taxation and they should simply be informed that they must decide for themselves on the question of remaining or leaving the place.'¹⁰⁰ It appeared that the matter was settled for the moment but the issue remained a prickle in the plans of Qassim. Qassim had tried to shut down the shops of the Banyans but the GOI made him pay the fine.

The Chief-expectant Qassim, soon retaliated after he was declared as the *Kaim Makam* or the Deputy governor of el Hasa in 1876. He summoned the two Indian merchants Cheyla and Rama to Hasa. The GOI considered the treatment of the traders as a "gross outrage upon two British Indian subjects".¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Lt. E. A. Fraser, Acting 2nd Assistant Resident, PG to Lt E. C. Ross, No. 4, *on board Hugh Rose* off Bidaa, 5 June 1875, NAI, FD, Political A, September 1875, Nos. 59-67.

⁹⁹ N. 8, p. 12, & GOI to PRPG, Letter no 2457, Political A, September 1875, No 67.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ CAEd., Records of Qatar, Primary documents, 1820-1860, Vol. II, 1853-1879, p. 571.

In 1879 Colonel Ross reported that a *banian* named Fursu was beaten by Turkish Governor of Bidaa for exporting dates from Qatar though according to a witness there was no such prohibition that was made public. Ross observed in his letter to the GOI that such incidents were prejudicial to the prestige of the British Government in and around the Gulf and thought it would be best to remove British Indians from Bidaa. The GOI on the other hand believed that the removal of the Governor Mahomed Agha, if the alleged ill treatment is proven against him, convey the matter to the Political Agent in Turkish Arabia and press it to the G-G in Turkish Arabia would suffice and that there was no need to remove the British Indian subjects as that would not be likely to increase the British prestige.¹⁰² Muhammad Agha was ultimately removed from his appointment.

In 1880 British Indian subjects at Bidaa made new complaints of ill treatment. In 1881 when Ross proposed that Qassim be made to sign an agreement by which he recognized the validity of an agreement concluded in 1868 between his father and the British authorities, the GOI was however of the opinion that a written agreement might bring about difficulties with the Turks, and the Resident was instructed to obtain a verbal assurance from the Sheikh to the effect that he would adhere to the old agreement. This was realized.¹⁰³

Qassim challenged the status of the British Indian traders at Doha as their operation in pearls disturbed his profits. In October 1881, the British Indian traders once again ran into trouble with Qassim's ire as their pearl operations interfered with his own. One more time the matter came up. The case was as follows: Ali bin Hassan Bahraini had mortgaged some pearls with a *banian* "Lakee-bin Hoormooz" and asked him to go with him to Sheikh Isa of Bahrain so that he could sell those pearls to Shaikh Isa and give the money back to the *banian*. Lakee had heard that Isa had claims against Ali and feared that the Sheikh may decide to keep the pearls and not pay Lakee. Instead he asked Ali to bring him to his shop, show the property and sell him or bring anyone else and sell the pearls or give him the money of the mortgage and take away his property. Ali, ready to comply and complained to

¹⁰² N. 8, p.14.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p.27.

Qassim who sent a Turkish officer and asked all the banyans to “shut (their) shop and sit down”. The merchants stated that he abused them and the government and told them “you have three days time; go away from my country; if you do not go, whatever happens to you will not concern me; the responsibility of your blood will be on your own heads; you have ruined my country and its trade.”¹⁰⁴ On this the *banian* had replied “we have a claim against a Bahrainee, let him pay it and take away the property”. Qassim however did not answer them, but closed their shops and kept their keys.¹⁰⁵ As per the complaints of the *banian* this was not all. Under the pretence of protecting them from the Bedouins and others, Qassim used to take from them 40 rials yearly but later he began to take some more until in 1881 when he took 210 rials.¹⁰⁶ He also demanded more in the same year thus calling for two payments in one year which had never happened so far. The *banians* complained that there were many traders pearls dealers & others at el Bidaa who were strangers to the place but they had not been called on for these payments but only the banyans had to do so. The shops were shut at the time when it was the season of trading. Qassim also ordered the Bidaa people not to pay their debts to the banyans.¹⁰⁷ This was believed to be most disastrous not only to the *banians* but also to other British Indian subjects with whom they were in business connection.

The Resident reported, “It was seen that Jasim’s object was to get rid of all Indian traders: their dealings in pearls interfering his own profits in the same trade”.¹⁰⁸ It was in the year 1882, following the above mentioned incident that Shaikh Qassim shut the shop of the British Indian traders and expelled them from his country. Qassim paid no heed.

¹⁰⁴ Translation of what was dictated by Dharmoo-bin-Chella from the contents of the letter in Moolatani language dated 16 October 1881 received by him from a banian in Bidaa original sent on 23 Oct 1881, NAI, FD, Secret January 1882, Nos 446-456, pp. 2-3.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ The petition was signed by Kokal bin Sandal, Gangoo-bin -chella, Khooshal bin rama, Ramu-bin-Hoormooz, Lakee-bin-Hoormooz, Mooloo-bin-Toorsoo, Teeka bin Gandoo.

¹⁰⁷ Extract from the report of proceedings by Captain Nesham of HMS Woodlark on the Batinah and Pirate Coasts, to Ross, 6 Nov 1881, Bushire, NAI, FD, Secret January 1882, Nos 446-456.

¹⁰⁸ Resident of Persian Gulf to GOI, Administration report of the Persian Gulf Residency, 1881-1882, MSA, P.D., Vol. 168, 1882, p. 4.

On account of the British Indian traders, the GOI requested instructions of the Home Government in respect of policy adopted towards the Shaikh of Bidaa on the Qatar coast of Arabia. In order to restrain him from ill treatment of British Indian traders who were resident there, they proposed to inform the Sheikh that arbitrary treatment of British Indian subjects could not be permitted and that in future he would be held directly responsible for any act inconsistent with the friendly relations which have hitherto existed between him and the British Government.¹⁰⁹ The Home government approved of the communication and trusted that it might prove sufficient for the subject in view.¹¹⁰ Qassim though paid no heed.

It was formerly a custom to make one yearly payment of 40 dollars for all the *banians* together as a sort of police rate to pay for the protection of the sheikh's guards. In the changed scenario Qasim's response was that he had, "great expenses to bear in protecting his town and its adjacent territory from the Bedouins," and not being able to defray these expenses from his own pocket, he (was) obliged to levy money from the traders who frequent (ed) his town; and further that his own people (were) impoverished, because all their trade (went) to the *banians*, "and we "Arabs (got) no profit at all" Qassim added further "truly I do not like these banians to stay in this place, because they make trouble between me and the British resident."¹¹¹ Qassim had trouble with the banyans for various reasons. It was understood that the Banyans used to buy this commodity, i.e the pearls and paid ready cash, and traders were more inclined to cash sales. In price, also the banyans would buy dear. This circumstance was injurious to Qassim-bin- Thani, as he dealt in a manner reverse to that of the *banians*.¹¹² The other reason was that the conduct of the shaikh arose from the commercial jealousy, for he himself being a trader felt that he was being "cut out" by the banyans so that anyone would scarcely do business with him but

¹⁰⁹ N. 8, p.26.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Extract from the report of proceedings by Captain Nesham of HMS Woodlark on the Batinah and Pirate Coasts, to Ross, 6 November 1881, Bushire, NAI, FD, Secret January 1882, Nos. 446-456.

¹¹² Translation of letter from the residency Agent Bahrain to the PRPG, no. 149, 26 October 1881, Bushire, NAI, FD, Secret January 1882, Nos. 446-456.

would go in preference with the banyans who paid liberally and promptly for the pearls and other commodities as well.¹¹³ Qassim believed that the banyans consumed the profits of the country and thus if he was charging them high for their security then, tribute must positively be taken from them. Accordingly “they transacted all the business and his Arabs have become poor, and everyone who has pearls does not sell them to anyone else but them; if anyone had a large pearl they would buy it of him and at whatever price; he does not get anything.”¹¹⁴ The Sharjah agent also stated that when the divers came some of them do not sell the pearls to anyone else except the banyans from whom they obtained proper prices and proper weights; when Qassim took pearls from them he gave them only rice and dates in lieu of a low price and his weights were very heavy.¹¹⁵

Captain Neshm who was asked to look into the matter commented that Shaikh Qassims conduct was being held up as an example of how the Indian subjects of Great Britain “may be “squeezed” with impunity”.¹¹⁶ The issue of the Banyans was finally settled they being ready to pay 100 dollars so that embargo on business might be removed. And peace was restored until “Jamadee-es-Sani”, the next time the pearl fishing season commenced.¹¹⁷

The GOI decided that it could not permit arbitrary treatment of British Indian subjects and in future to hold Qassim directly responsible for any act inconsistent with the friendly relations.¹¹⁸

Qassim had argued that he could have claimed the responsibility had he turned the Banyans out suddenly and without notice. Aga Mohamad Rahim, the British Agent in Bahrain

¹¹³ Extract from the report of proceedings by Captain Nesham of HMS Woodlark to Ross, on the Batinah and Pirate Coasts, Bushire, 6 November 1881, NAI, FD, Secret January 1882, Nos. 446-456.

¹¹⁴ Translation of letter of Residency Agent Shargah to PRPG, no. 141, 31 October, 1881, Abu Dhabi, NAI, FD, Secret January 1882, Nos. 446-456, pp.5-6.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Extract from the report of proceedings by Captain Nesham of *Woodlark* on the Batinah and Pirate Coasts, to Ross, 6 Nov 1881, Bushire, NAI, FD, Secret January 1882, Nos. 446-456.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ GOI to Secretary of State for India, No. 3 (Secret), 9 January 1882, NAI, FD, Secret January 1882, Nos. 446-456.

reported that Shaikh Qassim claimed that considered himself subject to the British Government because since his becoming a chief he has succeeded in preserving the maritime peace in the neighbouring parts; and he had not committed any illegal proceedings, stating that he declined to pay compensation in ready cash but from annual payments which Banyans will arrange to pay him. Rahim further reported that Qassim stated that during the season of pearl buying these *Banians* purchase pearls more than others; so much so that they purchased pearls from those people who were in debt to him and from whom they ought not to have done so.

The GOI felt that he could be reminded that he was a Sheikh and not a dealer and that if he agreed some arrangement to this problem could be worked out.

The Resident intended to employ force. The Secretary of State instead instructed to obtain from the Sheikh an apology to the British Government; indemnity for the traders; and permission for the traders to return. Thus in November 1882 confidential agent of the residency visited Doha in HMS “Woodlark” to require compensation for traders and his demand was again disregarded. In December 1882 Colonel Ross met Qassim and asked him to apologize to the British Government and even pay compensation to the Indian traders and grant the permission to return to Doha. Qassim had to pay an indemnity of Rs. 8,000 to the Indians who had in the meantime taken refuge in Bahrain.¹¹⁹ Post 1882 settlement five Indian traders who had been expelled from Doha returned but their position was still disagreeable due to hostility with the Shaikh. This was not an end to the events.

Never a Chief to accept the terms implied on him mutely, Qassim employed a new tactic against the *banians* very soon. When the traders returned, they found that their houses were given to other traders and the Shaikh refused to protect them in any way to recover their outstanding claims all under the pretence that he had retired into private life and relinquished his authority over the government of the place to the Turks. Qassim soon

¹¹⁹ N.8, p. 811.

complained to the Turkish authorities about the event and even threatened to resign as the *Kaim Makam* unless the 8,000 was recovered.¹²⁰

This made it further difficult for the *banians* to recover their outstanding claims and continue the trade. Curiously the Turkish authorities at Hasa and Baghdad seemed to have disapproved his action in expelling the Banians.¹²¹

A temporary arrangement was pending with reference to Government as to the mode of procedure in dealing on such occasions with the Chief of El-Bida, but the visit of HMS “Woodlark” settled the matters temporarily.

The Porte in return protested to the British Ambassador at Constantinople. The Ambassador was asked to possibly avoid discussion on the subject but if not then state distinctly that the British Government could not admit Turkey’s rights on Qatar coast. Constantinople took exception to it and hence on September 22, 1883, the Turkish Ambassador was told that the British Government were unable to accept the views of the Porte, that they were not prepared to waive the rights which they had with the Arab chiefs of the Qatar coast, in order to preserve the peace at the seas or to obtain redress for outrages on British subjects or persons entitled to British protection.¹²²

In 1885 as reports of Shaikh Qassim proceeding to Odeid poured in at Resident’s headquarters, those of an attack on two Hindu traders too came, wounding both.¹²³ Once again Qassim was held responsible by the Resident who expressed his belief that the attack on the Hindu traders was deliberately planned by Shaikh Qassim with his son whom he had left in charge at Bidaa. The purpose, he felt, was to intimidate the *banias* and induce them

¹²⁰ CAEd., Records of Qatar, Primary documents, 1820-1860, Vol. III, 1879-1896, p. 216.

¹²¹ N.8, p. 27.

¹²² N..18, p 811-812.

¹²³ Qassim claimed Odeid as his rightful property from Shaikh Zaid-bin-Khalifa of Abu Dhabi.

to quit Bidaa. He thus made an half hearted attempt at Odeid only to pretend his absence from Bidaa during the attack on the traders.¹²⁴ Qassim later apologized.

In the summer of 1887, Qassim was alarmed at the Turkish proposal of establishing a custom house at el Bida. The Turkish move could not be repelled easily but Qassim was aware that the establishment of such an office would mean continuous Turkish presence and loss of his authority. He was anxious to diminish the importance of the port and with that end in view planned to get rid of all the foreign traders, British, Indian and Persian.¹²⁵ The piracies on the Arab coast of the Gulf continued. Qassim's withdrawal and refusal to take responsibility of the coast made the British take some decisions for the British subjects in Doha as more and more examples of disturbances followed. Among those who suffered as a result of the outrages were British, Indian, Bahrainese, and Persians. While the Sheikh of Bahrain wished to take forcible action against Qassim, the Shah enquired for British help in obtaining reparation for his subjects and later even appealed to the Porte.

