CHAPTER-IV

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Introduction
This chapter will look at the nature of Britain imperialist domination over the Sultanate state and also the effect of British policies on the Omani non-state networks of Sharqiya and Sur. The administrative system of Britain in the Gulf was the machinery that was used to manage the relations between British India and the rulers of the Gulf States including the Sultan of Oman. Understanding the manner in which this system was organised and functioned is important for our study on Oman-British relations. When it comes to Oman, the British administrative system in East Africa is important and will be studied along with the British system in the Gulf. The British-French rivalry is also another important aspect. British India was an important political, economic and cultural font from where the British drew strength to dominate the Indian Ocean region. India’s role in the British domination of Oman will be looked at in this chapter.

Britain’s Early Engagements with Oman
The English East India Company based at Surat in Gujarat had already recognised the commercial importance of Oman during the seventeenth century. After the Yaariba dynasty expelled the Portuguese from Sohar in 1643, they invited the English Company to trade at Sohar and Seeb in 1645. This was at a time when Muscat was still under Portuguese rule. English merchants were already involved in the trade of Muscat. A commercial agreement was signed between the Yarubi ruler Imam Nasir bin Murshid and the representative of the English company in 1646 giving special trading privileges to the British at Sohar. However the British were not successful in establishing a factory at Muscat. During negotiations for establishing such a facility in 1659, Colonel Rainsford, a company representative who had come to negotiate on behalf of the company died at Muscat. There were no further efforts at negotiation between Oman and the British for at...
least the next one hundred and thirty nine years till 1798. During this long interval, Oman did not allow any European power, including Britain to establish a factory at Muscat a policy which was aimed at safeguarding Muscat’s position.

It was Napoleon’s arrival at Egypt in 1798 that heightened British concerns about the security of its empire in India and made it to sign an agreement with Oman in the same year. Oman was given trade concessions including permission for two of Sultan bin Ahmad’s own ships to carry 5,000 maunds of salt to Calcutta annually. Sultan in turn agreed to dismiss an employ of French origin from his service and promised not to support the French or the Dutch during times of conflict with Britain. While Sultan allowed the British to re-establish their factory at Bandar Abbas, he did not allow them to establish a factory at Muscat. The defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799 and the end of French occupation of Egypt in 1802 radically altered the situation in the western Indian Ocean with Britain becoming the paramount power. The fall of Mysore allowed the British to control every port of anchor from Surat to Calcutta which convinced Sultan the need to strengthen his relations with the British. The death of Sultan in 1804 increased the political and commercial influence of the Qawasim of Ras al-Khaima who began attacking British shipping in the Gulf.

Britain and Oman under Said bin Sultan therefore had common interests in putting down the Qawasim and decided to conduct a joint expedition to put down this threat in 1809-1810. But the Qawasim were allied with the Wahhabis which was the most powerful force on land in Arabia. Britain did not want to end up in engagements with the Wahhabis and broke off military support to Omani forces at crucial times during the expedition when there was a threat of Wahhabi reinforcements joining the Qawasim. The fall of the first Saudi state and renewed attacks by combined forces of the Qawasim and Utbis of Bahrain even against vessels in western Indian ports made the British to

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2 Ibid, p. 33.
4 Bhacker, n. 1, p. 39.
5 Ibid, p. 46.
6 Ibid, p. 61.
once again consider a joint campaign with Oman against the Qawasim in 1819. From here onwards, the British began to exert its influence in the Gulf and deny any advantage to possible rivals including Oman. While the campaign against the Qawasim was a success, the British ensured that the final outcome did not end up in increasing Omani influence in the region. Accordingly, the capture of Ras al-Khaima did not eventually work in the interests of Oman as Britain recognised the sovereignty of the various maritime Arab tribes of northern Oman including the Qawasim through the treaty of 1820 in which the tribes promised to refrain from attacking each other and acts of piracy. Utbi Bahrain was also included in the agreement later on. The recognition of the maritime tribes and Bahrain worked against the interests of Oman in the region as it could no more assert its influence in the Gulf or militarily deter any of its adversaries as it would be opposed by Britain. Northern Oman which was from then on known as Trucial Oman was permanently severed off from the Muscat Sultanate. It was in such circumstances that Said bin Sultan decided to shift his administrative centre from Muscat to Zanzibar in 1829.7

Before Said left for Zanzibar, there was one last event involving co-operation between Oman and Britain. This was the campaign against the Bani Bu Ali tribe of Jalaan in 1820. The Bani Bu Ali had adopted the Muwahiddun/Wahhabi doctrine during the nineteenth century. According to Calvin Allen, the subjugation of the Bani Bu Ali was necessary for Said to secure the commercial linkages between Oman and East Africa as Jalaan and its port of Sur was along the route from Muscat and the Batina coast to Africa. It was the British who put forward the suggestion to Said for a joint attack to avenge the murder of a messenger whom they had sent to the Bani Bu Ali port of Ashkara to inquire about the acts of plunder committed at sea by the tribe. The town of Ashakara was destroyed and the chief Bani Bu Ali leaders imprisoned during the expedition of 1820.8 This was the last incident of military co-operation between Said and the British. As far as the British were concerned, the Bani Bu Ali were a similar maritime threat like the Qawasim and

with the collapse of the Saudi state there was no possibility of Wahhabi reinforcements coming to aid the Bani Bu Ali. As it was subsequently proved, the Bani Bu Ali tried to exert their autonomy when there was support from a Saudi state. This happened in the 1860s during the time of the second Saudi state and also during the 1920s in the early decades of the present Saudi state.9

