SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RED SEA AND THE PERSIAN GULF

A: GEOPOLITICAL AND COMMERCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The geopolitical significance of the Middle East may be gauged from the fact that it was situated at the cross-roads of three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. The Europeans called the region ‘Near East’ whereas geographically it has been termed as Middle East. The Red Sea and the Persian Gulf which were an inalienable part of the Middle East are of immense importance. The Middle East comprised many states. Geographically, Saudi Arabia had privileged position in the whole of Middle East. It was this state with which Britain was mainly concerned. The region predominantly was inhabited by the Muslims.\(^1\)

During seventeenth century, the European political influence in the Middle East was not very effective. Undoubtedly, the Ottoman and Persian Empires were quite strong despite the technological superiority of Western Europe over the East. The European traders did not enjoy any dominance and to a large extent depended on the oriental rulers and officials.\(^2\) In the 18th century, with the weakening of the Mughal Empire in India, British came to subjugate major part of India. British foreign policy in the 18th century, therefore, concentrated on the defence of their Indian empire. It was to this end that the “whole British military and naval machine was heavily geared”. In the words of Curzon, “as long as we rule India, we are the greatest power in the world.”\(^3\)

\(^3\) Stuart A. Cohen, British Policy in Mesopotamia 1903-1914, London, 1976, p. 3. By the early eighteenth century as the major port city prospered many older commercial centres began to decline in importance. Damascus may be cited as one of the examples. Merchants wishing to use letters of credit obtained them from Beruit. Similarly the European merchants and local
As the conditions in the oriental empires [Ottoman, Safavid & Mughal] became anarchic, local rulers looked for more assistance from European powers in the form of financial, military and naval assistance mainly because of their technological advancement. This situation provided opportunity to the Europeans to enter the local political fiasco which led to European rivalries originating in Europe and extending to the East.4

The European influence in the Middle Eastern countries was felt in three main spheres. The first and the foremost was to have greater share of Ottoman economy and its integration in the capitalist world system. Secondly, the main motive of European powers was to have contact with countries of Middle East in order to assert political influence and thirdly there was a strong desire on the part of these European powers to dominate the regions anyhow possible as separate entity by each of them.5

The geographical location of the Gulf had significant position in commercial world from time immemorial and during 18th century the region had become strategically more significant as a line of communication between Asia and Europe.6

The British had commercial interest in the Persian Gulf. Since 1763 they had become politically active and also enjoyed supremacy in that region. The British also sought market in Iran for their goods in exchange for raw silk.7

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4 A Short History of Middle East, op. cit., p. 71.
6 Ajay N. Jha, India’s Economic Diplomacy in the Gulf, New Delhi, 1908, p. 22.
Strategically, Persian Gulf region had drawn the attention of foreign traders particularly owing to its position as channel of trade. At least three and a half centuries earlier Albuquerque, the Portuguese Viceroy observed that the hold over the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea was crucial for any maritime power if it were to have monopoly over trade and control over the Indian Ocean. He also keenly observed that in order to have effective control over these significant possessions the control over the routes to the East through Egypt and Mesopotamia was essentially important.\(^8\)

G.N. Curzon who visited the Gulf region in 1890-91 says in his account of *Persia and the Persian Question*, that Persian Gulf was a direct channel of trade and communication between India and Northern Persia.\(^9\)

British interest in the Persian gulf was on the rise by the end of the 19\(^{th}\) century. On the other hand, Russia adopted aggressive posture in Iran. She planned to reach India through Iran. So India’s security was also included in Britain’s interest.\(^10\)

The significance of British policy towards the Red Sea and Persian Gulf by and large can be understood in terms of the location of the regions of Arabian Peninsula and the landmasses in their proximity with those regions. The water passages, their ports and their adjacent territories and close relations with their rulers were of vital importance.
for the British if their possessions in Africa and the territories of the Indian Ocean shores had to be safeguarded.

Geographically the boundaries of Arabian Peninsula may be determined by the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman in the East and on the southern side by the Indian Ocean. The western boundary is surrounded by the eastern Mediterranean coast and the Red Sea, while on the North-West it is Jordan, Egypt, Israel and Iraq. As far as the Persian Gulf is concerned, its coast line is very vast. There are eight countries which are situated on the coast line. These countries are Iran in the East of Iraq, Kuwait in the northwest, Al-Hassa, a province of Saudi Arabia towards its west, the peninsula of Qatar and Federation of United Arab Emirates in the South. Bahrain is an island in the Persian Gulf.

It has been held that the entire Middle Eastern region was of strategic importance for Britain. The Eastern Mediterranean coast was the main route of access to this region because the main Arab lands were adjoined to the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, the British wanted to keep secure the Red Sea and Persian Gulf channels for their interest in India.

Abdel Farid Majid has highlighted the importance of the Red Sea. He says it was the connecting waterways between the open seas of the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. In the north, it was linked with the Isthmus of Suez and after the construction of the Suez Canal (completed

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12 India’s Economic Diplomacy in the Gulf, op. cit., 1988, p. 22.

