The death of Mohamed ibn Rashid in 1897 left a void in Arab politics which it was beyond the competence of his successor, Abdul Rashid ibn Rashid, to fill in. The passing away of the al-Bahraini, who symbolised in his person the rallying point of Arab unity for over a decade, activated an ambition in Egyptian Mubarak to win for himself hegemony over the Arabian peninsula. With the integrity of his principality a matter of vital concern for the British Government, the Kuwait chief could easily anshark upon an adventurous policy; while the fact that the head of the Al-Sabah family, Abdul Rahman bin Salim, was living as an exile in his capital offered him an opportunity for furthering his ambitions on the pretext of supporting the Al-Sabahs. The chief's manoeuvres dragged the British into a policy of involvement in the turbulent politics of Central Arabia.


Towards the close of 1900 Ibn Rashid made a probing movement towards the interior, which was followed by an incursion by the Kuwaiti chief in person. The allies, however, could not make much headway. They had to beat a hasty retreat on being confronted by the Hail forces. Ibn Rashid pursued them right up to the borders of Basra and it was only the intervention of Khosin Pasha, the Governor-General of the vilayet, which saved Mubarak from unpleasant consequences, though in return for Turkish 'good offices' he was obliged to re-affirm his allegiance to Sultan Abdul Hamid.

The inconclusive skirmishes in the desert did not mark the end of the struggle for Arabian hegemony. Immediately after returning to his capital

1. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, C.I. dated 5 October, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.81, November 1900; Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, C.I. dated 3 November, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.47, February 1901.

2. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, C.I. dated 9, 14 and 17 November, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.27, 42 and 50, November 1900; H.M.'s Consul, Basra to H.M.'s Charge d'Affaires, Constantinople dated 22 November, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.73, February 1901.

3. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, C.I. dated 26 November, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.56, February 1901.
Mubarik applied to the Bushire Residency for assistance in defending his principality, throwing the blame for recent hostilities squarely on the shoulders of the Hail Amir. The truculent tone of the chief's communication convinced the Resident that, with the British authorities having guaranteed the integrity of Kuwait, Mubarik was bent upon exploiting the situation to the end of making a bind for control over mainland Arabia. As he told the Foreign Department:

Mubarik is, I believe, confident that he is now in a position to inflict a crushing blow on the Amir (Ibn Rashid), by which means he sees the chance of removing a powerful enemy and considerably increasing his own prestige throughout the country-side.

The problem of restraining Mubarik was also exercising the mind of Sir Nicholas O'Connor. England, the Ambassador argued, was interested in defending the integrity of Kuwait because of its importance vis-a-vis the Baghdad Railway question; but she could not permit herself to be exploited as a tool for the

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2. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, C.I. dated 3 December, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.70, February 1901.
3. Ibid.
Besides a struggle for power between Ha'il and Kuwait would weaken both the participants and thereby increase Turkish influence over Arabia. British interests demanded that there be no conflict between the two states. To effect this the Kuwait chief could be warned that no assistance would be given to him if he provoked a conflict with Ha'il. Ibn Rashid could similarly be informed that the British authorities would restrain the Shaikh of Kuwait, and expected him, on his part, to abstain from any aggressive movement.

O'Connor's suggestion commended itself to the Foreign Office. But the situation in Arabia had already passed the stage of diplomatic intervention. In December, 1900, Hamad and Abdul Rahman again ventured out of Kuwait at the head of a sizable army. The Kuwait forces met with some initial success. Majd fell to the chief without a blow and

1. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 10 February, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.121, June 1901.
2. Ibid.
3. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 26 February, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.65, March 1901.
4. Report from News-Agent, Kuwait dated 22 December, 1900; F.D.S P.No.58, February 1901.
he appointed the Wahhabi leader as Governor of Riyadh. Hubarak next marched into Jebel Shammar, Ibn Rashid's home province. However, turned to bay the Hail Amir fell upon the allies with a strength born of desperation and virtually annihilated their army at Sarif near Borsyda on 17 March, 1901. The defeat shattered Hubarak's dream of founding an Arab Empire under his aegis.