In May 1887 Shaikh Qassim announced that he had left Bidaa and its government and was no longer responsible for the affairs of Qatar "referred to God and then to Turkish Government". His withdrawal caused disorder, the bazaar was plundered the Hindu traders were protected by the Shaikh's relatives. Qassim was held responsible and made to pay fine in October 1887.¹²⁶ Colonel Ross's "pacific expedient" paid off as Shaikh Qassim sent an agent to Bahrain to negotiate and the case was settled by payment of Rs. 6,390 as compensation to the injured British Indian subjects out of the property attached.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ CAEd., Records of Qatar, Primary documents, 1820-1860, Vol. III, 1879-1896, p. 217.

¹²⁵ Administration report of the PG Pol. Residency and Muscat Political Agency for 1887-88, p.8.

¹²⁶ N. 8, p.31.

¹²⁷ N. 18, p. 813.

In addition Colonel Ross, the resident also got the Chief of Bahrain to lay an embargo upon spice and pearls belonging to Shaikh Qassim at Bahrain aggregating to Rs. 20,000 in value.¹²⁸

Qassim once again appealed to the Turkish government about ‘all’ his property in Bahrain being affected. The Mutesserif of Hasa demanded the restoration of property from Shaikh of Bahrain and Turkey protested to the British Government through the British Ambassador at Constantinople. The Porte objected to the action of exacting compensation from Qassim and conveyed the same to the British Ambassador to which London responded that, it was not prepared to waive the right of dealing directly with the chiefs of Qatar coast. A right which “they have exercised at intervals during long period of years...in order to preserve the place (peace) of the seas, or to obtain for outrages on British subjects, or on persons entitled to British Protection.”¹²⁹ As for Bahrain, it responded, “His Majesty’s Government continue to hold that view and they are equally unable to admit any claim of the Porte to jurisdiction over the Chief of Bahrein, whom they have once intimidated, they regard as an independent ruler and with whom they are on treaty relations”.¹³⁰

Shaikh Qassim’s interest in the pearl trade continued unabated. He had to come to terms with the situation where he had to operate his trade engagements with the presence of the Indian traders. Nevertheless Qassim continued to maintain high stakes in the pearl trade. In one year when the speculations of the pearl trade in the Gulf went wrong, and it was a slack season, Shaikh Qassim suffered much due to the loan of 80 lakhs he had borrowed to buy the pearls.¹³¹

The pearling business in Qatar and the participation of the Indian traders in it was just one reason for British interference in Qatar.

¹²⁸ CAEd., Records of Qatar, Primary documents, 1820-1860, Vol. III, 1879-1896, p. 218.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 219.

¹³⁰ N. 8, p.31.

¹³¹ Administration Report for Persian Gulf and Maskat Political Agency, 1906-07, CAEd, Administration reports 1873-1914, p. 8.

A reconsideration of British policy on the Arab coast was desired by the GOI when Captain Daly, Deputy Secretary, pointed out to a better hold on Qatar and of coming to some permanent arrangement with Shaikh Jassim and Ahmed. "I do not at present see any reason why a satisfactory *modus Vivendi* with the Katar Sheikhs should not be secured. The position is somewhat complicated by the presence of a Turkish garrison at Bidaa, but we do not admit that the Porte is in effective occupation of the coast south of Katif, though upto Katif we recognize Turkish jurisdiction." Demanding an "arrangement of a permanent character could be made with the Sheikhs..." prompting Secretary Barnes to comment that "I think the general impression by the draft is that the GOI desires and intends to adopt a much vigourous policy all along the Arabian Coast than has hitherto been in vogue, and so lengthy and serious a review gives, perhaps any change that may be intended rather a more formidable aspect than it deserves...". Curzon minuted "Captain Daly's draft comprehensive and excellent as it is must certainly be split up. It could only be regarded in its present form as a *mandamus* for a forward policy".¹³² GOI certainly wanted to obtain a better hold but not to make show of any activity.

In November 1905, the Political Agent in Bahrain Captain Prideaux's visit reflected upon the administrative position of Qatar. Qassim now almost at the age of 80, had by now been residing at Lusail retired from the affairs of Qatar, in favour of his brother Ahmed yet in reality the ruler of Doha, and nothing important happened without his consultations. Ahmed, now the *Kaim makam* and the Chief was only the medium for all dealings with the Turks "though the jealousy prevailed between him and Qassim".¹³³

Matters for Qatar however no longer remained the same as Ahmed was murdered and once again Qassim had to take matters in hand. Qassim's fourth son Abdullah was left in charge of Doha, as the Turks remained aloof of the internal matters of succession. The following is an account of the events that unfolded after Qassim retired from active governance and his brother Ahmad took over the charge.

¹³² N. 8, p. 48.

¹³³ N. 18, p. 825.

4.4. Treaty with Qatar: Initiative of the GOI

In 1868, Qatar had signed its first agreement with the British. It was signed by Mohammad bin Thani. As mentioned earlier, the later Chief his son Qassim however accepted Turkish authority as and when it suited him and even interacted with the British at times pleading for security. In fact at one time Qassim had intended extension of his influence beyond the territory of Qatar and thus he signed accords with Ibn Rashid for collaboration in trade and Saud family for religious affiliations. He remained hostile to Shaikh Zayed of Abu Dhabi and the Al Khalifas of Bahrain and had interest in Kuwait.¹³⁴

The increasing Ottoman presence in Qatar, Bahrain's claim on Zobara, Qassim's plans at intervals for attack on Bahrain encouraged the thought in British India circles about signing a treaty with the Shaikh of Qatar to put Qatar on safe and sound footing as far as British relations were concerned. There was nothing in the Agreement of 1868 that could bind the Shaikh of Qatar to it.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century Sheikh Qassim, now almost 80 years old, had retired from the administration of Qatar and had handed over power to his brother Ahmed bin Thani who was now the *defacto* chief.¹³⁵ It was Shaikh Ahmed who in 1899 mentioned to Colonel Meade, the Political Resident, his wish to enter into closer relations with the British, and asked for permission to occupy Odeid. He was given evasive reply and Meade did not refer matter officially.¹³⁶ No action was taken in the matter. In 1902 the question of declaring a protectorate over Qatar was again raised by Ahmed the brother of Qassim and principal chief of Qatar sending a message to the Assistant Political Agent, Bahrain Mr. Gaskin.

In March 1902, Gaskin, wrote to, PRPG, Colonel Kemball that Ahmed-bin-Thani of Qatar had been periodically sending him messages with a request to be taken under British

¹³⁴ A. K. Pasha,(2010), "Qatar's Sheikh Jassim and India", Occassional Paper, Gulf Studies Programme. CWAS, SIS, JNU, New Delhi. p. 28.

¹³⁵ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, Proceedings May 1904, Nos. 234-293.

¹³⁶ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, July 1902, 519-526.

protection and that he will reside anywhere that the GOI thinks fit and be responsible. Gaskin's own understanding of the situation was quite favourable in accommodating Shaikh's request as Ahmed, he explained was a wealthy chief, influential with the nomads and tribes.

The reason for Ahmed's move towards British protection was perceived as that his influence and prestige would rapidly increase if it was known amongst the tribes that he enjoyed British protection. Gaskin believed that, any settlement in Qatar under the British protection would quickly expand and draw away most of the inhabitants of El Bidaa, where the only and actual Turkish presence on the whole of Qatar remained, besides this will also keep the issue of piracy at bay as it will keep the Bedouins in check.¹³⁷ As for the positioning of the Shaikh on the peninsula for residence purpose, Gaskin suggested Zobara could be the place to lay claim though understanding clearly that the Shaikh of Bahrain has always laid claims to it, but an arrangement can be reached as, "the occupation by a hostile chief would be a menace to Bahrein but a treaty can be concluded between the two.."¹³⁸ Gaskin's perception of the situation was very clear. He believed that engaging Qatar's request will help establish a better British control over the island which would be favourable for an equally better control over affairs and situation in Bahrein, a region so much of importance for the British. At the same time this could prove to be the opportunity to deal with the Turkish influence in Qatar. Some of the aspects could be to bring Shaikh Ahmed under British protection at Zobara to establish the policy of not recognizing the claims of Turkey to Qatar. At the same time diminish the number of places on the mainland from which Bahrein can be threatened, and draw a line across Katr to prevent Turkish encroachments towards the northern end of peninsula. This was the time when Turkey was turning her attention to strengthening her position in these regions and the GOI feared that "she may go far as to establish herself in a manner from which it may be difficult to dislodge her hereafter".¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Gaskin to Kemball, No. 56, dated 22 March, 1902, NAI, FD, Secret E, July 1902, Nos. 519-526.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid

The Resident too favoured the signing of an agreement with the Chief on the grounds that, the policy of Home Government with regard to El-Katr coast was clearly enunciated in Lord Kimberly's letter to the GOI in 1893, and liberty of action prescribed in the matter "of making such treaties with the Chiefs of El Katr as may be considered desirable"¹⁴⁰ Inland disorders and piracies at sea had not diminished in Qatar. The Resident argued that the importance of a peaceful and British controlled Qatar was even more essential for the maintenance of peace of Bahrain, "the maintenance of which HMG is so intimately concerned".¹⁴¹ The importance of Bahrain had continued to rise due to its increasing prosperity and importance as a trade centre. Hence an efficient control over the tribes inhabiting Qatar and safety of seas was desired as beneficial for the prosperity and trade of Bahrain. In the existing conditions all that the British government could do was to obtain redress for those who would suffer due to the piracies by attaching property of Qatar chiefs in Bahrain since this was not a feasible option, the Resident suggested,

[I]f I may be authorized to enter into an arrangement with the Chief of Katr whereby his independence is recognized and a promise of protection from interference by other Powers given to him, on the condition that he is responsible for the maintenance of order in Katr and for the piracies by sea, most satisfactory results may be expected to follow.¹⁴²

The GOI had never accepted Turkish authority beyond El Bidaa as such an extension of authority would be greatly deplored as disturbances both on land and sea would follow. The British contention was that Turkish control was never sufficiently effective to ensure the maintenance of order and to suppress piracies. The Resident felt though that, "undoubtedly the best arrangement would be to obtain the consent of the Turkish Governmentt to withdraw their garrison from El Bidaa, where they are in reality only in sufferance and which is not of real importance to them, but I fear that is out of question".¹⁴³ A decade and

¹⁴⁰ Kemball, to Secretary, GOI in FD, No. 93, 26 April 1902, Bushire, NAI, FD, Secret E, July 1902, 519-526.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid

a half later this was exactly what the British managed to do as they readied themselves for the signing of treaty with the Sheikh of Qatar.

In the early decade of the twentieth century however the problems seemed genuine. The arrangement of treaty with Qatar would involve consideration of many aspects such as, to make enquiries as to the actual position in Qatar of Ahmed and considering the old age of Qassim, how the succession will devolve on his death; the choice of residence of chief as the probability of some other place than Zobara on the opposite coast of Qatar was considered more suitable on account of the proximity of the pearling banks.

Nevertheless, the GOI wholeheartedly accepted the Resident's suggestion. Ahmed bin Thani's messages for British protection and his willingness to reside in a place of its choice had been looked at for a while. There were few reasons from the point of view of the GOI. The issues of piracies was not yet settled, hence a local authority was much desired which could be recognized in the form of the Al Thanis. The constant Turkish presence at Bidaa was no help in restricting the piracies but rather botheration for British position.

British India's insistence on establishing a better control over situation in Qatar was complete but it was not free about its doubts regarding the response of the London authorities to the proposal. Accepting Ahmed's request and entering into an agreement with the Chief of Qatar would require an assurance to the Qatari Chief about the protection against Turkey and other powers, "and the proximity of Turkish garrison at El Bidaa and the somewhat strained relations between the British Government and the Porte on Koweit and Aden may render the fulfillment of the promise somewhat embarrassing".¹⁴⁴ Dealing cautiously with the representation of the issue to the Home government, it was desired that, "we (the GOI) could represent that the increased interest recently displayed by the Turks in this region indicates the desirability of consolidating our position on the peninsula if this can be done without undue enlargement of our responsibility. The Porte would probably refuse to recognize our right, to make an agreement with the Chief as it did in the case of

¹⁴⁴ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, July 1902, 519-526. p. 1.

Bahrein, but this is hardly a sufficient reason for abstaining from action if otherwise desirable".¹⁴⁵

The GOI thus suggested to the Secretary of State of India George Hamilton, that various points may require consideration before a definite agreement but in view of the recent activity of the Turks in the neighbourhood of Hasa suggested that no time should be lost in consolidating the British position in el Katr peninsula. The GOI suggested concluding an agreement similar to those executed with the Trucial chiefs of the Arab coast. The matter was referred to Secretary of State with a remark that GOI saw no objection to the Resident being permitted to institute enquiries as to actual position of Ahmed-bin-Thani, and should it prove that the Sheikh was established chief of El Katr, they would propose to authorize Col Kemball to conclude with him an agreement similar to those executed with the Trucial Chiefs of the Arab Coast. It was added that this arrangement would involve an assurance to the Chief of protection against Turkey and other powers.¹⁴⁶

In September 1903, Secretary of State replied no objection to the institution of enquiries as to the position of Ahmed, but that before any steps are taken towards the conclusion of proposed agreement, the question of extension of British protectorate in Arabia would have to be considered carefully both from the political and military point of view.¹⁴⁷ Later information was provided by Resident that Qassim was the recognized Chief and that the Turks styled him *Kaim Makam* though he repudiated the title; that his brother Ahmed bin Thani was the de facto Chief and was regarded as heir to his brother, who was over 80 years of age. The Viceroy suggested, that to prevent Turkish designs, it would be wise to enter into an agreement, but that if the Home Government were not prepared to take this step at once, which would perhaps depend upon the attitude of Turks, the Shaikh might be told that we prefer to wait till he succeeded later on to Chiefship.¹⁴⁸ This communication

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

¹⁴⁶ GOI to George Hamilton, No. 113 of 1902, NAI, FD, Secret E, July 1902, 519-526.

¹⁴⁷ Foreign Department Notes NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1904, 234-293.

¹⁴⁸ NAI, FD, Secret E May 1903, No. 80.

indicates to the apprehension of the British authorities in India in relation to the Home Government's position and ability for decision in Qatar.