Further, South Yemen was connected with the strait of Babel-Mandab and the Red Sea which opened into the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. The strait was divided by Perim (Moria) Island, situated at the entrance of the Gulf of Aden. The north of the Red Sea ended into two inlets – one of them the Gulf of Aqaba in the east, another was Gulf of Suez in the west. As a result, Suez Canal had become more important as an international trade route after its opening in 1869.\footnote{Hassan el – Bazzaz, ‘The Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf: Strategic and Economic Links’, (2) in Abdel Farid Majid, ed., The Red Sea –Prospects for Stability, op. cit., pp. 95-96.} Al Qasimi mentions that the merchants carried dates, pearls, piece goods and spices to the Red Sea which were exchanged at Mocha and Hoeida for Coffee, drugs and Abyssinian Slaves in 1790.\footnote{Sultan Mohammad Al Qasimi, The Myth of Arab Piracy in the Gulf, London, 1986, p. 14.} Arabian Peninsula with two of its channels has been of special significance, particularly for the British communication between Europe and its Empire in the East.\footnote{H.L. Hoskins, The Middle East, p. 89.}

The territorial gains of Russia and the political influence of France in Persia and North Africa forced Britain to adopt a tactful policy to develop a more effective line of communication in the Red Sea as well as Persian Gulf which could be controlled, even during European conflicts.\footnote{Britain and Saudi Arabia, 1925-1939. The Imperial Oasis, op. cit., p. 2.} During nineteenth century, France got most of the Africa by agreement; she also took hold of Ottoman territories of Morocco and Tripolitania. The Suez area was subjugated by the British and after the completion of Suez Canal, it gradually came under her total control.\footnote{Atlas of Islamic World History, p. 30, (more details are not available).}
Russia had tried to establish her monopoly over Middle East, especially over the Ottoman territories. Britain therefore, reacted in 1878, by making Sultan Abdul Hamid II of Turkey to agree to put Cyprus under her control which still was a part of the Ottoman Empire.\(^\text{20}\)

For Britain, Southern area of the Dead Sea was of vital importance as the region was situated astride the two main oceanic routes, the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean. It was perhaps the reason why British strongly opposed to Napoleon’s advance (1798) in Southern area of the Dead Sea, and resisted sternly French attempts to strengthen her position in that region. Britain occupied Perim which was situated near the strait of Bab-al-Mandab. Aden was the immediate location, which the British would like to use as a military base.\(^\text{21}\)

Modern historians writing on Middle-East are of the view that the region of Persian Gulf and Red Sea was of great strategic importance for Britain and therefore a control over the area could be of vital importance. It is interesting to note that when Grant got the information that a French agent was likely to approach the Sultan of Aden, he made suggestions to the British government for a hasty measure for the control over the southern region of the Red Sea. Besides, he also expressed apprehension of Mohammad Ali’s taking over of the whole of Arabia once he crossed over the Bab-al Mandab. In case Mohammad Ali successfully conquered the southern Arabian region, it would have been difficult for Britain to check the indulgence of other European powers as well.

\(^{21}\) *A Short History of the Middle East, op. cit.*, p. 74.
Definitely, this warning was an alarming signal for Britain, particularly in the circumstances shaped by the weakening of the Ottoman Empire. Britain thus began to prepare herself to resist the encroachment by any European powers in the South of Suez, where state after state had begun to exercise increasing political independence.22

By the turn of the 19th century the outlook of Arabian Peninsula was rapidly changing into modern pattern. Yemen by now was almost independent of Turkish rule. Aden too alienated itself as a tributary state from the Turkish rule but unfortunately it was lost to Britain when it came under the imperial network in 1839, and became a British protectorate.23

Actually Britain wanted to maintain her control over the dominions of coastal Yemen, especially Aden, because Britain’s main aim was to defend the communication line of her Indian colony. For British, it was to be considered how close Mocha was to Aden and how important was Aden to Bombay. Aden was important for Britain as coal depot and supply station for her steamers which should be able to sail from Bombay to Suez. There was no other place where steamers could anchor safely and good water be obtained. Britain’s aim was not to defend Aden, but to check the ambition of powerful neighbouring Arab chieftains like Tajjura, Zeyla, Lahej, Shoa and the Sherif of Mocha.24

It was noticeable that France control over Abyssinia, her possession in Senegal in West Africa and her support to Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt might help them in their object of undermining

23  Middle East And North Africa 2000, op. cit., p. 110.
English influence on the Red Sea and Indian Ocean and to become dangerous even to India. So the Britain was fully aware about the activities of the France as well as Yemen’s tribe.\textsuperscript{25}

In the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, there were two competing powers in Persia namely Britain and Russia, whereas Germany played an important role and influenced the politics and economy of Persia with the support of Democratic Persian Party.\textsuperscript{26}

In 1907 Germany also was exporting her goods to Persia. Gradually its influence increased in that region which was dangerous for Britain.\textsuperscript{27} Germany also had begun the construction of Baghdad railway in 1903.\textsuperscript{28}

In 1912 Germany Constantinople-Konia railway line posed a serious threat to the British navigation. British did not want any European power to weaken their commercial monopoly over Mesopotamia (Iraq). Therefore it was essential for Britain that she should get navigation rights to safeguard its commercial monopoly over Persia.\textsuperscript{29}

In Persian Gulf, besides Bushire and Bandar Abbas, Basra served as a major port for commercial activities.\textsuperscript{30} The Shatt-al-Arab was connected with Basra by water through the Persian Gulf from one side. On the other side it was linked with Baghdad by Tigris River. Basra and

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 165.
\textsuperscript{27} *British Policy in Mesopotamia 1903-1914*, op. cit., p. 54.
\textsuperscript{29} *British Policy in Mesopotamia 1903-1914*, op. cit., p. 259.
Bushire by 1783 were the Chief centres of navigational activities.\textsuperscript{31} Commodities reached these ports overland from Europe and Asia Minor. Goods were distributed from Basra as well as Bushire. In fact, the latter was basically commercial port of Persia. Basra served as an important port city for Turkish Iraq. Bahrain served as an island port for Al Hasa and central Arabia through Zubarah and Katif routes.\textsuperscript{32}

The British developed transport and trade at the Basra port in 1890. Basra was famous for many goods like dates, cotton, silk, opium and major crops like tea and tobacco which were exported to India and Middle East. Abdul Qadir and Briton Cooper mention many commodities which were carried by camel from Basra to Baghdad.\textsuperscript{33} Abdul Qadir also mentions various names of Bazaars of Basra such as Suq-al Mazarah where brocade cloth and other requirements of soldiers were available. Suq-al Qazzazah was a bazaar famous for silk and material for embroidery.\textsuperscript{34}