The Hail Amir's victory caused serious concern to the British authorities. The Resident at Bushire proceeded posthaste to Kuwait to forestall a possible coup against Hubarak and to gain firsthand knowledge of events. He got a garbled version of occurrences in the interior from the Sheikh, who refused to admit that he had been beaten by Ibn Rashid. However, Kemball was sure that Hubarak had experienced a severe reverse, and was in a precarious position. The important question was whether Ibn Rashid would follow his victory with the invasion of Kuwait. It was not easy to guess what course of action he would pursue; but the Amir's behaviour would, in the ultimate analysis, be determined by the Ottoman Government.

2. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 20 April, 1901; F.D.S.F.No.164, June 1901.
3. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 20 April, 1901; F.D.S.F.No.164, June 1901. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 18 April, 1901; F.D.S.F.No.148, June 1901.
Turkey's attitude gave no ground for satisfaction to the British authorities. From Basra, Consul Wretielew reported the arrival of General Mohammed Pasha Daghestani, Commander-in-Chief of the VI Army Corps, with the probable intention of concerting a military movement in the direction of the principality. However, the Porte had apparently not forgotten the warning served to it earlier by O'Connor. Mohsin Pasha, who favoured a circumspect policy, persuaded Constantinople to desist from embarking upon military measures. Pursuing an alternative line, the Pasha paid a visit to Awsit, ostensibly to affect a reconciliation between Ibn Rashid and Mubarik, but actually to inveigle the chief into accepting Ottoman protection. However, Mubarik proved deaf to his entreaties; instead, he appealed to Kornball to be taken under British protection on a formal basis.

Mubarik's request for protection coincided with

1. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 25 April, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.151, June 1901.

2. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 11 and 13 May, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.157 and 198, June 1901.

3. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 3 June, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.228, June 1901.
An unexpected overture from Hai. An emissary of Ibn Rashid told "retisian that his master, being sick of Turkish duplicity, wanted to enter into treaty relations with the British Government. The Amir would accept the British position at Kuwait; he would further grant a concession for a trans-Arabian railway, if the Government so desired. In return, England should let him replace Mubarak by a protege of his, and permit a free flow of arms through the Gulf to Hai. O'Connor did not regard the Hai Amir's feeler with enthusiasm. He pointed out that in view of the assurances given to Turkey earlier, acceptance of Ibn Rashid's proposal would be "impolitical and impracticable .... At the same time it would be foolish to antagonise a ruler who could, if he wanted, make a nuisance of himself along the Gulf littoral. An ideal thing would be to induce Mubarak into giving satisfaction to Ibn Rashid for his past conduct. If the Kuwait chief could be so persuaded, England's position in the Gulf would be strengthened without giving any cause for offence to Turkey.

1. H.M.'s Consul, Basra to H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople dated 3 June, 1901; F.D.S.P. No. 190, October 1901.

2. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 23 May, 1901; F.D.S.P. No. 184, October 1901.

3. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 1 June, 1901; F.D.S.P. No. 219, June 1901.
When the Imperial Government referred Ibn Rashid's overture to Calcutta, the Foreign Department for a moment indulged in extravagant dreams of British influence encompassing the entire Arabian peninsula. It was pointed out that the Ottoman hold over the region rested purely on military force. Dissensions in other parts of the empire could necessitate the withdrawal of Turkish garrisons at any moment. An understanding with England would be of advantage to the Amir when such an eventuality came to pass. Nor did the British Government stand to lose through the bargain. Complications at Kuwait would be resolved for once and for all. The railway concession, too, had its attractions. According to a Foreign Department official:

Should a line be practicable the optimists vision might contemplate a railway system, entirely under British control, which would eventually link Cairo with the upper waters of the Yangtse and the capital of Szecamn.2