Said bin Sultan’s shift to East Africa resulted in the commercial prosperity of Zanzibar and expansion of trade in East Africa. The British very soon realised that the vibrant slave trade was one of the reasons behind the success of the Zanzibari economy. They decided to adopt the anti-slavery campaign to politically subdue the Omani Sultanate now centered at Zanzibar and economically strangle Zanzibar’s economy in order to ensure that Oman would in no way be able to challenge Britain’s supremacy in the Indian Ocean region. For this purpose, they decided to use the Indian merchants who controlled the trade at Muscat and Zanzibar.10 The anti-slavery treaties that were signed by Said bin Sultan will be discussed in the next chapter. But the British tried to gain influence over Oman’s economy mainly by getting the Indian merchants declared as British Indian subjects. The British Consuls at Zanzibar namely Captain Atkins Hamerton and Captain Rigby used the anti-slavery campaign to intimidate Indian merchants and prevent them from taking part in the slave trade. The complication here was that the merchants from Kutch could not be regarded as British Indian subjects as the Rao of Kutch was not under direct British control.11

The British were involved in asserting their supremacy with regard to Said bin Sultan not just in East Africa but also in the Gulf. The Persians tried to capture Bandar Abbas in 1855. The then British Resident in the Persian Gulf Captain Felix Jones prevented the Bani Yas tribe from joining Said bin Sultan in his campaign against the Persians as was mentioned in the first chapter. Said was forced to conclude a lease agreement over

10 Bhacker, n. 1, p. 152.
11 Ibid, p. 166.
Bandar Abbas on very disadvantageous terms.\footnote{12} The death of Said bin Sultan in 1856 was the beginning of a new period of greater British domination over Omani affairs. The British arbitration in the dispute between Sultan Thuwaini of Muscat and Sultan Majid of Zanzibar led to the partitioning of the empire in 1861.\footnote{13} The partition provided the British to exert greater influence over the two separate sultanates. In 1869 the British persuaded the Rao of Kutch to bring out a declaration stating that the affairs of Kutchis residing in Muscat, Africa, Arabia and the Gulf would from then on be dealt by the British.\footnote{14} The Khoja Muslims had already been regarded as British Indian subjects as they were considered as originating from Sind which was under British control since 1840. While the Indian merchants had earlier associated themselves with the interests of the Al Bu Saidi Sultans, they increasingly sought British protection after 1869. Before going into the details of the nature of British intervention in Omani during the rest of the nineteenth century the nature of the British administrative system in the Gulf will be first looked at.

The British Administrative System in the Gulf and East Africa

Realising that the Gulf was strategically important for protecting the communication lines between British India and Europe, the British built an administrative system in the Gulf to look after its political and commercial interests. This system was part of the larger administrative network that was placed by the British in foreign countries bordering the British Indian Empire. The officers for this administrative system including the one that existed in the Gulf were drawn from the Indian Political Service (IPS). James Onley has termed these administrative setups as Britain's informal empire as the residents and political agents of this system as were there in the Gulf were political representatives as well as imperial officials. The British grouped these states into diplomatic districts known as political residencies, each under the supervision of a political resident. The Gulf was one such political residency. Most residents employed networks of subordinate political agencies throughout their residencies, each headed by a political agent responsible for

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\item \footnote{12} Badger to Forbes, 5\textsuperscript{th} June 1861, Aden, MSA, PD, Vol. 38, # 1038, 1863, p. 175.
\item \footnote{14} Bhacker, n. 1, p. 172.
\end{enumerate}
political relations between the British government and the local head of state. The Resident of the Gulf was seated at Bushire on the Persian coast while there were Political Agents at Muscat and Bahrain.

The chain of command in the Gulf was such that the Political Agents in a Political Residency was responsible to the Resident who in turn reported to the Political Department of the government of Bombay Presidency who was responsible for managing the relations of British India with East Africa and West Asia during much of the nineteenth century. The Bombay government reported to the Indian Foreign Department of the British Indian government at the capital Calcutta. This system prevailed till 1873 when Calcutta directly took over the management of the Residency in the Gulf in order to make the system more efficient. James Onley has drawn attention to the vital role of Native Agents in the administrative system of the Gulf. Influential men from affluent Indian, Arab and Persian merchant families served as the Resident’s Native Agents in over half of the political posts within the Gulf Residency. When Said bin Sultan shifted his administrative centre to Zanzibar, the then British Political Agent Captain Atkins Hamerton accompanied him to East Africa. Native Agents provided intelligence reports to the British Indian authorities in Bombay from this time onwards until the partition of Oman’s empire in 1861 and the appointment of Lieutenant W. M. Pengelley as Political Agent at Muscat. Even after Political Agents came to be regularly appointed from 1861 onwards, Surgeon Major A. S. G. Jayakar, an Indian doctor at the Agency, served for long spells as Acting Political Agent when there was no Political Agent. The role of

18 Onley, n. 15, p. 3.
Indians in the administrative system in the Gulf will be looked at in the section on India's role in Britain's imperialist policies in the Gulf and Arabia.

The nature of the British presence in Zanzibar is also important for this study. As Zanzibar was not under British protection the IPS officer posted there reported both to the Indian Foreign Department and the Foreign Office in London. In territories like East Africa where the British Home Government at London and the British Indian Government at London where both involved in the administration of British relations with the local ruler, there was often a conflict of interests. The British Home Government at London considered the curbing of the slave trade an important objective. The British Indian government understandably were more concerned about maintaining the security of the regions surrounding the British Indian Empire and did not consider issues like slavery as vital to this purpose. Reflecting the divergence of interests, the British Indian government suggested to the Home Government in London that while India would bear the expenses of the political duties of the Political Agent at Zanzibar, costs relating to the suppression of the slave trade should be borne by the Home Government. India also suggested that the correspondence of the Agent regarding political affairs should be addressed to the government of India while matters relating to the slave trade should be addressed to London.