The reaction of Turkey to British designs of establishing a protectorate over Qatar was always a matter of concern for the London authorities. The British naval commanders had been empowered to act in Bidaa only to the extent of preventing or punish disturbances of the maritime peace and refrain from visiting the harbours of El Bidaa, except when special occasion arose. At the same time avoid giving Turkish officials any opportunity of asserting by overt action such nominal authority as the Porte possesses in the locality.¹⁴⁹

Turkish Appointment of Mudirs

As the GOI contemplated an agreement with the Shaikh of Qatar a fresh series of events erupted which on one hand put a brake to GOIs efforts and at the same time on the other hand intensified the importance of its argument for an agreement with the Shaikh of Qatar. Turkey had decided to appoint Mudirs to Zobara, Wakra and Odeid the news of which was first conveyed in a telegram to GOI on 22 December 1902 by the Secretary of State. Sir Nicholas R. O Connor had drawn attention to a semi official newspaper announcement in Turkish newspaper 'Ikdan' of the intention of the appointment of Mudir at the above mentioned three places.

The GOI asked the Resident to inquire in the matter who in turn reported that, Abdul Karim Effendi the Mudir designate for Odeid who was on board *enroute* Bahrein conveyed that it was Qassim who had asked Porte to establish administrative units at Zobara, Wakra and Odeid and that Turks proposed to establish series of guard houses from Zobara to Ojeir.

Qassims Relations with the Ottomans

While the British government had its own interpretation of the situation, Shaikh Qassim's relations with the Turkish authorities had completely deteriorated. The Ottoman inability to provide assistance during his conflict with the powers of Abu Dhabi and their plan to

¹⁴⁹ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1903, p. 10.

establish customs house in Doha though strongly and cleverly rebuked by Qassim had made him look away from them. The Ottoman officials on the other hand had been extremely angry at the way Qassim responded to their authority. What followed was the Ottoman decision to punish Qassim for his inabilities. In 1893 the *vali* of Basra decided to visit Doha to settle differences with Qassim, but Qassim went and settled in Wajbah. The *vali* disgusted with Qassim's move attacked Wajbah with the help of Kuwaiti force, but the people of Wajbah resisted the entry of Ottoman- Kuwaiti troops and followed them to Doha as they receded to that place. Controlling the water supply of Doha Qassim inflicted a defeat on the Ottoman-Kuwaiti forces. The defeat is considered as a landmark in the history of modern Qatar and it established Qassim's authority completely.¹⁵⁰

Qassim however old now, had decided to retire from everyday affairs of administration thereby resigning his position as *Kaimmakam* and handing over the authority to his brother Ahmad, a long time aspirant to the seat. Ahmad took over the responsibility, as Qassim settled in Lusail. It was during this time that Qassim's son Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Jasim was appointed as the chief of Wakra as Shaikh Ahmed took over affairs at Doha. It was to Shaikh Abdul Rahman that the Turks were to recognize as the new Mudir.

GOI's Protest

GOI was not ready to agree to the Turkish endeavours particularly in the region where it had been contemplating a British protectorate for some time now. It conveyed the matter to Secretary of State asking for Porte to be pressed to issue official order to El Hasa cancelling the appointments in question.¹⁵¹

This was the time when the issue of Aden was being negotiated with the Turkish government and the British Ambassador in Constantinople did not want to broach the topic of appointment of the Mudirs due to high tension. He agreed to do so when he would get an

¹⁵⁰ N. 4, pp. 51-55.

¹⁵¹ Viceroy to Secretary of State, London, telegram, 655E, dated 9 April 1903, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1903, Nos. 313-402.

opportunity to represent to the Grand Vizier as in the meanwhile, the Porte denied having send Mudirs to Zobara.¹⁵²

In fact Yusuf Bay even took up his post at Wakra as Turkish *Mudir*. Immediate representations were made by British Ambassador to Constantinople. The Turkish Government conveyed that it had no knowledge and that Yusuf would be recalled. So it happened, but soon the news followed that Yusuf Bay was replaced by Abdur Rahman, son of Qassim. The Ottoman officials under no pretense had replaced one for the other in Qatar, without raising a banner against the British objections and yet maintaining their position intact.

To GOIs protest, the Secretary of State, agreed that as El Katr was beyond the sphere in which nominal suzerainty of the Porte is recognized by HMG, it should object to the appointment by Turkey of any administrative official. The Resident was informed and on 21st September the Consul at Basra reported that the Wali had instructed the Muteserif at El Hasa to suppress the Mudirate at Wakra and to revert to the status quo.¹⁵³

Deliberating over the possibilities, the GOI was keen on eliminating the Turkish influence and using the Turkish inability as a reason to promote an understanding with Qatar. The GOI considered it desirable to enter into an agreement with the Chiefs in order to prevent Turkish designs.

L. Russel noted in the Foreign Department notes:

It seems advisable to insist on the actual cancellation of the letter of appointment issued by Mutesserif of El Hasa to Abdul Rhaman. If the Porte refuses to do this, it will give us good ground for proceeding further with the question of a treaty with Sheikh Ahmed bin Thani should this appear to be desirable. If they comply there will be all the less chance of the local officials attempting to repeat the experiment and of the Arabs listening to their overtures, should they do so.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Sir O' Conor, Pera, No. 48, 18 March 1903, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1903, Nos. 313-402.

¹⁵³ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1904, 234-293.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Curzon's administration, though skeptical of getting a clearance from London, was nevertheless willing to follow a mild path by suggesting that, "if we assure him of continued friendship as long as he abstains from entering into agreements with other powers and he makes a voluntary agreement not to do so, we practically secure what we want, especially seeing the circumstances in which the assurances will be given."¹⁵⁵ The GOI was willing to wait till Shaikh Ahmed succeeded later on to Chiefship.

The Turkish Position

While the British camp deliberated over the issue at all levels, the Ottoman authorities continued to feign ignorance at the appointments. The Porte had been reminded through representations and declarations by the British since 1883, that they do not recognize Turkish authority over Qatar but to no avail. When Mr. Block spoke to the Turkish Foreign Minister he appeared to be imperfectly acquainted with the subject of Qatar and was under the impression that Turkish sovereignty extended northwards from Maskat coast, and was not inclined to discuss when told about the British stand.¹⁵⁶ The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs and Grand Vizier stated that the statement in 'Ikdam' was erroneous and that the Porte did not contemplate making any changes or appointments in those regions.¹⁵⁷ No sooner had this explanation been given by the Turkish authorities that Lansdowne once again had to communicate to the Turkish ambassador, Masurus Pasha regarding the appointment of Mudirs to Odeid and Zobara. This was on the basis of a paragraph in "Moniteur Oriental" on 31st March 1903 which had taken information from the paper "Malumat" of the previous day, to which Tawfik Pasha reacted by saying that he had no knowledge but there was no such intention on the part of the authorities.¹⁵⁸ Repeated British statements seems to have had no effect on the Turkish authorities as in the case of

¹⁵⁵ Ibid

¹⁵⁶ Sir O' Connor to Marques of Lansdowne, No. 146, Constantinople, 23 March 1903, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1904, Nos. 234-293.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

¹⁵⁸ Marques of Lansdowne to Masurus Pasha, FO, 30 April 1903, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1904, Nos. 234-293.

appointments they even took a stand that Yusuf Bay went to Wakra on his own and that there was no evidence to suggest that Turkish Government was responsible.¹⁵⁹

It was obvious that the Mudir's appointment at Wakra and the other two places created quite a flutter in the circles of the Indian government which repeatedly asked the issue to be taken up by British Ambassador in Constantinople. Under no consideration was it acceptable to GOI to recognise these appointments. Turkish response was casual and slow. It assured the British that Yusuf Beg who had taken up position in Wakra would be recalled though Turkish government had no role in his appointment. But Gaskin soon reported to Captain V de V Hunt, the first assistant to Political Resident in the Persian Gulf who in turn reported to the PRPG, that while Yusuf Beg was at Bida acting as the Mudir of that place, he had not removed his personal effects from Wakra and that a Turkish soldier was kept on guard over the effects. He stated, "(it) appears that Mutesseriff has not entirely carried out orders allegedly sent by Turkish government and withdrawal of Yusuf Beg is only temporary measure to make it appear to be so..."¹⁶⁰ It appears that the Muteserrif had indeed withdrawn orders for Yusuf Beg but unwilling to relinquish the possible authority over matters in Qatar, the Turkish official had, to avoid further suspicion, shrewdly recognized Qassim's son, Abdul Rahman, as the Turkish Mudir even agreeing to pay a salary of 52 Austrian dollars a month, the news of which reached the Residency through a confidential agent stating that even Ahmad confirmed his nephew's appointment.¹⁶¹

Qatar's Worries

On one hand where the British were trying to resist Turkish position in Qatar, so were the Al Thanis who now recognized severe danger to their authority. With the Turks insisting on a stable representative in Qatar with the intention of acquiring control over the region, it was reported that Shaikh Ahmed felt the danger threatening their independence, and tried to

¹⁵⁹ Marques of Lansdowne to O' Connor, FO, 12 May 1903, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1904, Nos. 234-293.

¹⁶⁰ Kemball to GOI, No. 6, 10th July 1903, NAI, F.D., Secret E, May 1904, Nos. 234-293.

¹⁶¹ Gaskin to Hunt, No. 161, 25 July 1903, NAI, F.D., Secret E, May 1904, Nos. 234-293.

prevent the appointment from becoming an accomplished fact.¹⁶² Shaikh Qassim was asked to give a guarantee for the future behaviour for the Sheikh Abdul Rahman bin Qasim, Mudir of Wakra and Abdul Rahman Wazzan, confidential British agent who was present there reported that Sheikh Ahmad dictated in his presence that there is no need of paid Mudir at Wakra to whose appointment local people may object and that Sheikh Abdul Rahman having already placed at Wakra by his father to attend to the affairs of the town, there is no occasion for giving him a monthly salary, consequently the call for a guarantee was unnecessary. The agent reported that the Mutessarif was still endeavouring to establish a paid Turkish official at Wakra.¹⁶³

For Shaikh Ahmed and Shaikh Qassim the situation was certainly not an agreeable one. When Gaskin went to meet him regarding the events he claimed that, since Zobara incident Qassim decided to sever ties with Turks. He proposed to abdicate in favour of his son Mohammad, but upon learning that the Qatar chiefs preferred his brother and after obtaining signature to a document to that effect he informed the Porte, the Wali of Busrah and the Muteserrif of El Hasa of his abdication in favour of his brother and requested them to refer to all matters to the latter in future and Shaikh Ahmed been accepted since 1898. As regards his son Abdul Rahman, he stated he was made Sheikh of Wakra 5 years ago by Ahmad and though he heard of recent action of Muteserrif of Hassa he let Ahmad deal with it as he himself settled in Lusail.¹⁶⁴

British understanding of the same was quite clear. Gaskin reported that, "the population of Qatar composed of numerous small tribes who have been hitherto under obligations and influence of Sheikh Qassim who financed them. The whole of the inhabitants may be said to be pearl divers and the high prices obtained for pearls in recent years have improved the condition of the people and before long their dependence on the bounty of Al Thani family will totally disappear and with it the hold of the latter on their loyalty will cease. The Al

¹⁶² Gaskin to Hunt, No. 187, 5 September 1903, NAI, F.D., Secret E, May 1904, Nos. 234-293.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Gaskin to Hunt, No 210, 20 September 1903, Bahrein, NAI, FD, Secret E, May 1904, Nos. 234-293.

Thani family did foresee that unless they can procure support which will enable them to keep the petty tribes under their direct control, they will lose Katar".¹⁶⁵

In a situation as this, Shaikh Ahmad of Qatar who understood that the *Muteserrif* was anxious to extend the Turkish authority in Qatar was worried for his position and his status among the other Shaikhs of Qatar. He was aware that Qassim still enjoyed the confidence among the people of Qatar but with Turkish expansion the Al Thanis would be left with nothing much in terms of authority. Shaikh Ahmed explained his uncertainties about the state of affairs with the Muteserrif's intention over the peninsula to Gaskin with the intention of securing help from British government in resuscitating the position of family that remained so long at the helm of affairs in Qatar. With serious apprehensions that if the *Muteserrif* succeeded in his designs the whole peninsula will be absorbed by the Turks and his family will be driven out of the country, as they could not oppose the Turks for any length of time, should they really make up their minds and employ force. It was at this time that Shaikh Ahmad repeated his request for British protection and was, "very eager to know whether HMG would extend their protection over Katar in the event of the petition being submitted to them to that effect." ¹⁶⁶ Not permitted to commit to any such immediate help, Gaskin declined to comment by stating that the matter was beyond his province.

It is interesting to note that this was the time (10th November 1903) when Viceroy Lord Curzon's visit to the Gulf was arranged. In the first ever visit of any Indian Viceroy to the region the GOI was anxious to reach conclusion regarding its position in Qatar. Telegrams were sent at regular intervals from the Viceroy's camp regarding the finalization of decision regarding British protection for Qatar. In fact it was proposed that a meeting with the Chief of Qatar be organised during the Viceroy's stay in Bahrein. The visit however could not be arranged and Colonel Kemball thought that the Shaikh would not come unless guaranteed protection against the Turks.¹⁶⁷ While the Viceroy's camp was eager to promote the policy of increased control over Qatar, the India Office was of the opinion that the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid

¹⁶⁶ Ibid

¹⁶⁷ Foreign Department Notes NAI, FD, Secret, E, May 1904, 234-293.

position regarding Qatar was still governed by the considerations on the intention of Turkish Government to create administrative districts at Zobara, Odeid and Wakra and that no actual attempt was made to appoint officer at Odeid and for Zobara and Wakra the orders recalling the Mudirs should be regarded as a compliance with the objections passed by the HMG to such an extension of Turkish authority. Hence the Secretary of State responded to Viceroy's query by stating that, "His Majesty's Government could not properly or consistently enter into any agreement with Sheikh having nature of protectorate which would constitute departure from status quo on their part. In these circumstances communication with Shaikh should be limited to assurance of continued friendship so long as he abstains from entering into engagements with other powers..."¹⁶⁸ The GOI's policy was to use the opportunity of the appointment of Mudirates to establish a firm foundation for further relations with Qatar by signing an agreement or a treaty which could also help in establishing a protectorate and keeping any other regional or foreign powers out. The authorities at IO and FO however believed that for a single instance as this where Ottoman authorities seem to have responded well, the British authorities were bound to refrain from pressing a matter for agreement will affect the *status quo* in the region which is not desired, particularly when the British Ambassador in Turkey did not fear any further aggression.