Through Bushire and Basra Persia exported wheat, tobacco and Persian carpets. Wellsted informs (1831) that merchants brought dates from Bahrain and Basra which they sold at Hejaz.\textsuperscript{35}

Even though the East India Company was not on good terms with the Turkish Government, yet the British policy was directed in having hold over Basra\textsuperscript{36} in some way or the other because Basra was a

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\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., Vol. I, Part A, p. 166.
\textsuperscript{33} Waqai-i-Manazil-i-Rum, ed. Mohibbul Hassan, op. cit., p. 54.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 54-55.
\textsuperscript{36} According to Mohibbul Hassan, the city of Basra had four gates and each gate had a guard. Besides, there was small gate called Bab-al-Rabat. Baghdadi gate was fortified by walls and protected by a number of batteries. The English East India Company had constructed its factory towards the Bab-al-Rabat. There were some houses and mosques, out side the city of Basra in the west and south west. There was a large canal which made supply of water to smaller canal
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strategic port and from there it would have been easier for the British to check the intrigue of any European power having malicious intention against the British possession on the Indian Ocean shores.\textsuperscript{37} Originally, however, it was a Turkish port where the Government had its military garrison and naval force in order to protect from encroachment of any foreign powers into Turkish Iraq through the Persian Gulf.\textsuperscript{38}

The region of Basra was prosperous and its land was fertile. The author of \textit{Waqa-i-Manazil-i-Rum} observed that many kinds of fruits and cereals were grown there.\textsuperscript{39} Basra, where the ships anchored, was fortified, so the region was by all means important for the European nations, particularly the British. It was because of Basra’s business and administrative establishment exclusively that trading companies like the EIC and the French had their factories there. It was on account of its location and lucrative business that rich merchants like Saleh Chelabi from Surat, Maugi Seth, the Imam of Muscat, Sheikh Ahmad and other brokers and merchants had established their business at Basra. There was a maritime customs house. It was always protected by gunboat.\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{itemize}
\item Edward Ives, \textit{Voyage from England to India in the year 1754 and a Historical Narrative of the operations of the Squadron and army in India, under the command of vice admiral Watson and colonel clive, in the years 1755, 1756, 1757, including a correspondence between the admiral and nabob Serajah Dowlah, Interspersed with some interesting passages relating to the manners, customs and of several nations in the Indostan. Also a journey from Persia to England by an unusual Route}, London, 1773, p. 231. These houses in Basra were mostly made of bricks in 1758; the city was besieged by Kuli Khan. Streets of Basra were very narrow and filthy. Edward Ives further informs us that trade was carried through navigable rivers. Its significance can be gauged from the fact that the port of Basra was linked with Baghdad, the Capital of Turkish Iraq, by the twin rivers of Euphrates and Tigris, \textit{Ibid.}, p. 231.
\item Waqa-i-Manazil-i-Rum, \textit{op. cit.} p. 51. There were many caravan sarais in the city of Basra. Sarais served as trading centers, these were large and well covered, at the top of the city consisted of many shops and varieties of merchandises was brought for sale, there was a market for mutton. The city was pleasant to look at and in its vicinity the landscape was very beautiful. See also Edward Ives, \textit{Voyage from England to India in the year 1754 and a Historical Narrative of the operations of the Squadron and army in India...}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 232.
\item Waqa-i-Manazil-i-Rum, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 44.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 51-52.
\end{itemize}
British residency had been established at Basra in 1764. Due to the influence of Karim Khan, the Shah of Persia, the British had lost their factory in 1769. But it was re-established in 1775. Whereas, they lost their entire Basra trade during 1773-79 on account of out-break of plague there, and the occupation of the town by the Persians. During this period, the British residency was shifted to Kuwait where Shaikh Abdullah bin Sabah was the ruler of Kuwait at that time.41

The Basra port was only comparable to another major port of the Persian Gulf called Muscat. Both the principal ports were of international significance and bulk of the goods entering or leaving the Persian Gulf passed through the port of Basra and Muscat. More than half the Indian import at Bushire and Basra and bulk of those in Bahrain was received through Muscat. In the same way the goods that arrived overland from Europe, Asia Minor etc., were distributed from Basra to other centres of trade. Bushire served as the only port of importance for Iran whereas Basra served for Turkish Iraq. Bahrain served Hassa and central Arabia through Zubarah and Katif. Muscat exclusively served as port of trans-shipment. Bushire and Kuwait were used as bases through which smuggled goods entered into Turkish Iraq and from there to Europe.

The British established their headquarters at Bushire in 1778. It was a principal open port of Persia. But it was more significant for an open roadstead. Cargo ships anchored at the Bushire port.42

There were two main routes in Bushire. One of them connected Firuzabad and Shiraz in the east and other route linked with Lingeh in

41 The Myth of Arab Piracy in the Gulf, op. cit., p. 25.
South-east of Bushire. From here a local road bifurcated and went forth to the north-east of Bushire. In 1864 Indo European Telegraph Company had established cable station at Bushire which further enhanced its importance. So the Bushire had emerged as the centre of foreign trade of Persia and became important for Britain and other European powers.\textsuperscript{43}

The late 18\textsuperscript{th} century was a period of prosperity at Baghdad. This may be gauged from the position of individual’s wealth and the luxurious opulence. S.B. Miles, enumeration of the prosperous condition enjoyed by the people of Baghdad may be cited as an example.\textsuperscript{44}