In order to make sure that Sultan Majid of Zanzibar took strong measures to curb the slave trade, London was even willing to free Zanzibar from the responsibility of providing subsidy to Muscat in accordance with the stipulations of the Canning Award which led to the partitioning of Oman's maritime empire. The Home Government in

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21 Onley, n. 15, p. 15.
London also thought that the subsidy should then be paid by India.\textsuperscript{24} While the British Indian government also supported the curbing of slavery, they did not want it to be done at the expense of the Canning Award as the stopping of the subsidy was likely to lead to a reaction by the Sultanate of Muscat against Zanzibar and disturbances in East Africa and the Gulf.\textsuperscript{25} The British Indian government also rejected the suggestion that the subsidy should be paid by India.\textsuperscript{26} While London did not press for stopping of the subsidy, Majid in 1868 stopped paying the subsidy to Muscat when Imam Azzan bin Qays came to power. Even after the Imamate was toppled in 1871, Sultan Barghash of Zanzibar refused to resume the subsidy on the basis of the promises provided by London to free him from the subsidy.\textsuperscript{27} The British Indian government and London had to jointly provide the subsidy to Muscat from 1873 onwards until 1883 when London withdrew from financial commitments regarding Zanzibar.\textsuperscript{28} The subsidy was continued by the British Indian government for the rest of the nineteenth century. That differences existed became evident in 1871 when the British Indian government came to know of an agreement that


was signed between Britain and France agreeing to respect the sovereignty of the Sultanates of Muscat and Zanzibar almost a decade after it was signed in 1862. 29

British Policy towards the Rulers of Muscat (1856-1900)

The partitioning of Oman's maritime empire in 1861 led to a change in the nature of the relationship between the British and the rulers of Muscat. When the first treaty between Oman and Britain was signed in 1798, Sultan bin Ahmad was recognised as a sovereign ruler and the treaty was seen as one between equals. Said bin Sultan was also recognised as a powerful ruler in the Gulf region. But the kind of situation that would prevail after 1856 was seen during the lifetime of Said itself when Britain established its hegemony in the Gulf after the expedition against the Qawasim in 1819. From 1861 onwards, the Sultans at Muscat bereft of their East African territories came to be increasingly dominated by the British. But here also a distinction need to be made between Thuwaini bin Said and the later rulers excluding Imam Azzan bin Qays. Thuwaini was the ruler who had most influence in interior among the Sultans of Muscat during the second half of the nineteenth century. Accordingly, his dependence on British support to maintain his rule was comparatively lesser. While the British did provide military aid in his campaign against the Wahhabis, they never had to provide naval support to defend Muscat from attacks by the tribes or enemies like the Wahhabis.

One reason for this could also be the fact that the second Saudi state was not as strong as the first one and merely resorted to launching raids against coastal towns of Oman and intervening in Omani politics from its base in Buraimi. These raids in the 1860s led to British retaliation against Saudi supporters at Sur and Saudi ports on the al-Hasa coast because of losses in lives and property by British Indian subjects. 30 The British also forced the Saudis to pay compensation for these losses. It should be noticed that the


British had adopted the policy of retaliating against attacks on British Indian subjects even before the declaration of the Rao of Kutch in 1869 stating that the affairs of the Kutchis would be handled by the British from then on. The British did not have to resort to such tactics in the Muscat area itself. This would be in marked contrast to the post-Thuwaini period. Thuwaini’s period saw the increasing involvement of British Political Agents at Muscat in Omani politics after a gap. This phenomenon had been already witnessed during the brief interlude when Badr bin Sayf was Sultan at Muscat after the death of Sultan bin Ahmad in 1804.\(^{31}\) The partitioning of the empire in 1861 made the British realise the need for a British officer in Muscat.

Lieutenant Colonel Pengelley was sent to Oman in 1861 to assume the post of Political Agent at Muscat. British policy was not just decided by the British Indian government. Often the British officer on the spot in Muscat through his inputs managed to influence British policy towards Oman. The views of the Political Agent often helped in the creation of favourable or unfavourable British opinion towards groups or individuals. Pengelley maintained close contact with Turki bin Said, the governor of Sohar and a rival of Thuwaini within the ruling dynasty. These contacts were continued even after Pengelley was replaced by another. Pengelley was replaced as he had promised safe conduct to Turki during a planned meeting with Thuwaini. But Turki ended up being arrested by Thuwaini.\(^{32}\) The Bombay government in India decided that Pengelley’s action was a breach of trust and hurt British credibility in the region.\(^{33}\) Even though Pengelley was replaced the relationship that he developed with Turki would become an important element in British-Omani relations during the nineteenth century. British officials like Lewis Pelly, the Resident of the Persian Gulf continued to be in close contact with Turki. The British saw Turki as a favourable candidate for the position of Sultan during times of political crisis like during the attack by Ibadi conservative forces against Muscat in

\(^{31}\) Bhacker, n. 1, p. 50.


1868. British preference in favour of Turki was also a factor in him becoming Sultan in 1871.

Thuwaini's assassination and the coming to power of his son Salim bin Thuwaini whose political legitimacy was weak saw the beginnings of British intervention in the defence of Muscat. Reda Bhacker has carefully analysed the period before 1856 in his work on Oman's maritime empire and has recorded the number of times that the British refused to come in defence of the Sultans despite appeals from them. What had changed in the second half of the nineteenth century was the increased strategic importance of the Gulf and especially Oman through the territory of which Britain's vital telegraph communication lines passed in the Makran coast. These communication lines connected Britain and its most important colony India. It was in Britain's interests to keep other foreign powers away from the Gulf region. Tribal opposition to the Sultan and British military support led to the creation of a cyclical reaction where tribal attacks against Muscat led to stronger British military support to the Sultan which in turn led to increased tribal resentment and more attacks. The decision of Hamad bin Said to make Muscat the administrative centre in 1791 distanced the Al Bu Saidi dynasty from the politics of the interior tribes. Even then Muscat was not vulnerable to attacks from the interior for more than fifty years in the way that it became during the second half of the nineteenth century. The loss of the East African territories, the curbing of slavery and the increased association of the ruling dynasty with the British were factors that led to increased tribal opposition.