Fortunately for Anglo-Turkish relations, Curzon refused to succumb to the megalomania afflicting the Foreign Department. The Viceroy concurred in O'Connor's recommendation. Ibn Rashid's request would

1. Note by H. Daly, Deputy-Secretary, Foreign Department, GCI dated 4 June, 1901: F. .S.F. No. 118/230, October 1901.

2. Ibid. Curzon's reaction to the suggestion was brief but eloquent. He noted on the margin: "Heaven forbid!"
have to be turned down, although in a tactful way. Perhaps a secret mission to Hail would prove useful. The Amir could be assured that England would not permit Mubarik to embark on an aggressive course in the future. He could also be given to understand that if Turkey attempted to conquer Arabia, the British Government would support the Arab cause, and restrain the Sultan. As for Kuwait, either of two alternative policies could be pursued. England could declare an open protectorate over Mubarik, or stick to the status quo. If the former measure was adopted, then the Government would be committed to defend the principality; but Turkey would not dare to move against Mubarik once he was taken under British protection on a formal basis. However, only the Foreign Office was in a position to judge whether the international situation permitted of such a move. On the other hand, even if Her Majesty's Government decided to maintain the status quo, it would be necessary to warn the Porte that no encroachment on the principality would be tolerated.

Lansdowne had little difficulty in choosing

1. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 8 June, 1901. F.D.S.P. No. 229, June 1901.
2. Ibid.
one of the two alternatives indicated by Curzon. He dismissed Ibn Rashid's overture as unworthy of serious notice. Mubarik's request for formal protection would also have to be rejected, since it was not in England's interest to direct attention to the Gulf by anything even remotely resembling a provocative move. As the Foreign Minister viewed the situation, it was necessary to consolidate the hold acquired over Kuwait and to work simultaneously for a rapprochement between Mubarik and the Emir Amir.

However, events in the Gulf soon necessitated more stringent measures. There were indications that the Porte had abandoned the policy of circumspection favoured by Mohsin Pasha for an activist role. The Pasha had been sacked; and troops were once again being concentrated near Basra under the command of General Edhem Pasha, the hero of the Turco-Greek War. O'Connor was sceptical of the ability of Turkey to execute any serious military move. Nevertheless, the Porte did make a filibustering attempt to force

1. India Office to Foreign Office dated 14 June, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.208, October 1901; Foreign Office to India Office dated 15 July, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.232, October 1901; Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 23 July, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.235, October 1901.

2. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 8 August, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.227, October 1901.

3. Tel.H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 8 August, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.274, October 1901.
the Kuwait chief into submission. Early in August a Turkish ship-of-war, the "Zuhafl", slipped into Kuwait harbour and only the presence of H.M.S. "Persues" prevented its commander from landing troops on Kuwaiti soil.1

The rebuff experienced by the "Zuhafl" led the Ottoman authorities to take up the question on a diplomatic plane. Tewfik Pasha protested to O'Connor against the action of the "Persues", and asked him whether England would outright annex the principality.2 His query gave the ambassador the opening he had been searching for. He assured the Pasha that England had no intention of disturbing the status quo in the Gulf unless compelled to do so as a riposte to Ottoman moves. The troop concentrations at Basra had created a delicate situation and any fresh incident would precipitate a crisis. However, if the Porte gave an assurance that it would not interfere in Kuwait, the situation would at once become normal.

The focus of activity next shifted to London, where Turkey could lean upon Germany for diplomatic support. German opinion had followed events in the

1. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, QM dated 26 August and 29 August, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.256 and 283, October 1901.