Baghdad was a centre of commercial transport, especially for Persia. It was the principal centre for the distribution of goods. Since 1862 Baghdad was connected with Bushire by navigation route.\textsuperscript{45} As Germany had established her supremacy in railways in 1912 due to construction of Baghdad railways, it was the best economic alternative that British should concentrate on the control of Tigris navigation. Some heavy goods also were carried from Baghdad to Mosul and Basra.\textsuperscript{46}

The idea gets further confirmed that by the turn of 20\textsuperscript{th} century (1930 AD), “The government placed unconditional demand for British control over a line from Baghdad to the Gulf” and emphatically asserted forbidding construction of any railway south of Basra without British consent.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pp. 503-504.
\textsuperscript{44} S.B. Miles, \textit{The Countries And Tribes of the Persian Gulf}, London, 1966, p. 367.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{British Policy in Mesopotamia 1903-1914}, op. cit., pp. 257-258.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p. 54.
Mosul situated in the north of Baghdad was the largest city in northern Iraq and an important trade and communication centre in 1890. It was connected with Baghdad by sea and land route. On the other side of it, there was the Levant route which was an important commercial route.\(^{48}\)

From Baghdad, Kashan, Isfahan silk was exported to Europe, especially to Russia. And silk was also exported from Baghdad to Bombay. Curzon mentions that in 1890 the value of exported silk to Bombay exceeded 30,000 lbs.\(^{49}\)

During this time, Ahwaz (31°, 17° N and 48°, 43°E) attained its importance as bridge town and river port of Karun river and was used as a means of communication.\(^{50}\)

Kermanshah, was a highway and connected Baghdad with Tehran, the capital of Persia. But it was strategically placed to circulate goods to other ports, from where British merchants carried out their trade to India as well as England through the Persian Gulf and Red sea channels.\(^{51}\)

Southern Tehran was connected with Isfahan, whereas in the north-east of Tehran, was the city of Kazvin. Tehran through Tabriz and Kermanshah, also had link with Baghdad. Therefore, these facilities of communication encouraged trade of Tehran. But over all communication was still very slow. Rapid communication by telegraph, however, couldn’t be available before 1914. Telephone services were

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connected with oil fields at Masjid-i-Sulaiman with Shustar, Khurramshahar.  

Tabriz, in the north west of Persia was a largest trading centre of Persia around 1830. There were two commercial routes; one route went to Kazvin and the other to Tehran. England exercised control over both the commercial routes. The base of that commercial line was the Turkish port of Trebizond, on the Black Sea. The other route was through Russian territory which started from Tiflis, the capital of the Caucasus. In 1830, Abbas Mirza (son of Fath Ali Shah, the Persian ruler) restricted English shipping to Trebizond (a Turkish port).

The Mesopotamian region, as it is claimed by the British, received facilities of irrigation and petroleum concession. But the fact is that Britain expanded its commercial interest in this region by forcing some British firm to undertake construction of railways.

So this fact cannot be denied that the British government was quite alert and between June 1907 and April 1910, the British government served carefully and examined an effect which three other railway routes could have on Britain’s design in Mesopotamia. The first of these, the most important was an original German plan to connect Baghdad and Basra by the Euphrates valley. The second between Mohammareh and Khurramabad in western Persia; the third known as the “wall cocks scheme” was railway connection between Baghdad and the Mediterranean through Syria. But in 1910 all the three routes were rejected in favour of link between Baghdad and Basra along the Tigris.

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54 British Policy in Mesopotamia 1903-1914, op. cit, p. 251.
55 Ibid., p. 102.
Oman may be described as a narrow strip of land of irregular width. It is bounded in east by the Indian Ocean, on the west by extensive desert and extends to Ras-al-Mussendam in the north.\footnote{Travels in Arabia, op. cit., Vol. I., p. 271. For detail, about location of Muscat and description customs house of (Fisdah) Dockyard sine gates during last quarter of 18th century, see Waqa-i-Manazil-i-Rum, op. cit., p. 27.}

By the turn of 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Oman’s political and economic power was at its height. When Wellsted visited the country in 1834, it enjoyed stability and prosperity on account of its thriving trade through her ports of Sohar, Matrah, Sur and Muscat. Products were brought from the interior and the population of hinterland participated in supplying agricultural products to these town markets. Such products mainly comprised dates, lemons, vegetables etc. Prosperous trade attracted Omani for migration to East Africa and Zanzibar, which further led them to participate in trade activity. Their standard of living raised and the Omani restored to introduce innovation.\footnote{Travels in Arabia, op. cit., Vol. I, Introduction, p. xv.}

Since long Britain had been politically active to build her influence in Oman. Obviously the British did not like any hostile power to have strong position in Oman, because it would be direct threat to the routes to India. It is well remarked by Briton Cooper Busch that “conversely the Persian Gulf is the gateway to Mesopotamia and Persia by sea and Oman is the gateway to Gulf itself.” Between Ras Musadam and Bandar Abbas in Persia there is a stretch of water of 50 miles width. This had two very fine natural harbours. These were considered sufficient to provide shelter to entire British fleet.\footnote{B.K. Narayan, Oman and Gulf Security, New Delhi, 1979, p. 72.}

The concentration of British policy by 1800 AD was mainly on Muscat which came to occupy a significant position in British policy.\footnote{Briton Cooper Busch, Britain and the Persian Gulf 1894-1914, London, 1967, p. 11.}
viz-a viz the gulf comparable to the one held in Afghanistan in respect of Central Asia.\textsuperscript{60}

In view of the growing influence of Wahabis who had intimate connection with the Johasmi pirates in Muscat by 1800 AD, Wellsted advised Britain to mobilize British naval force in areas which were their main centres of concentration.\textsuperscript{61}

In the nineteenth century the position of the Persian Gulf states was that they could not stay alone in matter of defence. They had economic difficulties and were not well off as suggested by Anthony H. Cordesman. The regional cooperation was essentially important particularly for their defence. So they would take the help of the west like Britain and France.

