CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION
Chapter - I
Introduction

Geo-Political and Historical Perspective of West Asia

The spectrum of West Asia gives a reflection of different kinds of tensions, unrests and turmoils in its various forms i.e. economic, political, strategic, territorial and emotional. The political scenario of West Asia is full of conflicts and Western influences - both regional and global in nature.

There are many unifying factors which have shaped its historical and political development. Further, the diversity of geography, cultures, religions, languages and social and ethnic groups within the region has given a distinctive character to this region.

A. Geo-Physics of West Asia:

The region centres around the junction of Africa and Europe where the land mass is deeply penetrated by the seas— Mediterranean sea, Red sea, Black sea and Arabian sea etc. The land and sea routes tie the region with the rest of the world. Along with these— people, ideas and plants as well as the trade flourished which nurtured cities and enriched empires here. The region was a great transit zone and a major crossroad in the World.

The geographical factor in West Asia has great significance since no other region is located so strategically as West Asia where three continents— Africa, Europe and Asia meet together. It lies immediately to the South of Heartland (former Soviet Union) and forms along with Western Europe more than half of Rimland\(^1\).

---

**Historical Background**

Of all the external influences, the legacy of Ottoman empire had deepest impact on their thinking. The Turks entered into this region as slaves, they were more political than speculative, more realistic than mystical and more worldly than other Muslims. They accepted Islam because it fostered their material spirit. Turkey was the most active and advanced country at that time. Only this empire had foothold in European soil. In Asian side it meant Asia minor or Anatolia and Anatolia had been the core of the Ottoman empire and their imperial activities flourished from this centre.⁴

The Ottoman empire reached at its hight of glory in sixteenth century. They penetrated deep into the heart of Europe and threatened the Roman empire. In Southern Russia too, the Turks occupied Black sea and Caucasian mountain. And in north African coast Islam had reached its zenith under the Caliphates.⁵ (1683)

The downfall of the Ottoman empire was not overnight, it took different turns at different stages. Problems of succession to the throne of Caliph and governor, corruption among high officials and rise of powerful European nation states contributed to undermine the empire. Apart from it, there were some reformist groups known as 'Tanzemmat' led by Rashid Pasha and Midhat Pasha and lastly there was Hamid II among young Turks. Gradually, European powers started to take interest as Portuguese were motivated by commerce and they assisted 'Mumlus'. France joined due to its economic competition with Italy. Britain was with France and highly interested in Iraq (Basra) and Saudi Arabia. Russia since the time of Catherine empress was interested in northern border of the empire and there was a long six years war with Russia and Ottomans for Iranian border that ended with the treaty 'Kuchuk Kainarji' of 1774.⁶

---

⁴ Ibid. p 73
⁵ Ibid. p 9
⁶ Peretz, Don. The Middle East Today. 11nd (Edn). Holt Rinehart and Winston. 1971 USA. pp 61 to 81
The first direct onslaught started when Napoleon Bonaparte initiated direct military intervention in 1798 and after his collapse in 1814, again British suzerainty started in this area (West Asia). After thirty eight years, Crimean war took place in 1853-1856 in which Britain, France and Ottoman were in the same alliance against Russia on the matter of protection to the Catholic orthodox Christians in Palestine. After some years, France fought with Prussia (Germany) and Ottomans had to participate in that war from French side. There had been a chronic rivalry between Russians and Muslims, this malice again manifested in Balkans war of 1880. Russia strongly supported slavism, slavs and Christians against the Muslims of Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenergo and Rumania (these were under the Ottoman empire. Meanwhile prime minister Bismark made a secret deal with Austria and Russia that is known as Berlin conference of 1890 Germany encouraged Russian occupation in Balkans. German interest in West Asia increased and railway lines were established between Basra, Kuwait and Berlin. 

B - West Asia during the World Wars I and II.

The glory of Ottoman empire had started to loose all its charm and strength and these two world wars proved to be death knell for this empire. The Ottomans joined Axis powers during the World War I and there were following secret agreements among Allied victors to divide it.