2 Tel. H.M's Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 29 August, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.299, October 1901.
The Cologne Gazette, for instance, expressed the hope that England would not use forcible means to occupy the debouche of the "contemplated great railway". More concretely, Count Metternich, the German Ambassador at London, interpreted the action of the "Persians" as amounting to the establishment of a protectorate over the principality, and accused England of violating the Treaty of Berlin whereby she had guaranteed the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. The Foreign Office brushed aside the German protest by asserting that it had no desire to set up a protectorate over the principality and that it would not take any steps to alter the existing state of affairs in the Gulf.

Metternich's protest was followed by a Turkish note. Reiterating the arguments of his German colleague, the Ottoman Ambassador claimed Kuwait to be an integral

1. Article in Cologne Gazette digested in Statesman dated 16 November, 1901.

2. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 6 September, 1901; F.D.S.P. No. 268, October 1901.

3. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 9 September, 1901; F.D.S.P. No. 271, October 1901.
part of the empire since 1871, and contended that Mobarik did not possess the authority to enter into the engagement on which England premised her rights over the principality. Lansdowne, needless to say, was not prepared to listen to such claims. He warned the Ottoman Ambassador that if Turkey insisted on raising the question of her rights over the principality, England would convert her present tentative relationship with Mobarik into something much more concrete. ¹ Lansdowne’s plain speaking led to immediate results. Towfik Pasha informed O’Connor that Abdul Hamid would not interfere in Kuwait if the assurances given by the Foreign Office to Metternich were formally communicated to the Sultan. The Foreign Office had no objection to such a course, and the Porte in return told the British authorities that Basra had been instructed to refrain from making any move towards the principality.²

The formula emerging of the tripartite exchanges in London determined the pattern of power relationship in Arabia-on-the-Gulf till 1914. British

1. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 12 September, 1901: F.O.S.F. No.281, October 1901.

2. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 27 September, 1901: F.O.S.F. No.310, October 1901.
interests, to which the development of the Baghdad Railway question had imparted an added emphasis, were restricted to the maritime regions. The Government of India could, therefore, afford to view events in inner Arabia with indifference. However, Mubarik's ambitions almost dragged the British authorities into a policy of involvement in the interior. Lansdowne's diplomatic skill was taxed to the utmost in keeping the Government clear of commitments in Central Arabia, the acceptance of which would not have furthered British interests in any direction.

THE RISE OF THE AL SAUD

Mubarik's discomfiture at Sarif momentarily crushed the spirit of the anti-Rashidi forces in Arabia. Both the Kuwait chief and Imam Abdul Rahman had no stomach for further adventures in the desert. However, in the Imam's son, Abdul Aziz Al Saud, the Wahhabi cause possessed an outstanding leader. Abdul Aziz was initiated into statecraft by the astute Mubarik and most Arabists are agreed in that the Kuwait chief inculcated in him a sensitive awareness of England's preeminent position in the Persian Gulf.

In the autumn of 1901 Abdul Aziz Al Saud suddenly pounced upon Riyadh and captured the Wahhabi capital. Ibn Rashid was quick in reacting to this challenge, though his response indicates that already the Hail Amir was losing his grip over events. He attempted to draw Turkey into the struggle by giving out that Ottoman possessions in Arabia had assumed great importance in British eyes because of the Baghdad Railway scheme and that Abdul Aziz's expedition was covertly supported by England and constituted part of a design to occupy El Hasa. While the Hail Amir's attempt to play upon Turkish fears proved abortive, his Saudi rival fast consolidated his position. The worsening situation convinced Ibn Rashid of the necessity of a determined effort to retrieve his position. In July, 1902, he marched out of Hail to crush the Wahhabis but was himself defeated at Dilm in November, 1902.

1. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, Govt. of India dated 2 March, 1902; F.D.S.P. No. 342, July 1902.