If long term security and stability had to be maintained in the Gulf States, the only alternative as suggested by Anthony H. Cordesman was to find out means of cooperation on national and regional boundaries. The author therefore, suggests that the moderate states of Persian Gulf should build up allies with such power like Britain and France.\textsuperscript{62}

It was only possible for Britain after the disappearance of Napoleon and his design over India. But the rivalry of Britain did not totally end at this juncture. She had to face another rival in her attempt to dominate the Asian politics. That rival which Britain had to face was Russia. However, Britain after rigorous attempts against Russia got

\textsuperscript{60} India and the Persian Gulf Region 1858-1907, op. cit., p., 18.
\textsuperscript{61} Travels in Arabia, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 403-404.
success in increasing her influence in Southern Iran as British sphere of influence.63

For Britain, Red Sea was significant for both purposes i.e. commerce and communication. British wanted to develop a trade route through Egypt and Red Sea, and also planned to utilize the Red Sea for communication. Hastings wrote to the Home authorities that he considered Red Sea a matter of “Great Public Utility”. He dispatched agents to Cairo in 1775 to arrange, if possible, for privileges of trade from India and for a regular system of communication through Egypt.64

The importance of Red Sea grew up even more after the coming of steam ship. It was the channel through which coal was imported for steam vessels from England to Bombay which was found to be cheaper than Indian coal.65

Besides Persian Gulf, Red Sea was also important for commerce and communication. Its ports like Aden, Jiddah and Mocha were important centres for international trade. They were also crucial for communication between Eastern world and Europe.

Aden with its excellent harbour was visited by several vessels particularly from Sumali port of Berbera and Bandar Kassim. The vessels from Berbera brought livestock, building material and other essential commodities for consumption.66 Aden was a peninsula which was near the entrance to the Red Sea, and about 100 miles east of the

64 H.L. Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, London, 1928, pp. 6,8,54.
65 6 December 1831 – 16 August 1832 (Colonies East India Session), Appendix to the report from the select committee on the affairs of the East India Company with an index (Finance and Accounts) part II commercial, *British Parliamentary Papers* (1 public), Shannon, Ireland, 1970, Irish University Press, Vol. 8, p. 495.
Aden had great importance for Britain, and therefore a control over the area could be of vital importance to her. Aden was occupied by British on the 16th January 1839 (for details see chapter III). Further inland and along the coast of Red Sea, all Arabian chiefs were under the political control of the British.68

Just a little away from the coast of Aden, there was another commercially important state known as Hadramaut. Its export and import were carried through its port of Shihr. This port also was important for Britain because of its linkage between Oman border and that of Yemen. Hadramaut extended about 20 miles of either side.69

From its admirable commercial and military position, Aden was the earlier to become the chief centre of trade between Europe and Asia. Its importance as a port of call and a coaling station had grown immensely since the opening of the Suez Canal. Aden also conducted a considerable trade with the interior of Arabia and the east coast of Africa.70

According to Valentia in 1804, Mocha was the only good sea port in Arabian Peninsula and also had great advantage over every harbour like Aden. Mocha was famous for coffee in whole Arabia.71 Jiddah is a city in the Western coast of Saudi Arabia, serving as the port to Mecca. It is situated on the Red Sea at 21° 28’N lat. and 39° 10’ E long; and is 45 mile west of Mecca and about 750 miles south east of Suez in Egypt.72

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68 Ibid.
70 Ibid., p. 26.
Jiddah was only a small harbour around 1770s. But it was protected by offshore coral reefs. It owed its existence and importance because of the holy city of Mecca. After the rise of Islam, Jiddah with Mocha emerged as the important seaports for hajj traffic and trade from India and near east. It became an important trading centre when goods from India were unloaded along this coast and transshipped in Egyptian boats which carried them to Suez and the western Mediterranean.

J.R. Wellsted mentions that British vessels were engaged in commercial activities between India and Persian Gulf and Red Sea ports, particularly Jiddah. Politically, for much of its history, Jiddah was controlled by the Turks. When Ottoman Empire started disintegrating, Mamluk ruler of Egypt took Mecca in 1769 and declared himself as Sultan. Whereas the Arabs had driven the Egyptian garrison out of Mecca and Jiddah, and had restored Ottoman authority. The political upheavals affected the trade which was beginning to reach Egypt by way of the Red Sea. British succeeded (1775) in securing an agreement with Egyptian ruler, Mohammad Abu Dhab, through which English goods should pay 8% customs duties instead of 14%, usually levied at Jiddah. The English previously carried on a considerable trade with Jiddah but it gradually declined. As a result Jiddah had gone under the influence of Sharif of Mecca. The British obtained permission from the Egyptian government to send their Indian

73 Ibid., p. 415.
77 Collier’s Encyclopedia, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 415
78 Yahya Armajani, Middle East: Past and Present, New Jersey, 1970, p. 156.
79 Hoskins, British Routes in India, op.cit., p. 6.
80 Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, The Red Sea, Abyssinia And Egypt in the Years 1802-1806..., op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 331-332.
manufactures to Suez. Hitherto this has not been permitted in consequence of the influence of the Sharif of Mecca at Constantinople, who obtained an order that all vessels bound for Egypt should stop at Jiddah and pay duty there.\textsuperscript{81}

The coffee trade, which next to that of grain was formerly one of the principal branches of commerce between Jiddah and Egypt, had now much declined in 1830s, because of the importation of American and west Indian produce into the ports of the Mediterranean, Asia Minor, Europe, Turkey and Syria by English.\textsuperscript{82}

In the first half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, introduction of steam ship and opening of Suez Canal (1869) ended this commerce but increased the religious tourist or pilgrim trade which was the economic life of Jiddah.