While there was almost no British military intervention in the Muscat area during the time of Thuwaini, the opposite became the norm during the rest of the nineteenth century leaving out the period of Azzan's Imamate. British policy was to always give preference to the security of British Indian subjects located at Muscat, Muttrah and towns on the Batina coast and intervene in favour of the Sultan only when he appealed for such help. The Sultans nearly always asked for British support during major attacks by the tribes. If

34 Secretary to Bombay Government, to Foreign Secretary, 31 October 1868, Poona, MSA, PD, Vol. 83, # 1130, 1868, p. 14.
British Indian subjects were not likely to be harmed, the British were more inclined to use force in defending Muscat than in other areas like the Batina coast. This was because the fall of Muscat would have greater consequences for British interests than the loss of any other territory by the Al Bu Saidi dynasty. When Azzan bin Qay's Imamate was established in 1868 the British decided to not recognise or support it as it saw the conservative Ibadi forces as inimical to British interests. The British prevented Azzan who had proved successful in uniting the landward territories of Oman after a long time to exert his influence over Oman's maritime territories. They illegally extended the stipulations of the maritime truce not signed by Oman and enforced in the northern Gulf to the coastline of Oman. While the intention of the higher authorities in British India was to merely prevent Azzan from sending munitions and supplies to his forts on the coastline in large quantities required for an attack, the Political Agent enforced it in such a way that even the normal reinforcing of the forts were not allowed.

The restrictions imposed on Turki who was in detention in India were lifted by the British and he arrived in the Gulf to instigate a rebellion against Azzan. The supreme British Indian government at Calcutta criticised the Bombay government for allowing Turki to leave. This shows that the existence of good relations between the British officials in the Gulf and Turki had helped in influencing the views of the Bombay government more than that of the government at Calcutta. This was because British officials in the Gulf like the Resident of the Persian Gulf reported directly to the Bombay government. All pretentions of neutrality by the British in the conflict between Turki and Azzan came to an end when the British allowed Turki to proceed and land at Khor

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Fakkan even after he had been intercepted at sea.\(^{40}\) On the other hand, the Political Agent at Muscat continued to prevent Azzan from garrisoning his fort even by using forceful methods.\(^{41}\) The end result was the toppling of the Imamate government. Once Turki came to power, the ban on movements by sea which was enforced when Azzan’s Imamate was established was quietly withdrawn.\(^{42}\)

Among the rulers of Muscat during the second half of the nineteenth century, Turki was the one who was most acquiescent to the British. The example of Azzan served to bring out the understanding that no ruler of Muscat, no matter how powerful, could maintain suzerainty over Oman’s maritime territories without the approval of the British. During the time of Turki it appeared that the interests of the Sultanate state and those of the British coalesced into one. Joint operations were conducted by the Sultanate and the British to drive out Ibrahim bin Qays and his supporters the Ya‘l Sad from settlements like Mussnah and Suwaiq in the Batina and gain compensation for losses suffered by British Indian merchants during raids conducted by these rebels.\(^{43}\) But the British also recovered compensation or settled disputes in Sur and Ras al-Hadd areas without active support from Omani forces albeit with the presence of an official of the Sultanate state. Such actions helped in reinforcing the view among tribes in the Interior that it was Britain that was the real power behind Muscat. Because of his loyalty, Turki was provided the Zanzibar subsidy directly by the British Indian government even when Sultan Barghash


of Zanzibar refused to continue the payments. Britain also brought out a declaration in 1886 as part of a definite policy that it would defend Turki from rebel attacks during his lifetime. 44

In the early years of Faisal’s rule it appeared that he would continue the policies of his father. In 1891 Faisal signed a treaty with the British promising not to sell, mortgage, cede or give for occupation any part of his territory except to the British. This treaty pushed Oman in to the greater control of the British and prevented the possibility of any other power establishing its influence on the country. 45 Unlike previous treaties, the treaty of 1891 was a clear sign of Britain’s domination over Oman’s affairs. Faisal bin Turki tried to actively free himself from British influence especially after the tribal revolt against Muscat in 1895 as he felt that they had not provided adequate support for him during the crisis. As far as the British were concerned, the tribes had already entered Muscat and occupied large portions of the town and therefore there was risk that British Indian lives and property would be targeted if active support was provided to Faisal. 46

While the British brought out a declaration that any further attacks against Muscat would be resisted, it did not help in bridging the distance with Faisal who had begun cultivating closer connections with France who had begun to intervene more actively in Omani politics. 47 Faisal was willing to allow the French to establish a coaling-station at Bandar Jissah close to Muscat. Before Faisal, the British had to never use or threaten the use of force against the Sultans to make them comply to their wishes. In 1899 the British threatened to bombard Muscat if Faisal did not come aboard a British warship stationed at the harbour and publicly declare the withdrawal of the coaling-station concession


47 Landen, n. 9, p. 302.
offered to the French. Faisal had to comply with the demand.\textsuperscript{48} After this incident Faisal lost whatever respect that he had among the tribes and it was also proved that British influence with regard to the affairs of Oman was paramount.