2. Ibn Rashid to Turkish Government dated nil; F.D.S.P. No. 20, October 1902.

3. J. A. Saldanha, Precis of Kuwait Affairs, (1896-1904), pp. 62-4; H. M.'s Consul, Basra to H. M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople dated 31 July, 1902; F.D.S.P. No. 27, October 1902; Political Agent, Bahrain to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 17 November, 1902; F.D.S.P. No. 234, April 1903.
Dilmah marks a decisive stage in the duel between the Saudis and the Rashids. It enhanced Abdul Aziz's stature and we find him trying to establish European contacts in order to buttress his position. Towards the close of 1902 the Amir travelled to Kuwait where he met French and Russian agents. Colonel C.A. Kemball, the British Resident at Bushire, did not attach much of a significance to this meeting. The Resident was told by Abdul Aziz that he had been offered protection by the French and Russian representatives. But Kemball was sceptical of such an offer having been made and felt that the Amir was merely trying to arouse British interest on his behalf. Yet it was clear that Central Arabia was being drawn more and more into the vortex of international politics.

Throughout 1903 Abdul Aziz repeated his initial success in a series of encounters with the Rashidi forces. However, his victories contained in their matrix the germs of serious danger. For Turkey could not afford to view with indifference the exclusion from Arab politics of her protege, especially by an anti-Ottoman dynasty. The obvious strategy for the

1. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, Govt. of India dated 16 March, 1903; F.D.S.P. No.69, April 1903.
Wahhabis to adopt was to involve England in Arabia as a counter-poise to Turkey. Feelers in this direction were soon sent. In November, 1903, a Wahhabi agent met Captain Prideaux, the Political Agent at Bahrain. The emissary spoke of a 'nationalistic' upsurge among the Arabs and of their desire to free themselves of Ottoman rule. After Abdul Aziz had defeated Ibn Rashid, he would try to eject the Turks from El Hasa. In this task he would succeed, for the people were tired of Ottoman misrule. But his success would be lasting only if England undertook to protect his littoral from a Turkish invasion. Would the Government undertake such an obligation?

While Prideaux returned an evasive answer, the overture was received with interest in India. Sir Louis Dane, the Foreign Secretary, ruled out the possibility of protection being given to the Wahhabis. Yet there was an obvious need for political contact with Riyadh, since it would be inexpedient to let Abdul Aziz regard the British with hostility in case he consolidated his power. The territories of Najd included the right flank of the Baghdad Railway and

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an established power there not restrained by Treaty relations could prove troublesome. In view of these considerations Colonel Kemball was consulted on the expediency of a secret mission being sent to Riyadh. The Resident expressed himself against the proposal. The despatch of a mission could not be kept a secret from Turkey or Hail and would be interpreted as an open espousal by England of the Wahhabi cause. Such a committal would be premature. No doubt the Al Saud had somewhat established themselves; but one could not rule out the possibility of the Hail Amir staging a come-back.

The proposal for a mission to Riyadh was not pursued in view of the Resident's advice but one gets an impression of increased British interest in Central Arabia from a despatch addressed to the Imperial Government on the question. The Amir's overture was

1. Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 15 December, 1903; also see Secretary's Note dated 20 February, 1904; F.D.S.P. No. 207/218, June 1904.

2. Under-Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI, to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 6 January, 1904; F.D.S.P. No. 208, June 1904.

3. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 5 February, 1904; F.D.S.P. No. 202, June 1904.

4. Secret Despatch to the Secretary of State for India No. 69 dated 24 March, 1904; F.D.S.P. No. 215, June 1904.
brought to the notice of the India Office and it was pointed out that in the past the Government had maintained political contact with the Wahhabis. Relations with Najd had abruptly ceased with the invasion of 1871, and the consequent rise of the Hashids. However, developments like the maturing of trans-Turkish railway schemes and the rising fortune of the Al Saud made it necessary for the Indian authorities to exhibit a more lively interest in the affairs of inner Arabia.