Commercial importance of Jiddah declined, but strategically it remained important. For steam vessels, British received fresh supply of coals from Jiddah.\textsuperscript{83}

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\item \textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{82} \textit{Travels in Arabia, op. cit.}, p. 277.
\item \textsuperscript{83} \textit{British Parliamentary Papers, op. cit.}, Vol. 8, p. 740.
\end{itemize}
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B: BRITISH CONFLICT WITH WAHHABIS OF RED SEA

Saudi state arose in the eighteenth century as a result of the rising power of Wahhabism. After his banishment from Uyanya in 1745, Abd al-Wahab shifted his activities of preaching Islam to Diriyah, the capital of Saudi principality. He remained there till 1765. The ‘Wahab-Saud partnership’ marked a new period in the establishment of a big state which had perhaps not been conceived even by its leaders.

It was during the second half of Mohammad Ibn Saud’s reign (1726-1765), that most part of Nejd was unified under wahhabi’s rule. Abd al-Aziz succeeded Mohammad Ibn Saud and had a long reign from 1765-1803, Wahhabism, on the other hand, succeeded in extending its control over most of central Arabia. In 1795 Hasa was conquered. As early as 1784 the Wahhabi menace began to alarm the Ottoman authorities in Iraq. Burckhardt mentions that they even aimed at extending their dominions beyond the limits of Arabia. So they targeted Iraq, Mesopotamia and Syria.

Sherif of Mecca (Sherif Ghalib) engaged in open hostility with Wahhabis in 1792-93. It was not until the first decade of the nineteenth century that the Wahhabis extended their control over the Hejaz. In

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88 Ibid.
90 The Sherif of Mecca or Sherif of Hejaz was the title of the former governors of Hejaz and a traditional steward of the holy cities of Mecca and Madina. The term Sherif means noble in Arabic.
91 Ibid., Vol. 44, p. 321.
92 *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia, op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.
1801 the *Wahhabis* sacked the Shi’ite holy city of Karbala in lower Iraq. In 1802 they conquered Taif to the east of Mecca. In 1803 Mecca too fell. Burckhardt mentions that the capture of Mecca (in 1803) was a great success for *Wahhabis* in Hejaz. Abd al-Aziz was stabbed to death by Shi’ites in revenge following the death of their family in Karbala in 1801. After his death his successor Abdullah Ibn Saud (1803-1814) occupied Madina in 1804.

In 1806, Sherif Ghalib was made to accept Amir Saud as his Suzerain. By this fresh agreement, Saud replaced the Ottomans as the sovereign power in the whole of the Hejaz. By 1811 Saudi *Wahhabi* tentacles extended as far in the north of Aleppo as near the present Turkish border, and over the Hejaz, southern Mesopotamia, eastern Arabia and as far as Muscat.

Ottoman government was not in a position to destroy the *Wahhabi* movement in the area of holy cities (Mecca and Madina). So Sultan Mohamud II (1808-1839) urged Mohammad Ali Pasha, the viceroy of Egypt, to act as his deputy and drive away the invaders out of the holy cities. Mohammad Ali sent his son Ibrahim in August 1816 to Hejaz. Ibrahim Pasha forced Abdullah Ibn Saud (in 1818) to surrender his capital Diriyyah. This surrender marked the first major set back to a hitherto to expanding power of the *Wahhabis*. On the other

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99 *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 7.
hand, the Ottoman victory gave rise to foreign occupation of Arabia, lasting on and off for more than twenty years.\textsuperscript{101}

On the other hand, Britain’s overriding interest since the early eighteenth century had been to maintain control over the sea route to India. Also her commercial interests extended into Persia and Persian Gulf. The British established a permanent presence in the area by creating in 1769 the position of the political resident in the Persian Gulf, who was based at Bushire on the shore of Persian Gulf. The British policy in the Gulf centered on two objectives: Firstly suppression of Arab piracy so as to maintain a maritime peace and secondly to resist rival imperial challenges by other European powers. To achieve these ends, in a series of bilateral agreements the British compelled the various gulf sheikhs to pay due regard to Britain’s interest in maritime peace. British navy became supreme in the Gulf and no rival power challenged Britain’s hegemony. In 1820 and 1835 the chief of Oman coast made agreements with the British which turned the area into the Trucial coast and made Britain the predominant power in the Gulf.\textsuperscript{102}

Besides this, Britain tried to maintain friendly relations with Saudi State which was steadily gaining strength in the late 18th century. The British were interested in maintaining trade relations between Bombay and Basra and a reliable postal service between India and Syria via Basra. They tried to persuade the \textit{Wahhabis} not to harass the couriers who carried dispatches from Basra to Aleppo. Britain did not hesitate to use military force when necessary. A representative of the East India Company was sent to Diriyyah. He tried to obtain a promise from the \textit{Wahhabis} and the Saudi government that British interests in the Gulf

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century}, op. cit., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia}, op. cit., pp. 12-13.
would be safeguarded, but the mission failed, the *Wahhabis* advanced on Kuwait in 1804. The following year Britain tried to impose a protectorate over Kuwait but Abdullah, the Amir of Kuwait, preferred to remain independent.\textsuperscript{103}

The *Wahhabi* drive along Persian Gulf coast brought them, for the first time, into contact with British power. They were suspected of instigating piracies by the Qawasim, who inhabited the ports of Sharjah and Ras-al-Khaima. They attempted to destroy the independence of Muscat, which was against the policy of the British government.\textsuperscript{104} Oman ruler, Sultan Said, threatened by a *Wahhabi* invasion from the land side of his own territories, appealed to British Government in India for protection. In 1809 the Bombay government sent a fleet in support of the Sultan to destroy the pirate gangs of the Qawasim, the capital of Ras-al-Khaima (at the entrance of the Persian Gulf) and render whatever aid it could to the Sultan of Muscat to protect Oman from *Wahhabis* onslaught.\textsuperscript{105}