British policies also affected the politics of the Bani Hirth tribe led by Salih bin Ali. It was the curbing of the slave trade in East Africa by the Sultanate authorities at Zanzibar due to British pressure that forced the Bani Hirth to rebel against Majid in 1859. It is also doubtful if the Hirth would have become the foremost political force supporting the Ibadi conservatives if the Sultans of Oman from Salim onwards had not become so much dependent on British support. Salih was a supporter of Thuwaini throughout his reign. The British did not want to completely decimate the Bani Hirth as they were not concerned with the politics of the interior as long as it did not impact on the situation at Muscat. At the same time, the British did not cooperate with any political formation at Muscat which included Ibadi conservatives and the Bani Hirth tribe. This happened during the Imamate of Azzan as we have already seen and also during the brief regency of Abdul Aziz at Muscat in 1875 when Salih was his advisor. They were willing to aid Turki in his attempts against such political formations. The British realised that they could not target the Bani Hirth who were located in the interior Sharqiya province unlike the supporters of Ibrahim bin Qays, the Yal Sad tribe who were located on Batina coast. Even an attempt to recover compensation by blocking the trade of the Bani Hirth at Sur by the British was not successful.\textsuperscript{49} Till the end of the nineteenth century, the British tried to make sure that advisors of the Sultans in both Zanzibar and Muscat like Hilal bin Omar and Abdul Aziz who had links with the Sharqiya and Sur networks did not continue in their positions.\textsuperscript{50}  


\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, p. 515.

Heightened French Involvement in Omani Affairs during the Late Nineteenth Century

Britain's influence in Omani affairs was paramount from the time of Turki bin Said onwards. The only power which challenged Britain's control of Omani affairs during the late nineteenth century was France. We have seen previously how Faisal finally capitulated and severed his links with France when the British threatened to bomb Muscat. But that incident has only been studied from the perspectives of Omani dynastic politics and also British imperial influence in Omani affairs. Here the French involvement in Omani affairs will be looked at in the context of European rivalry in the international realm. This will also explain a lot better the events that took place during that period including policies implemented by the British. To be sure, France had begun providing papers and flags to mainly Suri vessels which were involved in transporting slaves from East Africa from the 1870s onwards. But these activities did not include a political campaign to cut down Britain's influence in Oman or the Gulf. In 1891 France and Russia entered into an understanding to diminish British influence in the Gulf. The task of implementing this policy in Oman fell to France. That year witnessed growing French involvement in Omani affairs.

In that year, the French Ambassador in London questioned the circumstances in which Faisal had succeeded his father to the exclusion of his uncle Abdul Aziz and of his elder brother Muhammad and complained that the rule of succession to the Sultanate of Oman had recently been altered under the advice of the Government of India. 51 Ironically, in the same year Faisal informed the British authorities that he wanted to address the President of the French Republic over the issue of French papers and flags to the vessels of his subjects as he was worried about the political ramifications of such French recognition of his subjects which might later extend to their houses and property on land. Faisal solicited the advice of the British Indian government on what steps he could take to uphold his jurisdiction in his own waters and over his subjects who had obtained French flags. The British authorities in India replied that he had full authority to punish any of his subjects who violated the laws of the country. At the same time, they advised him not

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51 Lorimer, n. 48, pp. 546-47.
to raise the issue with France. Meanwhile the highest British authorities in London and India began to take into account heightened French interest in Omani affairs. Lord Lansdowne, the Viceroy of India recommended to Viscount Cross, the Secretary of State of India at London that Oman should be declared as a protectorate and that taking into account Britain's relations with Oman for almost half a century, no power, including France could deny that Muscat legitimately belonged to the British sphere of influence.

Viscount Cross agreed with the Viceroy's views and he told Salisbury, the British Prime Minister that it was an opportune time to declare Oman as a protectorate. This was because the Convention that was signed between Britain and France promising to respect the sovereignty of the Sultanates of Zanzibar and Muscat had been nullified with the French acceptance of a British protectorate over Zanzibar. But anticipating a move suggested by Cross, Francois Deloncle, a Deputy of Colonial Party of the French Chamber of Deputies prompted a declaration from the Paris government that events in East Africa had not invalidated the Convention of 1862 in respect of Muscat. Lord Salisbury as opposed to the India Office knew that the French would oppose any attempts to declare Oman as a protectorate. The Zanzibar-Heligoland Agreement of 1890 between Britain and Germany had alarmed both France and Russia. While not wanting to declare a protectorate on Oman Salisbury at the same time wanted to exclude alien influences from that territory. He therefore instructed the Indian authorities to secure a declaration from Faisal that he would not lease or alienate any part of his territory to a foreign power without British consent which resulted in Faisal signing the Agreement of 1891 accepting the same.

Deloncle continued in his attempts to ensure greater French involvement in Omani affairs. In November 1892 Deloncle declared in the Chamber of Deputies that French honour demanded that a consular agent be appointed to Muscat. Deloncle added that France would be in a position to cooperate with Russia and demonstrate her potential as

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53 Ravinder Kumar, India and the Persian Gulf Region 1858-1907: A Study in British Imperial Policy, (Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1965), pp. 75-76.
an ally if she were established in the Gulf. In the budget debate of 1893 Deloncle again raised the issue and proposed a supplementary credit of 7,000 francs for the establishment of a Vice-Consulate at Muscat. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. Develle, gave a promise that the post would be created. On November 8 1894, M. Ottavi, an Arabic speaking diplomat with extensive experience in Zanzibar and other Indian Ocean posts arrived in Muscat to take up his duties as Vice Consul. Faisal was initially disturbed over Ottavi’s arrival for he feared that France would try to assert a protectorate over Omanis who held the French flag and perhaps to detach Sur from his realm. But Faisal was to change his views about the French within a few months. During the revolt of 1895 Faisal felt that the British had not provided him with adequate help. In contrast Ottavi offered help and had the gun boat Troude sent to Muscat. Though the gun boat arrived after the conflict had ended, France’s goodwill was acknowledged by Faisal and two sides began to develop close relations.