Nicholas. R. O'Connor, British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire understanding the situation in Turkey and its response to British Government's representations, however was not against an agreement with Qatar. He was concerned about the increasing weakness of Empire could afford occasion to other powers to extract concessions inimical to our interests and supremacy in those regions and believed that there was nothing that "necessarily debars us from an agreement with the Sheikh of El Katr to the same effect and directed solely to exclusion of foreign intervention".¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Secretary of State, FO, to Viceroy of India, Telegram no 104 C, 18 November 1903, NAI, FD, Secret, E, May 1904, 234-293.

¹⁶⁹ Secret message, Nicholas. R. O'Connor, no. 218, 14 November 1903, Pera, NAI, FD, Secret, E, May 1904, 234-293.

Lord Lansdowne certainly did not approve of, “any unnecessary extension of responsibilities of His Majesty’s Government in this respect”.¹⁷⁰ The issue of Qatar was at its height during Curzon’s visit to the Persian Gulf. A conclusion to the discussion in the form of agreement or a treaty would have been ideal for the GOI at this time. This could not happen due to British Government’s own understanding of the situation. The Government did not find the situation as urgent as the GOI conveyed it to be so. Besides it was more apprehensive about affecting the *status quo* in the region and also about the actual status of the Al Thani family with whom GOI deliberated an agreement.

In spite of the exchange of communication with London that almost turned down GOI’s proposal, GOI however made further elaborate proposal to the India Office explaining the reason for its insistence on an agreement with the Shaikh of Qatar. In its address to the Secretary of State for India, the GOI took into account the objections raised by IO and FO and conveyed its reasons for engaging into a Protectorate treaty with Shaikh Ahmed bin Thani of Qatar. The GOI addressed the objections raised by IO that were based on two considerations. One that such a convention would constitute a disturbance in status quo particularly since the Turks had cancelled the appointments of Mudirs which they had made in violation of the understanding to respect the status quo and hence unjustifiable and second, that the influence of the Shaikh was waning away and that an arrangement with the British Government would only help to retrieve his diminishing influence.

The response to these objections reflects upon the GOI’s policy towards Qatar peninsula during this period. Citing the opinion of the British Ambassador at Constantinople that a protectorate might be contrary to the spirit of representations to the Porte but an agreement can be justified for maintaining position “we might be justified in making an agreement with the Sheikh with the object of securing the maintenance of the position which the remonstrances (*cs*) of HMG have so far partially preserved and of excluding the possibility of foreign interference in the future...”¹⁷¹ As for the diminishing status of Shaikh Ahmed

¹⁷⁰ FO to IO, T.H. Sanderson to IO, 17 November 1903, NAI, FD, Secret, E, May 1904, 234-293.

¹⁷¹ GOI to John Brodrick, HMS Secretary of State for India, 31 March 1904, Fort William, NAI, FD, Secret, E, May 1904, 234-293.

the GOI explained, “ there is nothing in the history of our relations with the Trucial Chiefs to justify the apprehension that we shall be renewing our relations with the Thani family, incur the inconvenient objections anticipated by His Majesty’s Government.”¹⁷² Reminding the Government that the desired *status quo* was conditional to Turkish withdrawal of any claim to administrative control or suzerainty over Peninsula which the Turkish government has failed and adding to it the intelligence received from Kemball about the status of the Chief.

So far the reference to Qatar fisheries was nowhere made in the entire discussion regarding the establishment of a Protectorate over Qatar. By adding a reference to this the GOI adds one more dimension to the entire argument.

Considering The IO’s doubts about the status of the Shaikh of Bahrain among the other tribes, Captain Prideaux, the Political Agent to Bahrain one more time struggled to collect information as he believed that the subordinate tribes along with the members of the Al Thanis were anxious to evade falling under the yoke of Turkey. Turkey’s intentions of retaining its hold over the peninsula and strengthening it were serious concerns of the GOI which it believed London failed to understand. F. B. Prideaux commented, “We have always maintained the independence of the Katr inhabitants and have never actually admitted the right of the Turks to establish themselves at El Bidaa. We cannot however disregard the fact that for years past the Porte has had a sort of Gibraltar at the latter place, and as this post is one of the alternate military routes to Hufuf, it is certain that the Turks will maintain their position there so long as they hold the province of El Hasa.”¹⁷³ Prideaux demanded a stronger case to be presented to the HMG, “to show that the tribes of the peninsula, excluding the townsmen of El Bidaa, have never been subjected to Turkey; and as the Turkish local authorities talk of placing three new guard-house posts on the road between El Bidaa and Hufuf, it seems that we should come to a decision as to our course of action in regard to the peninsula as quickly as possible.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Ibid

¹⁷³ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, February 1905, Nos. 110-132, p. 7

¹⁷⁴ Ibid

As can be noted serious deliberations were on regarding the issue of Qatar in the official circles in Constantinople, London and of course GOI which was the initiator of the entire discussion.

GOIs discussion on the matter now dealt with various aspects related to the establishment of a Protectorate. That included the validity of the earlier agreement of 1868; the verbal assurance given by Shaikh Qassim in 1880 to the resident about adhering to the agreement; the fine imposed by British on Shaikh Qassim in 1882 and 1887 for injuries; the current status and position of the Shaikh of Qatar and that of the Al Thani family amongst the other tribes of Qatar and besides that also; the profits from pearling season at Qatar coast but most importantly looking into the interest of foreign powers in the region by pretence of trade in pearls.

The GOI aimed an agreement with the Shaikh of Qatar on the lines of one concluded with the Trucial Chiefs in 1892. The agreement of 1868 was considered as a reference point, even if it, “merely prohibits the Chief from taking hostile action by sea, and binds him to refer disputes and misunderstandings to the Resident”.¹⁷⁵ Curzon’s administration one more time considered the renewal of the Agreement of 1868 on the motion of Sheikh Ahmed as a more viable option as, “Limited as this provision is, it will still go far to give us what we chiefly want i.e. the control of chief’s relations with foreigners. (As regards Turkey, the frequent refusal to recognize Turkish sovereignty appeared sufficient). Thus, suppose that the appearance of French subjects on the pearling banks gives rise to complications with the Sheikh and the chance of French interference. The chief at once announces his decision to refrain from putting to sea with hostile intention in order to redress his own grievances and place the dispute in the hands of the British Govt.”¹⁷⁶

Pearl fisheries as an issue now became a part of discussion as the GOI submitted an entire report on it in 1904. It called for special attention to the difficulties which could have arisen

¹⁷⁵ Ibid

¹⁷⁶ Ibid

in connection with the rights of pearl-fishing which the tribes of Qatar possess on the coast, in the absence of any formal convention with them.

As to the position of Shaikh Ahmed the Secretary of State for India, Brodrick accepted the view of GOI, "that his authority is sufficiently established among the tribes to justify the conclusion of an Agreement with him, should it be thought advisable on the grounds of policy...(&) recommend for Lansdowne's consideration the proposal put forward by the GOI, which would not only secure the exclusion of foreign interference from the peninsula, but assist the Indian authorities in maintaining control over the pearl fisheries in the Gulf."¹⁷⁷ Lansdowne desired an opinion from the British Ambassador in Constantinople to which O' Connor responded cautiously though not exactly declining a possibility of agreement. Connor's views were particularly based on the advantages of such a convention "against the ill-feeling which it will provoke in the minds of the Ottoman Government and seeing how far it could be justified as giving His Majesty's Government the right to restrain foreign interference in El Katr without attempting in any other way to disturb, *vis-à-vis* to the Turkish Government, the *status quo*."¹⁷⁸ He brought forth wider issues that he believed were of importance and the referring to the issue of an agreement with Qatar can have a serious effect on the Anglo-Turkish relations at that juncture such as, as he explained that, "at the present moment we are threatening Turkey with an armed expedition, to be manned by Bahreinese (sic) and supported by England to avenge the murder of Sheikh Selman committed by the Al Murrah tribe in revenge for the murder of some of their people; that it has been decided to establish a British post office at Koweit and to attach a resident to the Sheikh, and that we are at the same time insisting upon the removal of Turkish military post from Bubian Island as also from Um Kasr, although not with quite same pressure."¹⁷⁹ In view of all this, the Ambassador suggested that if at all a convention has to be concluded then to avoid an embarrassment in the Turkish court and antagonism with Turkey to do it in

¹⁷⁷ Godley Under, Secretary of State, IO to FO, 18 May 1904, NAI, FD, Secret E, February 190, 110-132.

¹⁷⁸ Sir N. O'Connor to Marquess of Lansdowne, No 516, Therapia, 28 June 1904, NAI, FD, Secret E, February 1905, 110-132.

¹⁷⁹ NAI, FD, Secret E, February 1905, Nos. 110-132.

as “quiet and secret manner as possible”.¹⁸⁰ Lansdowne too agreed to the aspect of secrecy to avoid exciting suspicion in the minds of the Turkish government and if at all decided then it, “should bear the appearance of being directed towards the virtual preservation of status quo in the Gulf.”¹⁸¹

It is obvious that the GOI with its focus on Qatar and the authority it desired to establish there had never considered the above issues as those affecting the conclusion of an agreement. Nowhere in its correspondence did it have a slightest mention of the cumulative effects of the steps and the consequences that could accrue in Turkish court as a result of this convention. In fact regarding the matter of secrecy, the GOI had a completely different stand. As much as the Ambassador would want the matter under wraps, and if at all required, explain to the Turkish Government that it was only an extension of the agreement of 1868, Curzon’s administration thought otherwise. It wanted to make the convention more open. Curzon agreed to the administration’s opinion that more publicly the renewal of relationship is made the better it would suit the purpose of the Shaikh and the British.¹⁸² In this respect GOI went by the Resident’s argument that the primary reason for which Ahmed had desired an agreement was for public knowledge that he was under British protection and which may strengthen his hands and help the British maintain order. Besides, he observed that “we consider that an agreement to which were attached the precautions and reservations advocated by HBMs Ambassador would defeat its own object and would seem to imply recognition for the first time of some Turkish rights in Katr. It might further preclude our obtaining completely satisfactory agreement at a more opportune season.”¹⁸³ Throughout the period, GOI had tried in one way or the other move bit by bit towards making the IO and FO understand the importance of such an agreement and the establishment of a protectorate over Qatar. GOI’s arguments underlined its urgency to

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ F. H. Villers, FO to IO, NAI, FD, Secret E, February 1905, Nos.110-132, p. 2.

¹⁸² Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, February 1905, Nos. 110-132, p. 7.

¹⁸³ Telegram from Cox to Secretary to GOI, FD, 12 December 1904, Calcutta, NAI, FD, Secret E, February 1905, Nos. 110-132.

avoid by any pretence, any other power, except the British to retain its influence in the region.

The India Office rejected GOI's proposal particularly after noting the British Ambassador's views from Constantinople. It too considered that in view of other important matters and considering that Turkish government has cancelled the Mudirate at Wakra it is futile to push for an agreement and affect the status quo and thereby intensify matters. It should however be noted that though the signing of the final convention is declined, GOIs arguments in favour of the convention were neither doubted nor even dismissed. It can be thus observed that according to the IO and FO, it was not the right time to push for this issue and even difficult to justify it in the given conditions.

Understanding the gravity of the situation and considering that the matters of Koweit pending the PRPG one more time considered giving a thought to the issue rather than it all leading to withdrawal under Turkish pressure. He wondered about an alternative that aimed at initiating an action from the Shaikh himself.

The Resident drew GOIs attention to the disputes regarding succession which could have made matters worse for the government to deal with later and believed that, "an agreement should be concluded before the death of aged Sheikh Jasim"¹⁸⁴. GOI concurred to the Residents' suggestions and recommended his proposal as the best alternative to the course suggested in its earlier dispatch to the Secretary of State for India believing that this, "would afford some measure of control over the maritime relations of the Sheikh with the foreigners"¹⁸⁵. The immediate conclusion of such a treaty with Shaikh Ahmad would bind him to take no hostile action by sea, and to refer to all disputes to the Resident PG.

The reasons for the immediate conclusion of a treaty were laid down in R Ritchie's note on British interests in Qatar:-

¹⁸⁴ Ibid

¹⁸⁵ Telegram from Viceroy to His Majesty's Secretary of State for India, London, no 4413 E. B., 30 December 1904, Calcutta, NAI, FD, Secret E, February 1905, Nos. 110-132.

- (1) The Katr coast, lying as it does between Bahrein and the Pirate coast, constitutes a break in the continuity in our maritime influence.
- (2) The absence of a treaty may hinder His Majesty's ships in the work of suppressing piracy and maintaining the peace of the Gulf. In this connection it may be observed that the objection to the extension of Turkish authority in those regions is that the Turks cannot establish a strong administration, and that their attempt to rule El Katr might only end in anarchy. Bahrein as a centre of pearl fisheries attracts pirates.
- (3) The absence of a treaty considerably increases the difficulty of making arrangements to protect the pearl fisheries from outside interference which has been threatened by certain Frenchmen settled in Bahrein. The question of what powers we possess in this respect under our existing treaties with the local Sheikhs is under consideration of the Law officers of the Crown.
- (4) The absence of a treaty may encourage the Turks to set up a rival Sheikh to Sheikh Ahmed on the death of Sheikh Jasim. In this connection it may be observed that Sheikh Ahmed and the Arabs of El Katr are Wahabis, and presumably sympathise with Ibn Saoud in his attack on Turkish authority in the interior. It is thus of importance to them that the new Sheikh should be on their side of Ibn Saoud.¹⁸⁶

From the point of GOI, the balance of advantage seemed to lie on the side of a treaty with Sheikh Ahmed; and it had been suggested that, as any treaty with him would raise a difficulty with the Turks. Hence if there was to be a treaty, then it should be on the lines of those with Trucial Chiefs, on the other hand it was also believed that, if the BG were to make a treaty it would be incumbent on them to support Sheikh Ahmed if, on the death of Sheikh Jasim, he became embroiled with the Turks, and a fresh chapter of difficulties with the Porte may opened.¹⁸⁷ R Ritchie in his notes on the island argued, that '[t]o leave the situation in El Katr to work itself out without interference on our part, even though the

¹⁸⁶ British interests on the coast of Arabia, Koweit, Bahrein and El Katr, Note by R Ritchie, 30 January 1905, IOR/L/P&S/18 B 133A-160/B 151, p 135.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. p 134.

ultimate result may be the restoration of nominal Turkish sovereignty, would not be inconsistent with the policy laid down in Lord Lansdowne's Minute of 21st March 1902 as to the position of Koweit..¹⁸⁸

Trying to find out the most possible and acceptable way GOI tried to argue on every count to make it agreeable to the London authorities but to no avail thereby drawing an exasperated response from GOI that, "the present attitude of His Majesty's Government makes it very hard to devise any means for protecting our interests on the Arab Coast of the Persian Gulf".¹⁸⁹

It is evident that, ensuring peace at the seas, which the Turkish government seemed unable to maintain since a long time, was now not the only concern for the GOI. Its concern was more about losing control over the region that seem to be an increasing interest for Turkey and which could subsequently bring in other foreign powers in the region. As the GOI understood, the Agreement of 1868 which the GOI signed with Sheikh Mahomed, was practically identical with Agreements of 1853 with the Trucial chiefs and dealt exclusively with the preservation of Maritime peace among the Arab rulers. However, the Agreements of 1853 later, were found insufficient to guard against the growing danger of encroachment or interference by foreign Powers, and it was considered necessary to supplement them by the Agreements of 1892 which were in force during the entire discussion between GOI, London, Turkey and Shaikh Ahmed of Qatar and as per GOI's arrangement, were intended to guard against such an eventuality.