With the Government of India poised on the brink of an active Arabian policy, it would have been surprising if Turkey had not betrayed sensitivity about her position in the peninsula. We got a glimpse into the motivations of Ottoman policy in a memorandum on Arabia by Talib Bey, an ex-Governor of Al Hasa. Talib Bey's report on Arabia, though exhibiting excessive Anglophobia, is a remarkable essay in statesmanship. The Bey based his thesis on the premise: that with the projected development of communications in Turkish Arabia, England had become vitally interested in the Ottoman territories bordering the Gulf, which commanded one of the highways to India. Unless Constantinople adopted a resolute policy the tragedy enacted in

1. Report on Arabia by Talib Bey, ex-Governor of Al Hasa dated nil, F.D.S.P. No.216, June 1904.
Egypt would be repeated in Turkish Arabia and the whole of the regions and districts of the Persian Gulf and the Tigris would pass under the protection of England, the craftiest and most astute of (country) all. As remedial measures Telib Bay recommended a series of steps, commencing from a more active policy towards Kuwait and ending with administrative reforms designed to give the Arabs a greater measure of internal autonomy. He referred in particular to the necessity of annulling the engagements which the Arab chiefs had contracted with foreign powers (i.e. England) and of cautioning them against surrendering their prerogatives without the knowledge of the Imperial Government.

Moved by the sentiments embodied in Telib Bay's memorandum Constantinople decided to intervene in the struggle between Abdul Aziz and Ibn Rashid. In May, 1904, the Government of India learnt that troops from Baghdad had been directed to the assistance of the Hail Amir. At the Bushire Residency apprehensions were aroused concerning the safety of Kuwait, whose ruler was known to be countenancing the Al Saud. It was, however, Abdul Aziz who confronted the supreme

1. Ibid.
2. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, G.I I dated 3 May, 1904: F.D.S.P. No.329, August 1904.
crisis of his career, for to vanquish the Rashids reinforced by Turkish regulars was a formidable problem. In the face of the Turco-Rashidi line-up, the Wahhabis once again turned to the British Government. The Imam Abdul Rahman wrote to the Bushire Residency, protesting against the Turkish invasion and formally asking for British protection. In addition, the Wahhabi leader wrote to Mubarak of the Russian offer of protection, which, as he put it, came to his mind in the context of the Turkish move. This epistle was obviously designed to alarm the British. Yet the Foreign Department did not treat it as a piece of bluff. Apparently afraid that Abdul Aziz would approach Russia for help, it requested London to warn the Porte against military intervention in Arabia.

Developments in Arabia found the Indian authorities involved in a conflict of opinion with the British Ambassador at Constantinople. O'Connor told the Foreign Office that there was no likelihood of Sultan Abdul Hamid being prevented from following a course which, it could be plausibly argued, was calculated to prevent a disturbance of the status quo in

1. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 16 May, 1904; F.D.S.P. No.335, August 1904.

2. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 28 April, 1904; F.D.S.P. No.323, August 1904.
Arabia. The Al Saud were actually trying to upset the equilibrium which England had undertaken to respect in 1901. If he acted on the Indian recommendation, he could legitimately be accused of violating this arrangement. As for the Imam's reference to the Russian offer, O'Connor dismissed it as a manoeuvre better designed to alienate rather than to encourage support. The best line of action would be to await developments, while maintaining a resolute attitude towards the territorial integrity of Kuwait. The policy sketched by O'Connor commended itself to the Foreign Office, which felt that countenance to Riyadh could even prove dangerous. Past experience indicated that the re-establishment of the Wahhabis would lead to increasing pressure on the maritime principalities under British protection, particularly Kuwait.

The Government of India contested the arguments advanced by the Foreign Office. It was true that England had undertaken to uphold the status quo in 1901.

1. Tel. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Foreign Office dated 23 May, 1904; F.D.S.P. No.368, August 1904.
2. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 25 May, 1904; F.D.S.P. No.349, August 1904.
3. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 29 May, 1904; F.D.S.P. No.350, August 1904.
But consistently with this undertaking, it could be maintained that England would abstain from interference in Najd only as long as Turkey also did so. The Government had no concern with Central Arabia. But British interests in Eastern Arabia and along the littoral were such that Turkish intervention in favour of the Rashids could not be viewed with indifference. The outcome of the struggle in the interior would necessarily affect the maritime Arab principalities in treaty relations with England. The understanding of 1901 imposed neutrality equally upon England and Turkey.