Ottavi encouraged Faisal to assert his independence from the British. He at the same time encouraged Omani navigators to use the French flag without the Sultan’s consent and even in defiance of the Sultan’s orders. Ottavi’s influence resulted in growing estrangement between Faisal and the British. Even a declaration by Britain that it would defend Faisal during attacks from the interior did not help to bridge the gap between the two sides. The alienation became more obvious when Faisal turned down British offers for assistance during a rebellion in the province of Dhofar. The British were worried about the situation and feared that France or Turkey might take advantage of the situation in Dhofar. Sayyid Fadl, a leader who wanted to wrest Dhofar from Turki was supported by Turkey. The officials in the British Indian government wanted to declare a

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55 Lorimer, n. 48, p. 547.  
56 Landen, n. 9, p. 203.  
57 Lorimer, n. 48, p. 547  
58 Sayyid Fadl or Mamburam Thangal as he is known in Malabar, the northern region of the present day South Indian state of Kerala belonged to the sayyid lineage from the Hadramaut region. The sayyids are believed to have descended from the Prophet Muhammad. Both Sayyid Fadl and his father Sayyid Alawi were regarded as spiritual leaders in the Malabar region of Kerala. The father-son duo was involved in instigating peasant agitations and revolts against the landlords and the British. These agitations resulted in the practice of shahadat or martyrdom where fighters went for suicide missions against landlords or even against British forces and authorities. The British deported Sayyid Fadl from
protectorate over Oman immediately. But Salisbury knew that it would provoke a reaction from France. When London received reassurances from Paris and Constantinople that they had no interest in the affairs of Dhofar, the British decided to use conciliatory measures to change Faisal's attitude. They sent a delegation headed by the Resident of the Persian Gulf to Muscat and Faisal responded positively. Dhofar was recovered by Muscat with the help of British assistance. 59

Ottavi also cultivated close relations with some of the advisors Faisal. This included Abdul Aziz, who has been mentioned in the previous chapter. He was the dragoman of Ottavi and was at the same time personal advisor to Faisal. 60 Faisal also showed signs that he was no more willing to accord the customary salutes and recognitions accorded to the British during formal occasions. For a number of years it had been the practice for the Sultan's batteries to fire a salute on Proclamation Day in honour of Queen Victoria. But on the 1st of January 1898, the Resident and the Political Agent both being at Muscat, the accustomed salute was fired without the hoisting of the British flag. Faisal explained the innovation by saying that the ceremony was now to be regarded as a greeting to all Christian nations and not as a compliment to the Queen alone. The Resident, however by laying stress on the unfriendliness of discontinuing a long-established courtesy, succeeded in obtaining from the Sultan a written apology and a promise of future observance of the practice. At the end of January 1898 a gunner of the British ship Cossack was assaulted at Muscat by a slave of the Sultan and subjected, along with two officers of his ship, to humiliating treatment by certain of Faisal's officials.

In October 1898 a French gunboat Scorpion arrived at Muscat harbour. The crew of the ship presented Faisal with a breech-loading field gun as a gift from the French government. Several secret conferences were conducted in which Ottavi played a

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59 Kumar, n. 53, pp. 80-81.
60 Landen, n. 9, p. 204.
significant role. Valuable return gifts were given by the Sultan. Ottavi and the officers of the ship made an expedition to Bandar Jissah, a small but defensible harbour on the coast five miles south-east of Muscat, of which they took photographs and made rough plans. A direct result of the visit was Scorpion was the dismissal by the Sultan of his wazir Muhammad bin Said, who was against rapprochement with the French and reinstatement of Muhammad bin Azzan who was pro-French. A report came out in the Paris newspaper, the “Journal de Debats” in November 1898 that Faisal had leased a harbour called Bandar Jissah to the France for the erection of a coaling station. The situation in France had changed by this time. Hanotaux, the pro-imperialist Foreign Minister was replaced by Declassé who was not an ardent imperialist. Declassé wished to promote British-French friendship as the keystone of his foreign policy. This was when the news story on the Bandar Jissah concession came out in the newspaper. The British Ambassador in Paris inquired about the matter to Declassé who denied all knowledge of the statement. Salisbury who was the British Prime Minister and Foreign Minister wanted to solve the problem amicably as he was also trying to mediate French-British difficulties. While the leaders in London and Paris were trying to solve the problem in joint consultation there were changes that were taking place in India.

Lord Curzon assumed office as the new Viceroy of India in January 1899. Curzon was an advocate of using strong measures to protect India’s wider security interests. When he learnt of the French concession, he decided to void the understanding between Oman and France by force if necessary. Curzon’s policy set about a crisis in Muscat which seriously disturbed Salisbury’s and Declassé’s negotiations. In January 1899 the occupation of Bandar Jissah by the French was considered so probable that an officer and a boat’s crew of the British ship Sphinx were stationed there and remained for some time to hoist the British flag in case of the appearance of a French ship. On the orders of Curzon, the British Political Agent, Major Fagan questioned Faisal on the concession. Faisal admitted providing the concession. Fagan protested saying that it was a violation of treaty of 1891.