Thus to provide against similar encroachments of interference, that an Agreement with the Sheikh of El Katr was then desired, and therefore, if any such Agreement was to be concluded it seemed clear that in order to be effective it should be modelled upon the Trucial Agreement of 1892 rather than upon Agreements which had been found in practice to be inadequate for present purposes.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Foreign Department Notes, S. M. Fraser's comments on 2-3-1905, NAI, FD, Secret E, March 1905, Nos. 795-800.

Considering that the GOI suggested signing a treaty on the lines of the one signed with the Trucial chiefs in 1892 or the least revising the one signed in 1868, IO had its doubts in place. Secretary Brodrick believed that such an initiative on the part of British government in India could be justified if one regarded it as “local on affecting only Indian interests in the Gulf...”¹⁹⁰

The Agreement of 1868 had never been expressed, abandoned or denounced and the Foreign Office understood that, “[I]t could however be made thoroughly effective for the purpose in view only by giving it an interpretation considerably in excess of what its actual terms would bear”¹⁹¹.

With such hesitation on the part of IO and FO the issue of an agreement or renewal of treaty was put to rest for the moment due to the “general sense of insecurity and suspicion (that prevailed) in the neighbourhood of the Persian Gulf” which would affect the *status quo* in that quarter.¹⁹² However the GOI and London held the view that the maintenance of *status quo* would not prevent the execution of an agreement to consolidate such influence as the British possessed in Qatar and the foreign interference in future. GOIs efforts thus seemed to have reached a halt, as the entire question of British policy in the region was left for the examination of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

Further Reservation on the Renewal of the Issue

One of the reasons for insistence on an early decision on the agreement was also because of Qassims old age who was now almost 80 years old and found to be “a typical patriarch of the ancient type...with long white beard and nearly blind from opthalmia, but still vigourous in mind and healthy in body...(and) still much interested in politics...but retired

¹⁹⁰ Godley to IO, 23 January 1905, NAI, FD, Secret E, March 1905, Nos. 795-800.

¹⁹¹ T.H. Sanderson, FO to IO, 18 February 1905, NAI, FD, Secret E, April 1905, Nos., 129-131.

¹⁹² Telegram from Secretary of State for India, London to the Viceroy, Calcutta, dated 28 February 1905, NAI, FD, Secret E, March 1905, Nos., 795-800.

from all administrative work...”¹⁹³ and had held sufficient sway over the tribes in Qatar also had effectively proved himself as a leader accepted by both the British and the Turkish governments. Qassim had willingly handed over authority of administration to his brother Shaikh Ahmed, “a somewhat extraordinary character and at the same time an extremely astute man...about 45 years of age...(who) evidently enjoys much popularity and influence over his subjects”¹⁹⁴. The Agent reported that, “there is no doubt...that the people of Bahrein(sic) and Katar (sic) regard him as being a strong and clever man, and that none of the younger members of the family stand out with any prominence over each other.”¹⁹⁵ But that did not rule out the possibility of a war of succession.

The British Agent during the course of conversation with Shaikh Ahmed in November 1905, had asked the Shaikh whether in reality he was now the *Kaim Mamkam* of Bidaa or his brother was and if he had received a formal warrant conferring on him the post or the title, to which the Shaikh had accepted that the Turks had good deal power over him but that he couldn't do much about it. It was during this conversation with the Shaikh, that the British Agent broached the issue of desirability of a treaty with the GOI similar to those of Trucial Chiefs, much to the discomfort of GOI which did not think of it as prudent to refer to the question.¹⁹⁶ But Shaikh Ahmed had replied in affirmative and wondered with the Turks in position how he could ever make one, and that if the British could drive the Turks out of Bidaa.¹⁹⁷ The British Agent then had replied in negative to state that the British and the Turkish Governments were on friendly terms, and that nothing of that sort could be effected except through diplomacy.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ Captain F.B. Prideaux, political Agent, Bahrein, to PRPG, Bushire, No. 455, 23 December 1905, Bahrein, NAI, FD, Secret E, March 1906, Nos., 251-256.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Assistant Secretary to the GOI in the FD to Major P.Z. Cox, PRPG, No. 988-E.B., 2 March 1905, Fort William, NAI, FD, Secret E, March 1906, Nos., 251-256.

¹⁹⁷ Captain F.B. Prideaux, Political Agent, Bahrein, to PRPG, Bushire, No. 457, 23 December 1905, Bahrein, NAI, FD, Secret E, March 1906, Nos., 251-256.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Nevertheless having accepted Shaikh Ahmed as the next in line to deal with, considering that Qassim was too old, British administration seemed to have completely neglected the possibility of Shaikh Ahmed himself being eliminated from the scene. In the entire gamut of discussion, in the course of arguments and counter arguments and the scheming of affairs to maintain certain policy matters to be forcefully implemented, nowhere did the GOI or London give a thought to the possibility of alteration in the circumstances and change of guard. This is precisely what happened, and the issue of renewal of treaty once again remained in abeyance. The reason was Shaikh Ahmad's murder by a rival Beni Hajir tribesman, Bin Mu'ammam who was under the shelter of Ajmun tribe. GOI admitted, that, "we contemplated the death of the aged Sheikh Jassim, as likely to lead to disputes of succession and to create a difficult situation. The contingency of Shaikh Ahmed's death, however was not foreseen; and now that it has occurred, it may possibly give rise to an acute crisis in Katr (sic)."¹⁹⁹

Shaikh's Ahmed's murder brought in the question of succession of the government of the principality and also the obligations of the Shaikh in residing in Doha as previously Shaikh Ahmed had suggested that he was willing to accept the British suggestion of residing wherever they desired. Similarly for the British it also meant that the issue of relation of the Shaikh with Turkish officials vis-à-vis the British remained unsettled. In the given circumstances, Turkish presence on the island of Bida was a fact to reckon with. Any unsettled status may have further increased Turkish authority and could change the Turkish dealings with the Shaikh and the situation in the region.

The GOI kept a close watch over the situation in Qatar as the British Political Agent of Bahrain reported over the matters. The question of succession now remained to be settled between the sons of Qassim and sons of Shaikh Ahmed as both had numerous grown up sons and when both died, it was expected that there would be serious struggle amongst the younger generation for the leadership of the family. But beyond the issue of succession, it

¹⁹⁹ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, March 1906, p. 2.

was the Turkish interference in the region that was the most immediate concern in the GOIs circles.

It was believed that as Qassim lived in retirement, his existence would not much affect the succession; and even if it should, his influence would probably be thrown on the side of Turkish interests. On the other hand, there was concern about the British position,

“[I]t is to be feared that the Turks will take advantage of the crisis and of the absence of any effective British influence from the scene to appoint a nominee of their own as a Turkish officer, and extend their authority along the coast.”²⁰⁰

The concern was aggravated from the news of Turkish proposal to appoint a *Mudir* at Odeid shortly and hence it felt that it may be called upon to interfere in Qatar. One opinion in GOI was to report the death of Shaikh Ahmed to London authorities and at the same time, “ascertain whether they (Government in London) have arrived at any conclusion in regard to the policy to be pursued in Katr (sic), while again pressing for a decision on the main objective in our former recommendations, viz., the conclusion of a Protectorate Treaty with the Chief of Bidaa (sic). Authorisation may, at the same time, be sought to our instructing the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf to secure a nomination of a successor by Sheikh Jassim before his death and to Major Cox getting a treaty signed by Sheikh Jassim and witnessed by the nominees”²⁰¹

R.E. Holland in the GOIs Foreign Department however did not share the view. He opined that though the news of Shaikh Ahmed’s death can be reported to the Secretary of State, but it would not be advisable to bring up the matter of conclusion of a Protectorate Treaty with the Chief of Bidaa. He believed that since it was already decided that the policy to be pursued in the region was to be referred by the Defence Committee it was not likely that, the news of the death of Shaikh Ahmed will affect the policy. Besides there is uncertainty regarding arrangements at Bidaa as it was likely that Shaikh Qassim would himself regain authority and in which case there would be no actual necessity to conclude treaty as the

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

original treaty, it appeared, never lapsed as far as Shaikh Jassim was concerned. He expressed that there may be a possibility of the Turks seizing the opportunity for making a forward move, but in any case, “the British Government could not interfere at the present moment...(and that) ...there is nothing to be done, but to wait and see who is appointed as successor.”²⁰²

By this time British Political Agent of Bahrain reported on the events in Qatar. Sheikh Ali, the eldest son of Sheikh Ahmed, was ready to accept the appointment but the Sheikh and people of Bida and Doha appeared to consider him too young. Sheikh Khalifa, the eldest son of Sheikh Qassim, to whom the post was first offered, refused it, as a strong minority believed that he was an abettor of the murder of Sheikh Ahmed. Sheikh Abdullah bin Qassim declined it on the ground that he preferred to devote all his attention to pearl dealing, and Sheikh Abdul Rahman bin Jasim replied that he preferred to remain in Wakra.²⁰³ For the moment it appeared that Qatar had to deal with issues that would take considerable time and efforts on the part of local authorities.

Given the state of affairs and uncertainty over the issue of succession, Lord Minto’s Government in India decided not to take any action at that moment towards re-opening the discussions about the British relations with the late Shaikh Ahmed-bin-Thani of Bidaa.²⁰⁴ In the meantime report came of Sheikh Abdullah-bin-Jasim-bin-Thani having accepted his father’s nomination to the Sheikhship of Doha from about 1st May 1906.²⁰⁵

This was also the time when political developments were taking place in Turkey. The repressive policies of Sultan Abdul Hamid II had encouraged disaffection amongst the educated lot in Turkey which now sought to restore the 1876 constitution and unify the diverse elements of the empire into a homogeneous nation through greater government centralization under a parliamentary regime. In July 1908, army units in Macedonia

²⁰² Foreign Department Notes, note by R.E. Holland, NAI, FD, Secret E, March 1906, p 3.

²⁰³ Captain Prideaux to PRPG, No. 128, 9 March 1906, Bahrein, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1906, Nos. 351-356.

²⁰⁴ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1906, Nos. 351-356.

²⁰⁵ Prideaux, No. 584, 14-18 May 1906, Bahrein, NAI, FD, Secret E, August 1906, Nos. 351-356.

revolted and demanded a return to constitutional government which was soon restored. In November 1908 the Sultan held elections in which the Committee of Union and Progress, a nationalist reform organisation formed in 1907, won all but one of the Turkish seats. The face of Turkey changed for the world. The Young Turks were educated and were mostly students and army officers who insisted on return to constitution. Although it was only in January 1913 when the coup engineered by Enver Pasha helped the authoritarian elements of the Young Turk movement gained full control, they had already become a force to deal with. The British Ambassador and government was to realize that soon.

In July 1909 came a reference to Turkish occupation of the island of Zakhnuniyah, “island situated to some 10 miles to the south of Ojair, the point recognized (by the British Government) as the furthest limit of Ottoman jurisdiction in El Hasa”²⁰⁶ Four Turkish soldiers were located on the island and a military post established. After sharp protest from the British government the military post was removed by September 1909, but once again the action was repeated. The British Ambassador believed that it could have been merely owing to the termination of the fishing season, during which Turks pretended the presence of their gendarmes to be necessary to maintain order among the Dowasir fishermen from Bahrein who frequented the island.²⁰⁷

The GOI intending once again to maintain a status quo had not entertained the earlier proposal of the Resident, Arthur Trevor to keep a permanent guard in Zakhnuniyah.²⁰⁸ The island was also earlier laid claim upon by the Shaikh of Bahrain as he claimed that it was frequented by the Dowasir who were the subjects of the Shaikh and who frequented the island in the winter months and the island remained uninhabited during the summer months.²⁰⁹ It was the Turkish Mudir of Ojair who asserted the claim which, the British believed, was a pretension of the Turks not only to the island but to the coast south-east of

²⁰⁶ Sir G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey, Confidential document Section I, No 1 [31386], 22 August 1910, Asiatic Turkey and Arabia, NAI, FD, Secret E, January 1911, Nos. 56-64.

²⁰⁷ Ibid

²⁰⁸ GOI, Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, December 1910, Nos. 296-324.

²⁰⁹ GOI, Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD, Secret E, July 1909, Nos. 538-548. More on Bahrain's involvement in Zakhnuniya is dealt with in Chapter III.