Although the *Wahhabi* movement and its political advancement were prevented by the Ottoman and Egyptian forces under Mohammad Ali Pasha, yet the vitality that was inherent in the movement could not be destroyed. Consequently, the Saudi state twice came under the influence of *Wahhabism* in the 19th century under Turki Ibn Abdullah (1824-34).\textsuperscript{106} He occupied his father’s throne and created a new capital at Riyadh.\textsuperscript{107} Turki extended his control over Arid, Kharj, Hotah, Mahmal, Sudayr and Aftay. In 1834 Turki was assassinated and his son

\textsuperscript{103} The History of Saudi Arabia, op. cit., p. 108.
\textsuperscript{104} The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia, op. cit., p. 13.
\textsuperscript{106} Emergence of Saudi Arabia, op. cit., Introduction.
Amir Faisal (1734-38) immediately returned to Riyadh from Hassa to assert his claim over his father’s throne. Amir Faisal defeated Misari (Turki’s Cousin) in 1834 and became the Imam of Second Saudi Emirate. Philby noted that by this time the rival state of Jabal Shammar had risen into prominence under the able leadership of the founders of the Ibn Rashid dynasty (1836-1848) and Faisal was never strong enough to reassert the claim of his ancestors to suzerainty over Hail. In 1836 Faisal moved to attack Bahrain by seeking support of the Sultan of Muscat. But the Sultan agreed only if the British government consented. Consequently, the project came to naught.

Amir Faisal’s rule was disrupted again in 1837 when he refused to pay tribute to the Egyptian forces in Hejaz. The Egyptian sent an expedition to Riyadh against him. Amir Faisal was captured and sent to Cairo. The Egyptian appointed a member of the Al-Saud family by the name of Khalid as a ruler in Southern Nejd. In 1840 Khalid Ibn Saud wanted to establish friendly relations with the British representative at Bahrain to it in practice he failed to live up to his desire. On the other hand, Egyptian forces were not finally withdrawn from Arabia until 1840 owing to British insistence. The situation was somewhat peaceful until a member of the Al Saud family, Abdullah Ibn Thunayan, rebelled against Khalid, who fled from Riyadh to Jiddah. Abdullah Ibn Thunayan came to rule in Riyadh. He abdicated the power in favour of Amir Faisal who managed to escape from his captivity in Cairo and

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110 *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, op. cit., p. 18.
112 *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, op. cit., p. 21.
returned to Riyadh in 1843. Faisal killed Abdullah and started his second chieftainship, which lasted until his death in 1865.\textsuperscript{114}

Amir Faisal considered the coastal region to be the part of his territory. He laid claim upon Kuwait, through Katif, Ras-al-Khaima, Oman, Ra’sal-Hadd and Muscat. Although his forces raided Kuwait, but they did not attempt to seize it and relations between Amir Faisal and the ruler of Kuwait remained friendly, but to capture Nejd and Bahrain, Faisal waged a long war. The conflict between the two states in 1845-46 did not result in victory for either side. In 1850 Amir Faisal’s troops occupied Qatar and further planned an invasion of the Dammam Island. Only the timely arrival of a British squadron to protect Bahrain saved its ruler from defeat. Amir Faisal maintained peaceful relations with the ruler of Bahrain on condition that the latter would continue to pay the tribute and clear the earlier arrears. In 1859 British squadron was again sent to protect the island. The leader of the squadron informed Amir Faisal that the British government considered Bahrain an independent emirate and was ready to protect it against attack.\textsuperscript{115} In 1861, the British imposed an agreement on the sheikh of Bahrain similar to those concluded earlier with the smaller states of Trucial Oman. Bahrain became a British protectorate and was never again claimed by Saudi rulers.\textsuperscript{116}

Oman was also in the arena of Najdis-British rivalry. In 1862 Wahhabis tried to increase their influence, but Britain not only prevented the possible extension of Wahhabi’s influence but also bombarded their port of Katif and demolished a small fort commanding the entrance to

\textsuperscript{114} A History of Saudi Arabia, op. cit., p. 24.
\textsuperscript{115} The History of Saudi Arabia, op. cit., p. 185.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 185.
the harbour. The visit of Colonel Pelly provided an accommodation between British and Wahhabi interests and Amir Faisal agreed that attacks on Oman should cease with an understanding that the tribute hitherto payable to him should be paid punctually. But Wahhabi’s attacks on the Gulf coast did, in fact, become frequent after this date.\textsuperscript{117} After the death of Faisal his son Abdullah (1865-71) became ruler of Najdi Kingdom. His half brother Saud Mohammad (1871-75) and Abdul Rehman challenged him for leadership.\textsuperscript{118} During the reign of Saud Ibn Faisal, however, the whole of Nejd country was subordinated.\textsuperscript{119}

The opening of the Suez Canal (1869) not only paved the way for Britain’s communication with the East, but also encouraged Turkey to consolidate and expand her position in Arabia. The Turks increased their presence in the Hejaz and Yemen. They also extended their influence in the Gulf beyond Kuwait by establishing a garrison in 1871\textsuperscript{120}, at Hufuf in Hasa.\textsuperscript{121} The Turkish influence seemed to be gaining further impetus when in 1891 a rival Nejdi Amir, Ibn Rashid of Hail, with Turkish encouragement captured Riyadh. The Saudi family, including the eleven year old Prince Regent of Saudi Arabia, went into