61 Lorimer, n. 48, pp. 555-56.
62 Kumar, n. 53, p. 81.
63 Landen, n. 9, pp. 205-06.
64 Ibid, pp. 206-07.
65 Lorimer, n. 48, p. 557.
Faisal replied that he had given the concession to the French and if the British objected to it then they should settle the matter directly with France. Curzon withheld the Zanzibar subsidy from Faisal and sent Colonel Meade, the Resident of the Persian Gulf, to Muscat with an ultimatum which he delivered to Faisal on 9th February 1899.

Without London’s knowledge, Curzon in the ultimatum demanded the cancellation of the Bandar Jissah concession to the French. The Sultan was given forty-eight hours to reply. On February 13th Faisal indicated he would revoke the concession and applied for British protection against France in case it resulted in French retaliation. This was not enough for Meade and Curzon. On February 14th Admiral Douglas, the commander of the India station, arrived off Muscat with a small fleet. Meade demanded that Faisal publically cancel the lease. On February 16 when the Sultan did not answer, Douglas ordered Faisal to meet him aboard his flagship. British ships in the meantime moved into position to open fire on the palace and forts of Muscat. Faisal capitulated and came out to the flagship and agreed to all demands. The relations between Faisal and the British were restored after this incident and were greatly improved when Percy Cox replaced Fagan as the Political Agent in March 1899.66 The Zanzibar subsidy was also restored to Faisal. The negotiations between Salisbury and Declasse finally led to a solution of the problem according to which France would share the coaling sheds used by Britain which was located in Muscat harbour.67 The French intervention in Omani affairs can be seen as an extension of the rivalry between Britain and France at the international level.

The Role of India in Britain’s Imperialist Policy in the Gulf

The Arabs of the Gulf considered the trade with India important as they obtained from there most of their vital needs like rice, timber and cordage for boat building, cloth and other commodities. There were strong trade connections between the Gulf Arabs and ports on the western coast of India. Indian merchants, including Hindus and Muslims, were involved in trade at least from the eighteenth century if not before in Oman and also the pearl trade in Bahrain and present day United Arab Emirates. Muslims, both

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66 Landen, n. 9, pp.207-08.
commoners and rulers, mostly arrived by sea and landed on the eastern coast of Arabia for the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca. In the nineteenth century, India took on a different role as the centre from where the British exercised their political power over the Gulf region. New studies have come out pointing to the fact that Britain’s other colonies and spheres of influence on the Indian Ocean rim including Arabia, and for the purpose of our study the Gulf, was under the political influence of British India and not Britain directly. India was a vital source of strength for Britain to acquire colonies in other parts of Asia and even Africa. Thomas R. Metcalf has described India as a “colonizing” as well as a “colonized” land.68 Ideas, people and political power flowed outward from India during the time of the British Empire across the Indian Ocean to territories like Africa and East Asia.69

The British had developed a system to administer the relations with the various princely states or native states in India which were not directly a part of the British Empire. These states though not under direct British rule are now described as Britain’s informal empire. These states ceded control of their external affairs and defence to the control of British India in return for protection. They then began to be known as protectorates, protected states, dependencies, dependent states, states under British protection, and states which had special treaty relations with the British Empire.70 Political Residents of the Indian Political Service (IPS) were stationed in the important princely states. It was this administrative system that was put in place in the Gulf region which included the region in Britain’s informal empire. The officers who were posted in the Gulf were drawn from the IPS and put into practice the administrative procedures that were used in India (here referring to the Indian princely states). A large number of Indians were also employed to maintain the administrative system in the Gulf. The British officers in the Gulf were guarded by around a hundred Indian sepoys or soldiers from the Indian Army. The British gunboats in the Gulf were manned by around two hundred Indian sailors or lascars and the Political Resident’s launch was operated by around seventy more. Most of the

69 Ibid, p. xi.
70 Onley, n. 15, p.
Residency's daily work was conducted by eight native agents; five munshis; a few Indian, Armenian and Eurasian clerks; four dozen Indian, Persian, Arab, and Eurasian members of the Indo-European Telegraph Department; eight Persian, Arab, and Eurasian employees of the Indian Post Office; an Indian surgeon from the Indian Medical Service and many others.\textsuperscript{71} A small Indian infantry detachment was also stationed at Muscat to defend the Political Agency.\textsuperscript{72}

In the period after the partition of Oman's empire in 1861, the importance of British India increased for the ruling dynasty at Muscat. As it was British arbitration that led to the division of Oman's territories, Omani rulers and rivals within the dynasty came to view the British Indian government as the final authority regarding dynastic disputes. It was to Bombay in British India that Turki were sent to be kept under detention after his unsuccessful rebellion against Salim.\textsuperscript{73} After Turki came to power, rivals like Salim the ex-Sultan and Abdul Aziz bin Said were imprisoned at Hyderabad or kept in detention at Karachi respectively.\textsuperscript{74} Abdul Aziz was brought from India to be made Turki's wazir in 1874.\textsuperscript{75} After unsuccessfully trying to re-establish himself at Muscat for some years, Abdul Aziz left Oman for India and tried to convince the British authorities to allow him to become the Sultan of Zanzibar.\textsuperscript{76} The importance of British India for the Al Bu Saidi dynasty of Oman was to increase by the time of the twentieth century. British Indian troops successfully defended Muscat from a major tribal attack in 1913.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{73} Lorimer, n. 48, p. 479.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, p. 503, p. 494.
According to John M. Willis, India was not only a source of power for British political and administrative control over its territorial possessions in the Indian Ocean littoral, but was also a cultural project aimed at the production, institutionalisation, and dissemination of a body of knowledge about India’s history, society, and culture, which in turn helped in the practice of governing colonised populations throughout the entire British Empire.\(^78\) Apart from the political administrative system, Willis has effectively demonstrated how the cultural practices used by the British in India like ethnographic observation, historical inquiries and state rituals were replicated in Yemen to control Aden and the tribal hinterland beyond the port town.\(^79\) As part of developing a bureaucratic apparatus for governing the tribal hinterland beyond the port of Aden, the port’s colonial administrators applied the ethnographic language used in India to classify the tribes into “martial” and “criminal” races.\(^80\) The situation in the Gulf was different as the British did not control any colony in the region directly like Aden. There was therefore no need to deal with tribes in the hinterland. The Gulf including Oman can be considered as forming the informal empire of Britain where it only dealt with the local rulers who sought protection from the Empire.