Ojair. A Turkish sub-governor was placed at Odied, a village on Qatar coast but which the British recognized as a part of the Abu Dhabi though the Turks believed that it was a dependency of Turkish district Caster (Qatar). The time had come to deal with the Young Turk element in the Ottoman administration. The British Ambassador in Turkey pointed out referring to the Young Turk element that, “all this seems to point to a determination to assert and extend Ottoman sovereignty in the neighbourhood of El Katr (sic) and it seems to me only prudent that HMGs government should make up its mind as to the attitude to be adopted towards Young Turkey’s general forward policy in the region of the Gulf”.²¹⁰

While on one hand the Ambassador at Constantinople gave a nod to the GOI to go ahead and sign the much desired treaty with the Al Thanis, The PRPG at this juncture considered avoiding of signing one. Explaining the situation in Zakhnuniyah, Gulf and the new Turkish regime’s response the Resident pointed out that the Consul of Basra had raised the issue of Turkish occupation of Zakhnuniya with the Wali who, ‘challenged right of consul to discuss the matter either officially or privately..(and) that he was astonished that the Consul did not mind his own business which was trade’.²¹¹ The PRPG believed that clearly communications made to the Turkish authorities have made no effect and ‘the position has become humiliating and impossible’ hence recurrence of such incidents was inevitable unless atmosphere was quickly cleared. The changed situation in Turkey was a point that the PRPG too raised:

It appears to be generally agreed that the temporizing policy which we have pursued for years past will not serve the purpose with the Young Turk regime, and I submit that their recent attempts to upset the status quo and their assertive attitude give us strong and imperative grounds for settling issues now.²¹²

Suggesting that the British power should induce the Turks to confine themselves to recognized possessions at Qatar and Ojair and then make treaties on lines of Trucial Coast

²¹⁰ Sir G Lowther to Sir Edward Grey, Confidential document Section I, No 1 [31386], 22 August 1910, Asiatic Turkey and Arabia, NAI, FD, Secret E, January 1911, Nos. 56-64.

²¹¹ From the PRPG to the Secretary to the GOI, in the FD, Telegram no. 1029, 2 November 1910, Bushire, NAI, FD Secret E, January 1911, Nos. 56-64.

²¹² Ibid

Agreement with Bin Thani and if necessary with other headmen on the west coast of Katar, the Resident left the question of dealing with the Turks 'whether reciprocal compromise or coercive measures', with the GOI, but suggested that there can be no quid pro quo which we could offer Porte in this sphere in exchange for withdrawal of Turkish pretensions which could be possibly found in some other sphere. He believed that in case of coercive measures, the strong British squadron can take over the less number of Turkish military posts in the Persian Gulf.

Signing a treaty with the Shaikh of Qatar was very much on the priority list of the GOI. However with the report from the PRPG it understood that vacating the Turks from their military post in Bidaa was an essential prerequisite, 'unless the Turks can be induced to confine themselves to their recognized possessions at Katif and Ojair no advantage would accrue from treaties with Katar Chiefs, and Chiefs would probably not now agree to enter into treaties'²¹³. For long i.e. since 1872 when the Turks occupied Bidaa and soon maintained a garrison there the GOI had taken a position to accept the Turkish existence on Bidaa but not recognize their right to sovereignty over Qatar by virtue of the military post there. It was also a policy of GOI to restrict the Turkish existence to Bidaa and not beyond it anywhere on the coast of Qatar. In almost four decades of time the GOI is keen on eliminating the Turkish base in Bida to ensure treaty relations with the Al Thanis. The desirability of concluding a treaty with the Shaikh (or Shaikhs) of Qatar was not doubted and the considerations in favour of the proposal in 1903 still held good. In fact since those times few more reasons were added to the desirability of the conclusion of treaty. The discussions for in GOI include three such aspects for increased desirability and those were :

(a) the business relations between Bahrain and for that matter India and Katar that have developed during the interval requiring a definite understanding to facilitate the adjustment of claims and the process of law;

(b) the possibility of German merchants in Bahrain following the footsteps of Messrs Grey Paul & Co acquiring trade interests in Katar, and then the possibility

²¹³ From Viceroy, to Secretary of State for India, London, Telegram P., No S.-736, 1 December 1910, Calcutta, NAI, FD Secret E, January 1911, Nos. 56-64.

that there might be an occasion and inducement to Germany to support Turkish pretensions on the Peninsula and

(c) the possibility which can be inferred from the views of the Naval Commander-in-Chief of the Qatar ports becoming a centre of illicit arms traffic if the British blockade operations should drive the traffic up the Gulf.²¹⁴

In the course of discussion, a suggestion/observation came up from some of the members of GOI's FD. The suggestion was related to signing of treaties not necessarily with the ruling family of Doha, a member of the Al Thani family but any of the other Shaikhs of Qatar as the Home Government's suggestion was 'a' Shaikh of Qatar. Though the suggestion may not have appeared to be very sound for the moment and perhaps even reflected the inability to grasp the situation, the line of thought was to somehow establish a control over Qatar without challenging the Home government. It was desired that Colonel Cox may be referred to and was suggested that it may perhaps have been possible that one of the Shaikhs in some place midway on the east coast of Qatar, say at Sumaisma, or Khor Shaiqi, may in return for protection enroll himself as one of the Trucial Shaikhs, and by encouragement and support extend his influence right up to the western end of the peninsula. This would exclude the influence of the Doha Shaikh, whom the Turks style their *Kaim Makam*, from beyond Lusail and effectively stop Turkish influence from extending beyond Bida towards Ruwais, Zubarat and Zakhnuniyeh. Perhaps Nasir bin Mubarak the exiled cousin of the ruling chief of Bahrain, who like his ancestors claims a share in Bahrain would be willing to establish himself as a British or Bahrain protégé somewhere in Qatar and start a new colony there.²¹⁵

Towards Concluding the Treaty

In June 1913, Lieutenant Colonel Percy Cox enquired about, "the steps which can be best taken in order to enable us to obtain full advantage from the new position which we are acquiring in relation to Katar Peninsula under the Anglo-Turkish Convention now on the

²¹⁴ Foreign Department Notes, NAI, FD Secret E, January 1911, Nos. 56-64, p 4.

²¹⁵ Ibid. p 5.

point of conclusion”.²¹⁶ In May 1913 the Resident Lieutenant Colonel P Z Cox invited GOI’s attention that the Shaikh of Bahrain was contemplating the possibility of reviving his claim to levy tribute on the Shaikhs of el Qatar. Such a claim was previously only exercised for two years and had not been enforced since 1870. The Resident was asked to firmly resist any such interference in Qatar.²¹⁷ The Resident believed that at the moment the subject had become a little complicated by an independent development namely the expulsion of Turks from Hasa and Qatif and assumption of province by Bin Saud. Meanwhile the Porte gave no signs of removing the garrison at El Bidaa and the resident doubted if Qassim would readily part with it at present, for in the absence of Turkish garrison or of assurances from us to supply the place of it, he would not unnaturally feel somewhat apprehensive of being absorbed by Bin Saud.²¹⁸

The news of the impending Anglo-Turkish convention it seems did not bring much good feeling in Qatar. People in Qatar were not too pleased when they heard that Katar was to be under British protection, apparently being under the impression that the Anglo-Turkish Convention had transferred Qatar from Turkish to British protection. Shaikh Qassim was reported to have been pleased when the new Turkish detachment arrived presumably that it meant “the postponement of the evil day”. The Political Agent in Bahrain reported to The Resident that, “there is no doubt that Sheikh Jasim clings to the Turkish detachment since Bin Saud became active, and he will not part with it if he can help it, unless he gets some assurance from us. All reports seem to show that he dislikes and fears Bin Saud.”²¹⁹ There were reports of people having bought up a number of Arms and were keeping them, as it seemed that the supply of arms sale had run short.²²⁰

²¹⁶ Cox to Secretary to the GOI in FD, letter No. 1963, 22 June 1913, Bushire, Qatar and Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913, IOR/R/15/2/30.

²¹⁷ L W Reynolds, Esq, CIE, ICS, Deputy Secretary to the GOI, FD, No.1704-E.A., 31 July 1913, Qatar and Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913, IOR/R/15/2/30, p.8

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Major A. P. Trevor, CIE, Political Agent of Bahrein to Lt Col Percy Cox, Bahrein No 403 Of 1913, 3 July 1913 Qatar and Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913, IOR/R/15/2/30.

²²⁰ Ibid.

It was necessary for the GOI to take some steps as it seemed improbable that Qassim would part with the detachment of Turkish troops until an assurance from the British, as he feared molestation from Bin Saud and that he could be absorbed by the British on withdrawal of Turkish troops. The Resident wondered if he could be told of his autonomy being duly recognized.²²¹

Apart from the Anglo-Turkish deliberations that were moving towards a treaty between the two, the British Government was involved in negotiations with the French Government over the Arms Traffic subsidy and if the outcome of which was to grant one such to Qassim. At this point the Resident once again suggested a treaty with Shaikh Qassim by which “we should recognize his autonomy, give him assurances of protection (so long as he observes his obligations to us) from attack by sea, and good offices to prevent unprovoked attack by land...”²²²

The vexed question of the status of El Katr was finally disposed of in the Anglo-Turkish negotiations of 1912-14. Under the unratified Anglo-Turkish Convention of 29 July 1913, the Ottoman government renounced all rights to Turkish peninsula, which was in the past, to continue to be governed by the Sheikhs of Thani family, while the BG engaged not to permit the Sheikh of Bahrain to interfere in the internal affairs of El Katar, to threaten his autonomy or to annex it. In 1913 when Ibn Saud Captured Hasa El Katr, like the Oman coast, formed in his view, part of his ancestral domains, to which he could therefore prefer a claim as of right. But the Amir was warned.

The discussion on final agreement of the treaty was being considered and by July 1914, a draft of it was ready. The Resident suggested that it be a matter of consideration on the spot whether the Treaty should be made with the natural head of the family only, Shaikh Abdullah bin Jasim bin Thani or whether the other sons of old Shaikh Jasim should sign

²²¹Telegram P from Resident Bushire to Foreign, Simla, 11 July 1913, Qatar and Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913, IOR/R/15/2/30 p. 14.

²²² L W Reynolds, Esq, CIE, ICS, Deputy Secretary to the GOI, FD, No.1704-E.A., 31 July 1913, Qatar and Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913, IOR/R/15/2/30 p.15.

also.²²³ The GOI wondered if it was required that a treaty be also made with any other Shaikhs in territory from which Turkey had withdrawn her claim.²²⁴

In the meantime all was not well in the Shaikh's camp too as he was disturbed about the ill-feeling that existed among his son's and towards his eldest son Abdullah, who was the Chief of Doha and in charge of the customs of that place. Disunion reigned among the members of the Bin Thani family. Abdullah in return declined to be the next Chief unless he was put faith on while Jassim being suspicious about the developments that loomed in his own camp had "kept a faithful negro in Doha to inform him about the movements there"²²⁵ The fear of Turkish forces being dislodged, loomed on the Jassim's horizon of fear. His other son Khalifa who despised the power of Abdullah was willing to join hands with Bin Saood provided he would appoint Khalifa as the ruler. Bin Saood wrote to Shaikh him to remove his soldiers and obey his orders which Qassim refused.²²⁶ Qassim soon died of an ailment and left an estate amounting to Rs 70,000, Dollars 20,000, Turkish Liras 6000, pearls in Bombay of 6 lakhs rupees, slaves one lakh rupees camels horses etc of 2 lakhs.²²⁷ The property was to be divided into three portions two of which to go to all his sons and daughters equally. In the meantime Shaikh Saood kept his cards up in Qatar asking Abdullah to meet him at Lhasa which Abdullah did not

On 29 March 1913 Sheikh Abdullah bin Sheikh Qassim bin Thani was proclaimed the ruler of Doha. But according to reports he was ruling over all of Qatar, but in Okra where his brother Abdurahman administered justice.²²⁸ In his report to the Political Agent at Bahrain Kanoo made a "shrewd guess at the object of his enquiries", by stating that "if the

²²³ From Major Knox to Foreign Secretary to the GOI FD, No C.G.-52, 21 July 1914, Bushire, Qatar and Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913 IOR/R/15/2/30.

²²⁴ Telegram from GOI, FD to Resident, 18 July 1914, Qatar and Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913, IOR/R/15/2/30, p.19.

²²⁵ Agent Bahrain to PRPG, Extract of reports from Yusuf bin Ahmed Kanoo, No 11 C, 2 August 1914, Qatar and Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913, IOR/R/15/2/30 p. 22-23.

²²⁶ Ibid. pp. 25-26.

²²⁷ Ibid. p. 27.

²²⁸ Ibid. p. 32.

government is going to make any agreement with Shaikh Abdullah, in my opinion, it would be advisable if they kept it till one month or so after the ceremony of giving medal to Sheikh Isa, as then he will not suspect anything, but will know that English do not fail to observe good works done by anybody and to reward same. So he will more easily and readily yield.” Kanoo further suggested that the agreement be kept secret from Abdullah’s brothers...”²²⁹ The Political Agent however felt that Kanoo exaggerated the tension between Abdullah and his cousins as Abdullah was the most unwilling of Jassim’s son and not even the eldest (being Khalifa) preferring to deal with the pearl trade instead of assuming political control over Katar.²³⁰

The PRPG outlined a more general policy for GOI to look at, making a reference to the disunion among the members of the Thani family he favoured Abdullah who he stated as “to be far more tractable than the remaining members of the family, and theoretically at all events, holds view as to the maintenance of order, equality of all before the Shara’ Law and general justice which seem to mark him out as the man for our purpose.”²³¹ Referring to Bin Sa’ud he added, “The Amir would be no Arab if he did not welcome opportunity of increasing his territory and influence and the outlook for the independence of Katar is gloomy unless we can arrange to bolster up the authority of the Shaikh.”²³² Turkey’s satisfaction with Bin Saud’s attempts in Qatar it was believed would be no less, but the fall of Qatar the resident argued in the hands of bin Saud, would be serious for Trucial Chiefs too as they were severely scourged by ravages of plague and the financial ruin caused by the war now raging in Europe. The Resident recommended, “the solution appears to me to lie in support, as strong as we can make it, of Shaikh Abdullah without for the present asking for any return and trusting to the future to bring us reward,” posing a question whether Abdullah will be worth that support. “Will he be Shaikh Mubarak or Shaikh Isa?”

²²⁹ Ibid. p. 33.

²³⁰ Agent Keyes, Bahrain to PRPG Knox, No 25-C, 9 September 1914, Qatar and Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913, IOR/R/15/2/30, p.45.

²³¹ Major Knox to Lt-Col Sir P. Z. Knox, Foreign Secretary to the GOI, Foreign and Political Department, No Cf.-203 (Confidential), 1 September 1914, Bushire, Qatar and Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913, IOR/R/15/2/30, p.51. .

²³² Ibid. p.53-54 .