In conclusion, the Indian authorities questioned the Foreign Office analysis of Wahhabi motivations. The re-establishment of the Saudi dynasty would be territorial rather than ideological. It would present no difficulty in respect to the British sphere of influence. As opposed to this, if Ibn Rashid won through Ottoman assistance, the situation would become serious. On the analogy of 1871, it would result in the virtual absorption of Najd by the Turks. Besides, Mubarik’s position would be endangered and it would become difficult for the Imperial Government to protect him.

The Foreign Office was led by Indian insistence to instruct O’Connor to address a remonstrance to the Porte on the lines suggested by the Government of India. However, Turkey had already despatched troops to assist

1. Ibid.
Ibn Rashid. On 15 July, 1904, the Wahhabis confronted the Turco-Rashidi force at Bukairiyah in Qasim. The fighting which followed was a confused affair but ultimately the Al Saud emerged triumphant of the conflict.¹

The reverse at Bukairiyah convinced the Ottoman Government that it was essential to come to terms with Riyadh if at all any influence was to be retained in the peninsula.² Statesmanship also demanded a conciliatory attitude on the part of Abdul Aziz. No doubt he had won the first round; but unless assured of British support, which was not forthcoming, he could not challenge Ottoman power. In fact, even before the Porte could establish contact with them, the Al Saud were attempting to approach Constantinople with professions of loyalty for Abdul Hamid.³ Both parties were thus inclined towards a compromise and a meeting was arranged at Saifwan between Abdul Rahman and a senior Ottoman official to negotiate a settlement. At the Saifwan meeting the Turks agreed to Nejd being freed

¹ Iorimer, op. cit., pp. 1147-9; Philby, op. cit., pp. 245-7.
² H.M.'s Consul, Basra to H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople dated 18 February, 1905; F.O. O.P. No. 175, July 1905.
³ H.M.'s Charge d'Affaires, Constantinople to Foreign Office dated 8 November, 1904; F.O. O.P. No. 1126, February 1905.
of all interference on the part of Ibn Rashid. Abdul Aziz Al Saud was to be appointed Governor there after accepting Ottoman suzerainty. The province of Qasim was made into a buffer state between Hail and Najd, garrisoned and administered by Turkey. The arrangement amounted to a recognition by Turkey of the re-establishment of the Wahhabis in their former territory.

**Najd and the Maritime States**

The settlement of Safwan gave a new orientation to Arab politics. Immediately after the meeting, Turkey occupied Qasim with an alacrity which impressed Riyadh. Abdul Aziz now turned his attention to the Persian Gulf. The autumn of 1905 found him in El Hesa, where he tried to revive the relations that had existed in former times between the Wahhabis and the coastal peoples. The Amir also addressed letters to the various Trucial Chiefs to the effect that he would visit them early in 1906, ostensibly to present a demand for "mukat" or the traditional tribute.

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1. Memorandum on Safwan Meeting by Political Agent, Kuwait dated 28 February, 1905: F.O.S.P. No. 151, July 1905.


4. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOL dated 29 October, 1905: F.O.S.P. No. 765, May 1906.
Knowledge of the Amir's intentions caused concern in Oman, where memories of Wahhabi expansionism in the past were vivid. Major Cox, who had replaced Kemball at the Bushire Residency, told the Foreign Department that a vigilant attitude would have to be maintained regarding the spread of Wahhabi influence. The various Trucial Chiefs believed that in accordance with Treaty stipulations the Government would not interfere to protect their integrity so long as Riyadh did not commit aggression by way of sea. Such a policy had been actually pursued in the past, but it would be unwise to adhere to it in the altered condition of affairs.