Because of the nature of British administrative system in the Gulf, the tribes in the region were not exactly classified in the way as they were in India or in southern Yemen. At the same time, traces of the ethnographic language used in India can be detected in some of the reports and accounts of the tribes in Oman. The British had a high opinion of the martial qualities of the Bani Bu Ali tribe especially after huge casualties suffered by British Indian troops during the expedition of 1820. It is worth quoting Herbert Disbrowe who compared the Bani Bu Ali and the muttawiah most of whom consisted of the Yal Sad tribe during the Imamate of Azzan bin Qays.

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\(^79\) Ibid, pp. 24-25.

\(^80\) Ibid, p. 28.
The *muttawas* are not at all physically or numerically formidable and are bad at riding horses. A dozen of the Bani boo Ali wanted probably put to flight fifty *muttawah*.  

The greater cultural link with India was through the specific hierarchies, orders and rituals constructed by the British Indian government to recognise the traditional authorities of the native rulers of India of course in subordination to the British Raj especially in the aftermath of the Indian Revolt of 1857. The Al Bu Saidi dynasty was also gradually included in the hierarchy of the native princes of India dependent on British support. In 1861 a knighthood specific to the Indian Empire (the Order of the Star of India) and comprising three classes was created to honour service to the colonial state on the part of both native princes and British civilian and military officers. Turki was conferred with the order of the Grand Knight Commander of the Order of the Star of India in June 1886 by Queen Victoria.

The cultural influence of British India further increased in the twentieth century. John M. Willis has described in detail how the tribal chiefs of Yemen were placed in the hierarchy of the native princes of India when they were all invited to the Coronation Durbar held in Delhi in 1903 to commemorate the coronation of King Edward VII. Faisal’s young son Taimur bin Faisal attended the durbar on behalf of his father after an invitation was provided by the Viceroy. Though we presently do not have the details, it is expected that Taimur would have also been placed within the hierarchy of princes providing a cultural context to the link with the British Raj. Taimur’s son Said bin Taimur was educated at the Mayo College for princes in India and did not know Arabic

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81 Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Disbrowe to C. Gonne Esquire, 6 August, 1869, MSA, PD, Vol. 86, # 757, 1869, p. 175.
82 Willis, n. 78, p. 30.
84 Willis, n. 78, pp. 33-34.
very fluently in the initial period after he came back to Oman. This meant that the Sultans of the twentieth century were not attuned to the cultural environment in their own land which further increased the estrangement between the tribes and the ruling dynasty.

Conclusion

Relations between the British and Oman had begun in the seventeenth century itself from the time of the East India Company. Napoleon’s arrival in Egypt in 1798 heightened British concern about India’s security and led to the first treaty between Oman and Britain in the same year. The menace of attacks by the Qawasim on British shipping led to a joint expedition by the British and the Omanis but the recognition of the sovereignty of the maritime tribes and Bahrain worked against the interests of Oman as it could no longer assert its influence in the Gulf region. As a result Said bin Sultan shifted his commercial centre to Zanzibar from Muscat. The British soon realised that the slave trade was a major source of income for the Sultanate and tried to curb the practice. They also tried to get the Indian merchants declared as British Indian subjects so that they could gain economic influence over Oman. The British created an administrative system in the Gulf to manage relations between the rulers of the Gulf and British India. Till 1873 the affairs of the Gulf including Oman were managed by Bombay after which the Supreme British Indian Government took over in charge. The management of the British relations with Zanzibar by both the Home Government in London and the British Indian Government led to a clash of interests of the slave trade issue which finally led to a situation where British India had to pay the Zanzibar subsidy to Oman.

The British arbitration in the dispute between Said bin Sultan’s sons after Said’s death led to the partition of Oman’s territories and the creation of two separate Sultanates at Muscat and Zanzibar. From then on Britain was able to exert much influence of the affairs of both the sultanates. Thuwaini among the Sultans of the late nineteenth century had most influence in the interior and therefore did not have to ask for British aid to defend his capital. The British had to frequently come to the defence of Muscat during tribal attacks from the time of Salim onwards. While Azzan bin Qays was a strong ruler

86 Eickelman, n. 77, pp. 11-12.
the British thought that the Ibadi conservatives were inimical to British interests and kept their distance from the regime. Azan was prevented by the British to exert his influence on Oman's territorial possessions outside Oman. Because of the close relations that Turki had maintained with the British authorities in Bombay and officials in the Gulf he could topple the government of Azzan and become Sultan. Turki was the most acquiescent among the Sultans of Oman during this period to British influence. His successor Faisal tried to make himself from autonomous from British control and move closer to the French but was forced to change his policy after the British threatened to bomb Muscat. The Bani Hirth were also affected by British policies in East Africa which forced them to become the political power behind the Ibadi conservatives. The British did not allow any government which had representatives from the Ibadi conservatives or the Bani Hirth to continue in power. The late nineteenth century was a period when France tried to challenge Britain's domination with regard to Omani affairs. When Faisal capitulated to the British during the crisis over the Bandar Jissah crisis, France's attempts to intervene in Omani affairs came to an end. India was a source of political and cultural strength for Britain's imperial policy during the late nineteenth century.