Agreeing to having underlined a more general line of policy and stating that “the present seems a more favourable opportunity for the inception of that policy.”²³³

Shaikh Abdullah was a battered man. He was increasingly getting restless about the highhandedness of his brother Khalifa and his cousins who do not care “for a woman or a subject or any foreigner.”²³⁴

Resident agreed that “Qatar (cs) question was most important” that bin saud “could eat up Qatar in a week” advising the agent to walk very wearily in this delicate problem and don’t touch on it in any communication to Bin Saud, until we have full instructions from Foreign who will have to consult the home people”.²³⁵

The British took some time over the final decision of with whom to sign the treaty till a confirmation from the Political Agent conveyed by the Resident to GOI if there were, “no Shaikhs except the Al Thani family with whom it would be worthwhile concluding a treaty.”²³⁶

The conclusion of a formal treaty with Qatar was in the immediate prewar period of much importance in connection with the arms traffic, was postponed until the final ratification of the Anglo-Turkish Convention, and so had not been disposed on the outbreak of war.

In Common with the rulers of the other states in the Gulf the Sheikh of Qatar was notified and maintained a friendly attitude towards the British Government.²³⁷

²³³ Ibid. p.51 .

²³⁴ Qatar and Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913, Translation of a note attached to a letter from Shaikh Abdullah bin Jasim Bin Thani To Haji Yusuf Bin Ahmed Kanoo of Bahrain, IOR/R/15/2/30, p.53 .

²³⁵ A handwritten note addressed by PRPG, 15 September (IX) 1914, Qatar and Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913, IOR/R/15/2/30.

²³⁶ Knox, to Keyes, Bahrain, Docket telegram No. Cf 106, 9 March 1914, Bushire, Qatar and Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913, IOR/R/15/2/30, p.34.

²³⁷ Notes on Bahrein, 1908-1928 by J.G.L. Confidential IO B.B402/P4804/28, Political and Secret Department IOR/L/P&S/18 B391-420.

The outbreak of European war rendered the conclusion of a definitive treat with Qatar less urgent, and it was not until May 1915 that the question was revived. Lengthy negotiations ensued and finally on 3 November 1916 a treaty was fully concluded between the British Government and the Shaikh of El Qatar and finally ratified by the Governor General in Council on 28 March 1918.

As Jill Crystal mentioned, because of Qatar's small size and its distance from the overland trade routes, a settled economy rarely developed. Its trade sector was small and among its traders the ruling family "loomed large" and never developed a merchant class.²³⁸ Qatar's Shaikh Qassim was himself involved in the pearl trade which was heavily taken over by the British protected Indian merchants. Qassim tried every attempt to challenge this situation and cleverly also aligned with the Turks against the British. The Ottoman Empire maintained a garrison in Doha for almost forty two years from 1871, and arrested its authority over Qatar by virtue of the garrison. Treating the region as its own and British as the intruders, the Ottoman officials regularly protested against the British force over the Shaikhs. The conflicting power situation in Qatar is a peculiar case study. Saudi Wahhabism made way in Qatar in the twentieth century. The Al Thanis were on good terms with the Wahhabis and many in Qatar had accepted Wahhabism, Shaikh Qassim himself adopting it, which also neutralized a possible threat.

The GOI consistently declined to accept it to be so instead restricted the Turkish presence in Doha thus recognizing the rest of the Qatar to be free of any significant authority except the GOI. But above all the chapter reflects on the GOIs designs and Shaikh Qassim's resistance to establishment of British authority over Qatar. The Al Thanis, particularly Qassim skillfully avoided British pretensions yet maintaining his position strong in the wake of challenge. It is worth noting then that the wily Al Thanis were the last in the Gulf to sign a protectorate treaty with the British.

²³⁸Jill Crystal (1990), *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.114.

CONCLUSION

For centuries, the Gulf had enjoyed a position as a lucrative trade route between the east and the west. Apart from its geographical position its strategic location ensured its role in the history of Asia and Europe particularly after the fifteenth century and had an impact on the history of the region per se. The entry of the Europeans, starting with the Portuguese, the commercial and political interests and the subsequent British control of the Gulf led to a change in the history of the region as also its interactions and relations with neighbouring territories over a period of four and a half centuries.

India had ancient maritime relations with the Gulf that also translated in socio-cultural exchange between the two. India's relations with the Gulf had deep reflections of trade. This included the involvement of the merchants of western India and the Coromandal coast in the trade of Gulf and exchanges in religion and science. Essential commodities as well as luxury items were traded, as the port cities of both the region ensured continuous trade links over the centuries. Indian products were in great demand in the Gulf and India proved to give patronage to Gulf products. Thus Indo-Gulf trade was small yet fruitful in maintaining continuous relations between the two regions.

Having discovered the Cape of Good Hope route the Portuguese managed to monopolize the trade in the east. The control of Hormuz at the mouth of the Gulf was its most significant beginning. Thereafter the Portuguese managed to control the trade in the Gulf for almost a century. The Portuguese position in the Gulf was initially challenged by Oman, and later by Persia, regional power and aspirant for authority over the region. Before the Portuguese arrived in the Gulf, it were the Arabs particularly those from Oman and Yemen who were in complete control of the east-west trade.

The diplomatic efforts along with the British naval power eventually limited the Portuguese area of influence and later eliminated its authority both in India and the Gulf. The Dutch

proved to be a tough competitor after the Portuguese and they thwarted any British attempts at successful trade after the decline of Portuguese power but they lost out in the long run. The French position remained on the fringes of British position in the Gulf. Soon ports of Hormuz, Aden, Bandar Abbas, Basra, Bushire, gained the renewed importance in British imperial designs.

The British had first appeared in the Gulf at the beginning of seventeenth century for the purpose of trade. Subsequent engagements with Persia and development of early interests in India, directed the events in the Gulf in the second decade of the sixteenth century. The year 1615 was one of the early beginnings of British India interaction with the Gulf, when the Directors of East India Company sent a ship from Surat to Jask.

British interaction and engagement with the Gulf in the period between the seventeenth and the twentieth century brought in an era of controlled European interference; treaties with individual Shaikhs and creation of new states for example Qatar. What started as an effort to establish trade; police the waters of the Gulf for safe communication routes; and elimination of slavery, ended up in the establishment of protectorates for example over Bahrain and recognition of individual states as Kuwait with chiefs who were installed or acknowledged, for agreeing to the British political and diplomatic policies. With the British dominating over the Gulf, the Gulf acquired a status of premeditated immunity from any power or authority.

The matters, relations and trade in the Gulf were then handled by the English East India Company. The early trading exercises in the Gulf particularly in Persia did not prove very promising as the Portuguese and later the Dutch competition proved a deterrent, but the Company's trade with India in the meantime gained success. The clash with the European powers ensued in India too. The decline of the once powerful Mughal Empire and the subsequent disintegration proved to be advantageous. It were the British who contributed to its decline that finally resulted in its end.

Wresting of Political authority in Bengal proved to be the most successful of Company's ventures as that led to unprecedented growth in trade in the eighteenth century. Soon the

East India Company acquired a political foothold in India with the efforts of Robert Clive, Warren Hastings and Lord Dalhousie. The French were aspirants of control over India, a fact that had far reaching consequences on the Gulf. It was Napoleon's challenge to the British power and his march towards India having reached Egypt, in 1798 which proved to be an impetus for increased significance of the Gulf for the British. Britain's domination over India and the significance of its colonial empire in the east was the marked determination for it to ensure its continuous presence in the Gulf. The British communication lines from London to India ran through the Gulf.

The early trade and commercial interests were meant to gain profit from the trade in the east. But that soon changed. It gave way to strategic and political interests that became paramount to British activities in the Gulf. With its Indian Empire on the east, the British got busy in securing their position in the Gulf. Protection and sustenance of the routes thus linked the region with British India's security concerns. The importance of the region increased manifold. Hence encroachment on the Ottoman Empire became a sustained policy.

Britain's commercial and territorial ambitions being fulfilled in India, resulted in the establishment of a colonial rule in India which had its impact on the Gulf. India's importance was unquestionable and its security non-negotiable. The British had fought the European powers successfully and limited their influence in India. The French were restricted in Pondicherry and the Portuguese to Goa and Diu. The annexation promised them more trade and wealth besides power and prestige. The purpose in Gulf was to secure stability in the Gulf to maintain secure position of India. It was no exaggeration then to state that India's defence borders extended to the Gulf.

It is noteworthy then that it was in view of the British imperial interests in India, that the Gulf experienced a gamut of colonial aspirations that contributed to the most far reaching changes for the region to experience. The Gulf suffered most harmful destruction and suppression. It caused enormous harm to the Arabs and to the socio-political and commercial situation in the Gulf.

In order to stabilize its status in Gulf and keep it as a region free from the interest and interference of the other European powers, the British raised an administrative structure in the Gulf that was directly administered from India, initially administered by the Government of Bombay. The British 'indirect rule' was maintained by interests that were realized by ever engaging policy decisions. Unlike India the GOI did not take the direct responsibility of political and administrative control over the regions. The GOI's policies in the Gulf were facilitated by its somewhat complicated administrative structure that required the Resident to be answerable to the GOI and as Consul- General of Fars, to London at times creating a clash. The British dominated Gulf by entering into treaty relations and establishing Protectorates but at the same time allowing the Chiefs to rule in independent capacity.

By the end of nineteenth century, Bombay was no longer responsible for decisions but the authority was handed over to the Governor-General and Viceroy of India. The matters in Gulf were no longer to be handled by a provincial government. It was the Governor-General and his Council that looked into Gulf affairs and demanded action from the Home Government on the most pressing matters in the Gulf impacting India.

The Gulf Residency was the most important British office for the GOI and the Political Resident was assisted by Agents who were often the traders and combined two things in one, that of trading and maintaining local contacts to get the much required information of the happenings in the region. In the earlier period these agents were the natives but by the end of the nineteenth century British agents were appointed. As the importance of states grew the native agencies were established for better information and facilitation, for e.g. Muscat and Bahrain.

The Political Resident in the Persian Gulf was the first and immediate reference point for the Government of India, to initiate its discussion on policy matters with the Home government. E. C. Ross, Malcolm Meade and Sir Percy Cox had gained an adequate expertise over the matters of the locals, the Shaikhs, the British protected merchants in Gulf, the regional powers and equally so the European aspirants for power. If E. C. Ross

raised the question of Turkish designs in the Gulf and its sovereignty over Qatar, Malcolm Meade initiated a strong case for the appointment of British Political Agent in Bahrain and Percy Cox successfully managed for the GOI, the establishment of separate state of Kuwait.

The Residents reported to the Secretary in Foreign Department, and their comments and suggestions were taken seriously by the GOI, though at times it may have differed on the action and the plan. In case of Turkish presence in Doha, the resident had argued for immediate withdrawal of Turkish forces. Though the GOI believed in the same, it did not immediately initiate any action.

The Government of India, though otherwise considered as the sub-ordinate arm of the imperial government in London, was nevertheless the only authority responsible for the conduct of the day to day affairs of the Gulf. It visualized the situation in Gulf as it was and as it could be for the Home government. It raised an alert at the slightest provocation of a foreign or regional power base in Gulf, and demanded expedited results for its arguments on policy matters.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century British position in the Gulf was increasingly challenged by the other European Powers. The European presence in the Gulf was an important factor that led to responses on the part of the regional powers and the local Shaikhs besides the GOI. Russia retained its interests in Persia but engaged itself in the Gulf region to ascertain the possibility of commercial gains. Around the 1890s France remained active in Muscat & Oman and showed interest in the pearl trade in Bahrain thereby entering the British zone of British strategic interests. During the same time Germany used its advantage of newly established friendship with the Ottoman Empire and acquired concessions for the railway line that could involve Kuwait and alerting the GOI's policy plans that eventually resulted in the recognition of a separate state. Throughout the period the GOI remained watchful over the earliest approach on the part of the foreign powers and yet weary about the increasing attempts on the part of Germany, France and Russia to make inroads in the Gulf.

In Bahrain and Qatar, both the regional powers Turkey and Persia made continuous attempts to establish their stakes in the islands. However the intensity of threat that Britain felt regarding France in Oman, Germany in Kuwait or Russia in Persia or the Baghdad railway episode was never felt as far as Bahrain and Qatar were concerned. None of the European powers came close to thwarting or shaking the British dominance in these two areas. But having faced the diplomatic pressures and overtures of the European and regional powers elsewhere in the region, the GOI remained extra cautious of their efforts in Qatar and peninsula. Largely the attempts of European Powers were towards establishing trade centers, and the negotiations would start with the Shaikhs. In order to discourage this practice the GOI had at crucial times signed agreements with the rulers of Bahrain and Qatar and controlled their foreign relations with other powers. Britain was not much concerned about Ottoman interests as it considered it incapable of any threat in the region, but it was its perception that the Ottoman sway could be interpreted by the global powers to make inroads in the Gulf. Thus maintaining its independence was of great importance.

The historians and researchers have identified the Gulf as Britain's informal Empire. Though the British rarely left the legacy of any enduring material symbols of their authority it was certainly aggressive about its presence in the Gulf. It struggled to maintain its position in adversity, watched and resisted every, and any, move on the part of any European or regional power and those of the Shaikhs. At some stage it would be interesting to analyse and compare the dimensions of British policy if different in Gulf as compared to anywhere else in Asia considering that it was an Asiatic power. The study shows that there was a constant shift in British India policy only to accommodate the status that could be threatened by the local shaikhs and overtures of the European powers.

The British policy in the region was one of robust engagements with the local rulers. However British power never went unchallenged in either Bahrain or Qatar. Shaikhs of Bahrain or that of Qatar displayed shrewdness. They often limited British interference and at the slightest of the opportunity were ready to retaliate as Shaikh Qassim did in case of the Indian merchants or the Al Khalifas did regarding control of Customs. The Bahrain Custom issue reflects Shaikh Isa's tenacity to ignore the GOIs aims. More than once the

Shaikh promised to hand over customs but feigned helplessness at the last moment, thus desperately holding on to his independence but never was missed an opportunity to seek recognition for his son Hamed as his successor. In interactions with foreign powers he sought British help but fiercely resisted attempts in internal matters. The British claim that they were not keen on internal control stands challenged. At different times of their rule the Shaikhs owed their allegiance to different powers in the region but the fact remained that in the given conditions Shaikh Isa bin Khalifa and Shaikh Qassim bin Thani used every opportunity to retain their hold on their territories and people declaring themselves as independent rulers that made them agree to British supervision. It is obvious that not once but several times they resisted British diplomatic pressures over their territories, but the desire to be recognized as an independent ruler was too strong to be resisted.