\textsuperscript{117} H. St. J.B. Philby, \textit{Arabia}, op. cit., p. 124.
\textsuperscript{118} A History of Saudi Arabia, op. cit., p. 24.
\textsuperscript{119} January 1874 (political – A), \textit{British Foreign Department Documents}, Nos. 122-125, National Archives of India, New Delhi (henceforth NAI), p. 7.
\textsuperscript{120} We have already discussed in detail in chapter 4 that the state of Kuwait was established from about the end of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century when a group of ‘utubi Arabs, who claimed to be a branch of the Anaiza confederation migrated into the area. R.M. Burrell, ‘Al Kuwayt’, in C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat, ed., \textit{The Encyclopaedia of Islam}, Vol. V, p. 573. In 1793 the English shifted their base from Basra to Kuwait, and, thereafter, the area always received Britain’s close attention in the formation of its Middle East policy. In 1899 Britain officially assumed the position of protector in 1914 Britain declared Kuwait independent of Turkey and under British protection. Hilmar C. Kruegeri, ‘Kuwait’, in William T. Couch, ed., \textit{Collier’s Encyclopedia}, Vol. 12, 1956, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{121} Al-Hasa, Oasis, or more properly group of Oases in eastern Saudi Arabia, approximately from 25\degree 20’ to 25\degree 40’ N. and 49\degree 30’ to 49\degree 50’ E. The name has been also used to designate the entire region of eastern Arabia. The capital is Al-Hufuf, about 65 km inland from the Persian Gulf. F.S. Vidal, ‘Al-Hasa’, in V.L. Menage, Ch. Pellat and J. Schacht, ed., \textit{Encyclopaedia of Islam}, Vol. III, 1971, London, p. 237.
exile, finally taking up residence in Kuwait at the invitation of Sheikh Mubarak. There, the young Ibn Saud, was introduced to great power-intrigue amid the proposal for the Berlin-Baghdad Railway, and through treaty with Mubarak in 1899, the British got paramount position in the Gulf.\textsuperscript{122}

From 1902 onward Saudi power was finally restored under the leadership of Abd-al-Aziz Ibn Saud (hereafter Ibn Saud) (1902-1953). After Faisal the state again suffered from a temporary dismemberment followed by the Rashidian rebellion under Mohammad Ibn Rashid of Hail. Abd-al-Aziz in 1902 freed Riyadh from the Rashidian yoke.\textsuperscript{124} In Abd-al-Aziz’s long reign of about 50 years (1902-1953) he recovered his ancestral dominions, conquered and annexed the new territories and consolidated his power.\textsuperscript{125}

In the first decade of 20th century Great Britain clearly observed the fast changing situation in the Middle East. Turkey was rapidly falling a prey to the clutches of German ambitions. The Baghdad railway was slowly bringing the forces of Gemany within striking distance of nerve centre of the British Empire.\textsuperscript{126}

In 1911, Ibn Saud visited Kuwait, had friendly talks with Britain’s agent and agreed on the areas of cooperation, waiving off all claims in Muscat and Oman. Under this agreement, the Amir of Riyadh was entitled to establish his control over al-Hasa, al-Katif, Darin and the port of al-Uqair. Britain, on the other hand, pledged itself to prevent intervention by any other power from the sea. In exchange, Ibn Saud

\textsuperscript{123} Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century, op. cit., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{124} Emergence of Saudi Arabia, op. cit., Introduction.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{126} H. St. J.B. Philby, The Heart of Arabia, op. cit., pp. xx-xxi
recognized the British protectorate over his emirate and pledged himself not to start wars without their consent. Further, Britain was entitled to exploit the peninsula’s mineral resources. The British government promised to send troops and arm to Ibn Saud at his request. To wage war in the peninsula, however, Britain did not need the Amir’s prior consent. Although the agreement was not concluded, it corresponded to character of earlier negotiations (i.e. Britain’s policy of not hindering Ibn Saud in his seizure of al Hasa) and the general provisions of future treaty of 1915. In practice, Britain treated the Emirate of Riyadh as potential protectorate within its sphere of influence in the Gulf.¹²⁷

The Anglo-Turkish convention of July 1913 defined the boundaries of the Sanjak of Nejd, which comprised Ibn Saud’s new acquisition in Hasa. Britain, therefore, neither objected to nor recognized Ibn Saud’s conquest of Hasa. The outbreak of First World War dramatically changed this situation.¹²⁸ The Ottoman-Saudi convention, signed in May 1914, stated that Nejd should remain the territory of Ibn Saud as well as his future generations. The convention also forbade Ibn Saud from entering into treaty relations with foreign powers or granting concessions to foreigners in his territories.¹²⁹

Britain began to search for local allies in Nejd whose support was seen as essential to end Ottoman authority in the region. The war freed Britain from its previous non-intervention policy in the affairs of the interior. Ibn Saud had expressed a wish to enter into negotiations with Britain only after he had conquered Hasa in 1913. Two years later he received captain Shakespeare, a British envoy whose role was to conclude an Anglo-Saudi treaty with Ibn Saud,

¹²⁸ A History of Arabia, op. cit., pp. 41, 42.
¹²⁹ Ibid.
which was finally signed on 26th of December 1915. According to this treaty, the British government acknowledged that Nejd, Hasa, Katif and Jubayl and their dependencies and territories were the countries of Ibn Saud. Aggression towards these territories will send a wrong impression to the British government that was advancing economic aid to Ibn Saud. In return, Ibn Saud agreed not to enter into any correspondence, agreement or treaty with any foreign nation or power, and refrain from all aggressions on, or interference with the territories of Kuwait and Bahrain and other Sheikhdoms of Qatar and the Oman coast, that were under the protection of the British government, and had treaty relations with the Saudi government. This marked the beginning of Britain’s direct involvement in political affairs of the interior Arabia.\[130\]