1. Constantinople agreement and Hussain MacMohan correspondence 1913-1914
2. London Agreement 1915
3. Sykes Picot Agreement 1916 and
4. Balfour declaration 1917

After the end of World War I the Ottomans were destroyed and everything was determined and distributed through League of Nation's

\[\text{Ibid, pp 82 to 93}\]
Mandate system among the major powers according to their interest. Treaty of 'Sevres' finally gave death blow to the Ottoman of empire. After one year of the treaty of 'Laussane of (1923) in Switzerland it further consolidated the position of Western imperial powers in the region. In 1923 Turkey (Anatolia) was kept free from foreign control and the arrival of Nationalist Mustafa Kamal Pasha (Ataturk) gave a new colour to Turkey. Very soon Turkey became a modern doorway of commerce and trade between West Asia and Europe. As a result of open door policy U.S. interests were involved only in Saudi Arabia with ARAMCO oil company and in Iraqi Petroleum company. In World War II, West Asia again got involved in international affairs. At the end of war Britain lost its paramount position in the region, Russia asserted its influence in North Iran and US was developing its position after its reentry into the war. France was no longer able to contain nationalist movements in Lebanon and Syria. Britain was facing tremendous challenges due to rising nationalist movements in Egypt and Iraq. And even in Palestine Britain was no longer to control the situation. Meanwhile a gradual cold war between Russia (USSR) and US'West' started. Upto 1949-50, Britain also left most of the areas and after the creation of Israel state the Palestine-Israel issue was handed over to the U.N.O. Britain departed from the scene and the vacuum was filled up by the emerging superpowers - USA and USSR.8

The US interest in West Asia at that time was not strategic but it was political and economic and it established its air bases in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Whereas Soviet interests were strategic, political and ideological. After British departure US successfully tried to hegemonize the area. Another important reason to have an upper over West Asia was to protect the region -(lest the area fall under the Soviet influence and become a tool of the hands of Soviet Union). This would have been certainly intolerable for the US. Since 1947 the 'Truman doctrine' became

8 Ibid. p.p. 95 to 120
the part of US foreign policy to contain Soviet influence and it was considered as a 'peacetime West Asia commitment' specially for Greece and Turkey.⁹

C -History and Geography of Saudi Arabia

All of the independent countries of West Asia are successor nations of Ottoman empire directly or indirectly. The one remaining area of former Ottoman empire in southern West Asia is known as Arabian peninsula, it lies between Persian Gulf and Red sea ¹⁰

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a land mass of immense 873,972 square miles in size, constituting a distinct geographical entity bordered on West by the Red sea in the South, by the Indian Ocean in east and by Arabian Gulf. The kingdom is itself bounded on the north by Jordon, Iraq and Kuwait, on the east by the Gulf countries - Bahrain, Qatar and U.A E., on the south by the Sultanat of Oman and two Yamani republics and in West by the Red sea ¹¹

The Great Britain had acquired extensive political influence along with the eastern and southern coasts of Arabian peninsula ¹² King Abdul Aziz (1880-1953) Ibn Abdul Rehman Al Faisal Al Saud is considered to be one of the greatest chiefs and leaders of this century and one of the most prominent history makers in modern times. In harsh conditions and difficult circumstances he set out from Kuwait to Riyadh with a small army and some followers and fought for his ancestral glory (ruled by Imam Abdul Aziz 1765-1803, Ottoman period) He succeeded in regaining Saudi Arabia ¹³

⁹ Ibid, p 121
¹² Ibid, p 87
After conquering Riyadh and securing it, King Abdul Aziz led his campaign for unification of the whole country. He annexed Al Qassim, Al Ahsa, Asir and Hail. He conquered Taif and Mecca in 1924. Afterwards entire Hejaz area was under his rule. The process of unification was nearly completed by 1926 and in 1927 the British government had to recognize King Abdul Aziz's supremacy in the area of Sultanate of Najad and Hejaz.

Since the situation was well under control, King Abdul Aziz declared the formal establishment of the government of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on September 23, 1932 corresponding to 1351 Hijri when a majority of the world powers recognized the sovereignty of the new nation. And this day became National Day of Saudi Arabian Kingdom.

The territorial differences with Yemen were resolved by the peace treaty of Taif concluded in May 1934 and the process of reunification was over. Everything was settled down, a period of reorganization, restructuring, reorientation and development started. Oil was discovered in 1933, the main resource of Saudi Arabia. At political level King concluded different treaties and participated in foundation of Arab League in 1945. Lastly, it also became a member of UNO in the same year.

When the kingdom of Saudi Arabia was formed in 1932, it lacked modern government, institutions, and well organized administration. Gradually, Quranic prescriptions and principles of Shariat were made the base of Saudi political system. After 1953 a Council of Ministers was set up for the whole Saudi Kingdom including Hejaz and Najd. King Faisal was the first Prime Minister of that council. In 1964 he became king after

14 Ibid, p 5-6
15 Iqbal Mohd Sheikh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Glimpses of Progress, p 1 (Saudi Embassy in India 94)
16 Dialogue Today 1994, op cit p 6
king Saud and he was assassinated by his nephew in March 1975. He was succeeded by King Khalid who died of heart attack in June 1982 and King Fahad preceded him. The kingdom has been under the Western influence specially United States of America.