British India played a more assertive role policy role in the Gulf. It was a result of the understanding that London had less knowledge about the region. In safeguarding British India's interests, its officials strongly defended their decisions concerning Bahrain and Qatar. The argument can be explained in the following way.

The GOI had to increasingly struggle with its Home Government for the establishment of its authority over the Gulf. The geographical understanding of the region was an exclusive domain of the authorities in the Gulf and in India but not so in London or Constantinople or Tehran. London was often oblivious of the actual territorial limits of Turkey in Gulf, or for London to believe that Turkey enjoyed authority for long which had to be recognized, but not for the GOI. In another such case regarding Qatar, while London believed that the presence of Turkish troops in Bidaa meant Turkish authority firmly established in Qatar, GOI protested and stated the position that it continued to impress upon, and that was about British recognition of Turkish garrison in Bidaa but vehemently declined to recognize its sovereignty over Qatar. GOIs policy was non-recognition of any power in the Gulf as sovereign power, thereby resisting Ottoman and Persian claims over the region; declare non-interference in domestic matters but involve itself in possibility of threat to its position; consider change of ruler but assert itself if required and consider the cause in Gulf as part of fostering an imperial policy since it impacted India.

During the period of study, Britain chose to remain away from direct political responsibility but in order to deal with the political ambitions of the regional and European powers it used the strategy of agreements or treaties with the local Shaikhs. Russian and German ambitions in Gulf brought aggressiveness in GOIs approach. The GOI that financed the administration in Gulf was solely responsible for its status and upkeep. Going by the responses of London Office, the GOI was confirmed that London had less knowledge about the region. For example, in the case of Persian claims over Bahrain, the GOI displayed concern over the mild approach of the FO in dealing with Persia. The case of customs linked to the appointment of Political Agent in Bahrain is a classic example of GOIs efforts at establishing an early protectorate to ensure complete control, and London refraining from doing so for the reasons of raising international suspicion. Bahrain's strategic position had encouraged British interest. The treaties of 1820 and the later treaties of 1861 1880 and 1892 only furthered the British control and brought Bahrain closer to a British Protectorate. The Turkish threat was a catalyst to British efforts. Similarly Turkey treated Britain as a foreign power in the region that it had sway over for long. The Viceroy in India and their governments continued to challenge Turkish rights over Bahrain. Even during Lord Elgin's tenure which is otherwise not considered very eventful in terms of India's foreign policy, denounced the Turkish claims in no uncertain terms. While this remained a consistent policy of the Government of India throughout the period, on the other hand London was more concerned about retaining Turkey's legitimate position as an independent empire primarily in response to European powers.

Encouraging an idea of protectorate was the most suitable action in GOIs policy patterns. This ensured greater and better control but more importantly it earmarked the region formally as a British territory to be acknowledged by other ambitious powers. The issue of the appointment of the British political agent in Bahrain as against the native which was a norm, underlines the GOIs attempts to assert its position and tighten control of Bahrain, but the Home Government at London was indifferent. Three issues were interconnected in this incident- appointment of British Political Agent; Control of Bahrain Customs by the GOI authorities; and the issue of succession in Bahrain. The three could appear to be otherwise

disconnected events but were unified by GOIs policy for enhanced control over the status in Bahrain. Using the issue of succession as a leverage for acquiring the desired hold on Bahrain's customs which could further the cause of the appointment of a British agent, were shrewd and calculated moves clearly aimed at enhancing British leverage over the Khalifas. It was also a way of convincing the Home Government of the need for formal protectorate.

Maintenance of pearl fishing as exclusive privilege or rights for the locals was also another step towards discouraging foreign interests in the Gulf waters. By insisting on maintenance of the age old rights of the people who regularly fished for pearls and were involved in related trade, the GOI time and again denied permission to any European or even British traders to trade for pearl. The Indian merchants were however involved in the trade. However the British derived considerable revenue from the pearl trade.

While London went for status quo and largely adopted a policy of non-interference and avoidance of control and willing to accommodate, GOI strongly defended its stand at on numerous issues at various times. Thus in safeguarding British India's interests, its officials strongly defended their decisions concerning Bahrain and Qatar. In case of Qatar the Government of India was keen on a revised and more elaborate agreement with the Al Thanis. This was certainly in response to the presence of Turkish force in Qatar as also the hesitant response and shrewd methods of Shaikh Qassim towards British unlike his father who rarely challenged them. In one such case of the appointment of Turkish Mudirs at Zobara, Wakra and Odeid in 1902, strong protest emanated from the GOI and immediate action was demanded from Turkey for the withdrawal of the Mudirs.

It was also argued by the GOI that the action suited a purpose that of an agreement with Qatar that could establish a stronger British control. Curzon advocated an aggressive approach and demanded an agreement that could leave the British position unchallenged hitherto in Qatar. The British Ambassador at Constantinople or the authorities at Home Government failed to realize the GOIs concerns. Both O' Connor in Turkish court and Lansdowne in London Parliament reserved their decision for such a course to be taken.

They agreed for a secretive arrangement but certainly not an open one thus clashing with the GOIs stand that demanded exactly the opposite. GOI conveyed it as the defeat of the very purpose for which the agreement was signed. For the GOI, the purpose of entering into an agreement was to make the regional and international powers known about British authority in the region, whereas for London it was inviting unnecessary attention that it could do without. If the GOI wanted to extend and declare its authority in Qatar by raising an issue against the Mudirate at Zohara, Wakra, and Odeid with Turkey, London was particular in restraining it to protest and nothing beyond. Brodrick clearly mentioned that India's stand on Qatar's agreement would be one of local issue that reflected nothing that was internationally relevant.

The withdrawal of Mudirs by the Ottoman government was the end of concerns for London. The issue of Turkish authority in Gulf was dismissed by the Home government, but the GOI treated it as an interval before renewed efforts were made in the direction. The Agreement was finally signed in 1916, but proved to be an example of the GOIs persistent efforts at the establishment of a formal status. It reflects on an almost two decades of persistent efforts on the part of the GOI for a protectorate over Qatar. One wonders then, how the events in the Gulf would have unfolded had GOIs suggestions on a treaty with the al Thanis been accepted and recognized in the very beginning of the twentieth century. Qassim bin Thani had consistently challenged British domination fully aware of the dire consequences. His clash with the Indian traders often led to his payment of compensation to the *banians* mostly under British pressure and coercion. After Curzon's viceroyalty Minto's government was not to be left in a situation to press the matter on the Home government in view of the issue of succession in Qatar. Thus at one stage if the Resident had asked for a treaty with Qatar on other occasion it was he who requested refrain. The fluid but dynamic situation propelled the GOI to gain the most by addressing its demands to the Home Government. Aware of the fact that a treaty agreement with Qatar (while Turkish garrison was remained in Qatar) there may not be a fruitful idea, the GOI diverted its efforts towards the getting garrison removed and first keeping on hold the issue of an agreement with Qatar.

It is important to focus on the efforts of the Indian government during the times of Lord Curzon as the policies of the GOI became more aggressive in their arguments with London. Curzon's trip to the Gulf in 1903 was the first of its kinds. Curzon pushed himself to view seriously with India's frontier issues, British Empire's concerns in light of Russian, German and French interests became a hall mark of Curzon's Viceroyalty. The trip to the Gulf and address to the Shaikhs of Gulf including a meeting with the Al Khalifas on issue of customs and discussion on treaty with the Al Thanis were important on the agenda. Although issues could materialize but it reflected Curzon's aggressive efforts in asserting GOIs and subsequently British position in the Gulf. Rarely had any Viceroy taken such a stand.

This however does not mean that there were no engaging efforts on the part of the earlier Viceroys. In fact the study reflects that GOIs efforts at increased control of Gulf were consistent throughout the period. The threat of foreign intervention in Gulf and the resulting effects on India's security was for anyone in GOI to realize. Curzon's approach and seriousness added force to the arguments of the GOI.

GOI asserted itself and asked for representations to be made. GOIs policy was non-recognition of any power in the Gulf as sovereign power; declare non-interference but involve if challenged; consider change of guard but assert itself if required and consider the cause in Gulf as part of fostering an imperial policy since it affected India. Apart from the geographical distance though which was reduced due to increased communication lines the GOI fell back on its geographical proximity; the experience of having dealt with the region for long; having extensive contacts due to the trade as many Indians who were seen as agents or spies were involved and much of Gulf imports went from India but most importantly the Gulf was an extended frontier of the British Raj in India.

Its first line of information/ contact was of course the Resident who received and implemented orders to and from the GOI which did not necessarily accept their suggestions all the times on all the issues. Throughout the period under study GOI treaded deftly on the path of its demands from the region, implementation of its policy in Gulf and reaction of

the Home Government. It is almost as if it developed its own art/ style of convincing the Home Government about its final decisions and acquiring permissions it desired. With the coming of Curzon the tone of demands became more succinct and aggressive. The all imperial belief of Britain as the civilized power became the undercurrent of arguments put forth in reason for security and stability in Gulf.

GOIs demand and appeal to the Home Government for a more aggressive policy was often coupled with a reminder of a century and a half British role in the Gulf and its position as protector, controller and facilitator of all the safety and trade in the region. Thus highlighting the significant role of British officials, as harbinger of good life for the people in the region. Neglect of this at a time when Britain was so close to establishing its complete authority over the region, would mean waste of those efforts.

The GOI's policy paradigm was not a stagnated structure. The British India's policy interests in the Gulf cannot be viewed as pre-decided state of affairs. Of course India was a significant reason for British interests in the Gulf but protection of its worldwide empire was a factor that determined British policies and its relations/ dimensions with others in Europe.

During the period under study, the Government of India and its Foreign Department was more concerned with India's security and its diplomatic relations with its neighbouring territories as against London whose engagement was with European concerns albeit without diminishing the importance of India but often choosing to maintain the status quo and openly challenging it. The British diplomacy in London aimed at avoiding a confrontation as far as possible. The study explains that the role of London was often confined to either agreement or disagreement over an issue but the active policy was determined by the GOI, which was precisely its responsibility too.

The study amply explains that the British Indian government that ruled India and owed responsibility towards the administration of the Gulf derived its position of authority from the fact that it was in charge of British Empire's 'jewel in the crown' the protection, stability and security of which was its penultimate responsibility. This remained its

important argument even at the cost of its clash with the Home government in London over the issue of Gulf. Its policy decisions were thus influenced by this concern. One can then deduce that within the mutual framework of imperial policies, regional governments in charge can often play a role that has a significant impact over the way a region and its importance can be perceived. The concerns of London were different than those of the GOI, and it was the GOI's pursuance that altered the situation, events and history of the Gulf. The parameters of diplomacy are rarely constant. The study explains that the shifting contours of imperial policies in the Gulf were actually a consequence of the GOIs acuity of its position in the Gulf.

Summing up

The objective of the study was to understand the British interests in the Gulf as they saw it from India; to examine key differences over policies between the authorities in London and India particularly concerning Bahrain and Qatar; and to look into the strategies adopted by the GOI to safeguard its interests. India's security remained a dominant concern for the GOI apart from the maintenance of safe communication lines, and the Home Government concurred. But where the authorities in London treated this as a matter for regional consideration, the GOI looked at incidents of foreign intervention in Gulf as immediate threat. This led to differences on policy issues. While accepting the overall policy of protection and sustenance of the Empire, the GOI differed with London on its soft approach towards the European powers as also the Ottoman and Persian Empires concerning Gulf. Ensuring safety of India, managing internal problems of the ruling families claiming it as a policy of non-interference, and yet dictating terms for internal administration were some strategies of the GOI. Agreement and treaties with the Shaikhs at crucial junctures formed a part of the strategy. This kept the foreign affairs of the states in British hands.

The Government of India's role in the Gulf aimed at increased interaction between Gulf and India as the Gulf was GOIs primary concern. GOI understood its geographical proximity to the Gulf and owed responsibility of securing the prized possession of India for the British Empire. Its attempt at responding to Gulf matters became more aggressive and

demanding in the wake of growing foreign interests. Ottoman and Persian presence and efforts were also a catalyst, but GOI feared European efforts in the Gulf may realize them through regional powers. The British India's policy towards the Gulf and particularly towards Bahrain and Qatar was one of establishment of complete control and its proclamation. Its resistance was towards outside intervention and its strategy was to allocate and deploy resources from India that could maintain its interaction with the region for long. If the entry of the Europeans in the fifteenth century, on one hand had eroded the opportunities for locals to trade in Gulf, GOIs domination contributed to encouragement to merchants from India who claimed continuous dealings with those in Gulf and vice-versa. Bombay and Surat enjoyed special position in the Gulf trade. London's lack of understanding often created a hindrance to GOIs policy implementation, but as is reflected, GOI objected, retaliated and pursued its efforts at times with force leading towards a relatively stable British position in the Gulf.

It is often argued that the GOI was a subordinate government to London hence its policies deserve only a conditional importance since the final nod came from the Home government. The study explains that the role of London was often confined to either agreement or disagreement over an issue but the actual policy was determined by the GOI, which was precisely its responsibility too. Yet the GOI was more than a mere receiver of orders from London and more often framed its own policy decisions and defended them strongly for obvious reason. It was GOIs firm belief that London understood less of Gulf matters than it did. A fact that did not help the GOIs security concerns for India. After all it was the GOI that enjoyed proximity with the region, regulated the trade of its Indian and British subjects, in the Gulf, the Persian, Arab and other subjects, was responsible for people from India on pilgrimage to the Gulf cities and those from Gulf who travelled for educational, trade and other varied reasons to India, conducted political affairs with the different dynasties in the Gulf, framed and entered into treaties with the rulers and regularly and rigorously monitored the affairs of the region. The GOI was more than just an administrative arm of London in the Gulf. The framing and implementation of the GOIs policies affected the region immensely.

The study thus validates the hypothesis that the British India took a more assertive policy role in the Gulf as it believed that London had less knowledge of the region and in safeguarding the interests of British India, the officials defended their decisions concerning Bahrain and Qatar. The policy of the GOI *de facto* as also *de jure* altered the boundaries and dimensions of power in the Gulf in a profound, fundamental way.

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