D. Discovery of oil and its impact on West Asia

In general oil is the most strategic raw liquid material armies on which alone - armies navies and airforces can move even the atomic age. Thus the geostrategic uniqueness of West Asia is based on twin pillars:- one of which represents the old centre of world communication and the other newly developed natural power oil, vital for peace and war both.

The history of oil in the Middle East and the Arab World goes back many centuries ago. A German mission first reported oil in 1908 in West Asia. In 1933 Petroleum was discovered in Saudi Arabia and by 1938 Dammam, Ras Tanura and other oil fields had started to produce a plenty of oil.

Since the world war II oil output increased rapidly. During the early 1940’s Iran was the largest oil producer followed by Iraq and Saudi Arabia. During the decade 1955-1965 Kuwait became the largest oil producer followed by Saudi Arabia and Iran. With the dawn of 1970’s Saudi Arabia and Iran emerged as leading producers of oil in West Asia.

Significantly, oil resource in West Asia has gained immense momentum and this natural resource proves to be central factor which determines the economic, political and strategic developments in West Asia.

20 Farsy, Al Foud. op cit. p 96
Oil, the Liquid Gold in Saudi Arabia

With the discovery and exploitation of petroleum during the past half century, Saudi Arabia became the world's largest exporter of oil and natural liquids. In 1933, the founder of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia granted the right to the Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL) to explore oil in kingdom. Oil was discovered in 1933 to 1938 and its utilization flourished through U.S. company and the same was renamed as ARAMCO (Arabian American Company of Oil) in 1944. In 1948, four U.S. companies shared in ARAMCO. The largest oil refinery is situated in Ras Tanura with a capacity of 10 million tonnes per annum and this is owned by ARAMCO. ARAMCO was producing 500,000 barrels of crude oil a day at that time (early fifties). It increased by an average of 19 percent a year from 1945 to 1974 reaching 82 million barrels a day in 1974.22

The Petromin Company of Petroleum and Minerals.

To develop the entire natural resource sectors and harness it to the service of overall developments, the government established Petromin as the state Petroleum company in 1962. Petromin's role is to maximize the usefulness of the kingdom's soil, gas and minerals. Its range of activity includes refining, pipelines, storage, drilling and power generation. More recently the Kingdom has formed the Saudi Arabian Marketing and Refining Company (SAMARIC).24

OPEC Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries produces 25% of the world oil reserves. Saudi Arabia plays a pivotal role in affairs of the OPEC. The idea of OPEC was initiated by Arab League to develop a common policy of major petroleum companies operating within their

23 Farsy, Al Foud Op cit. p 98
24 Ibid. p 102
boundaries including non Arab states such as Venezuela from Latin America.

The negotiation started in 1947 in Washington to achieve a coordinated petroleum policy among the large exporters. In 1949 Venezuelan delegation exchanged views on petroleum policies with Iran, Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The first Arab petroleum congress was convened in Cairo in 1959. The government of Saudi Arabia and Venezuela issued a declaration on 13th May, 1960, recommending to pursue a common policy in order to protect their rightful interests but the countries did not take immediate action. Sudden decrease in petroleum prices in 1960 made them feel endangered and encouraged them to unite on a common front. Thus Baghdad conference, (10-14 August, 1960) declared its intention to establish this organization finally. Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq and Kuwait were among the members. It came into existence in September 1960. 25

As OPEC's largest producer, Saudi Arabia realizes the importance of stable global economy and has therefore acted as the organization's primary moderating force. The Kingdom functions as "swing producer" adjusting its production in response to fluctuation in the world market and according to OPEC quotas. 26

OAPEC Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries.

The proposal for OAPEC was submitted by Saudi Arabia in 1967 summer in order to establish an Arab Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. For the first time the agreement was signed in January 1968 and it was finalized. The headquarter lies in Kuwait. The member countries of OAPEC are Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and U.A.E. Since its creation OAPEC has made great efforts

25 Ibid. p p 108-110
26 Disfogue Today op cit. p 33
towards achieving its goals and serving the economies of all Arab as well as member countries. OAPEC has played a key role in reducing duplication of effort and investment and rationalizing aspects of oil and gas production.\textsuperscript{27}

Thus Saudi Arabia has been a country of immense significance in West Asia by its resources oil, gas that is vital in world economy and by its political set up and multi-dimensional policies that has opened many avenues for superpower involvement especially the U.S. Ever since its independence it has been fostering and advancing friendly relations with the U.S.

\textsuperscript{27} Foud Al Farsy, \ldots op cit. p.p.117,118