The Resident's opinion was shared by the Foreign Department, which was not prepared to contemplate any diminution in influence in the maritime districts of Arabia. Dane was sure that Imperial Government would appreciate the Indian stand, since it did not involve interference in the mainland, but solely concerned the coastal region. The situation was brought to the notice of the India Office in a despatch analysing the Arabian situation. The Wahabis it was pointed out.

1. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, C.I. dated 12 February, 1906; F.D.S.P. No. 767, May 1906.

2. Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, C.I. dated 28 November, 1906; F.D.S.P. No. 761/798, May 1906.

3. Secret Despatch to Secretary of State for India No. 7 dated 11 January, 1906; F.D.S.P. No. 769, May 1906.
apparently established themselves in Najd. The cessation of hostilities with Hail had left Abdul Aziz free to devote his attention to regions where British interests were directly involved. The Government was of the firm opinion that Wahhabist expansion towards Oman ought to be checked, the more so since the Al Saud had accepted Abdul Hamid as their nominal suzerain. The time had come to enquire of Abdul Aziz whether he considered himself bound by the Treaty of 1866. Issuing such a move, which amounted to the establishment of relations with Riyadh, the Amir could be warned that England would not permit encroachments on her sphere of influence in Arabia.

While reserving comment on the more general question of establishing relations with Riyadh, the Foreign Office agreed to Abdul Aziz being served a warning. Then Cox asked Habarik to communicate the Government's sentiments to the Wahhabis, he found that

1. In 1866 the Wahhabis had agreed not to interfere with the Arab States in relations with the British Government; Vide C.U. Mitchison, A Collection of Treaties, etc., (Delhi 1933), p. 206.

relations between Kuwait and Najd had cooled off perceptibly. The Sheikh did not approve of the Amir's proceedings. He pointed out that he had already admonished Abdul Aziz, even threatening a disruption of relations if the Amir embarked upon a policy of aggression in the direction of Oman. However, the real reason for Mubarak's newly developed antagonism towards the Wahhabis lay in Riyadh's growing power.

For the Sheikh the most desirable state of Arab politics was the existence of rival factions of equal strength, with his principality holding the balance between them. Not surprisingly, therefore, one finds him manoeuvring to prevent the exclusion of Ibn Rashid from Arab politics. The Sheikh had opened a correspondence with the Heil Amir, and his feelers had received a satisfactory response, for Ibn Rashid too was unhappy about the Turco-Saudi rapprochement.

Mubarak outlined before Cox the scheme he proposed to advance before the rival parties. Central Arabia was to be divided into three political entities under Ibn Rashid, the Wahhabis and Kuwait respectively. The Heil Amir was to rule over the Jebel Shammar territories; Abdul Aziz was to get Najd and radi Dowsar; Jazan.

Boreyda, Sedayr and Waskh were to be under Kuwaiti influence. The arrangement was to function as a pan-Arab alliance against Turkey. The Resident considered Iubarik’s proposals impracticable, not the least because the Shaikh had been so generous with himself in the allocation of territory. The scheme was indeed a piece of futile speculation, for even as Iubarik was drawing up his plans, events in the interior had radically altered the situation. Hostilities between the Wahhabis and the Hail Amir were renewed early in 1906. On 11 April, 1906, Abdul Aziz defeated and killed Ibn Rashid in a battle fought near Boreyda. The Hail Amir’s death removed Abdul Aziz’s principal rival in Arabia.

**British Policy Towards the Wahhabis.**

With the passing away of Ibn Rashid the Wahhabis were well on their way to establish their hegemony over Central Arabia. However, they had yet to evolve a


2. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, D.I dated 15 March, 1906; F.O. S.P. No. 414, July 1906.

satisfactory relationship with the two powers most intimately interested in the peninsula. These were England and Turkey. The existence of Najd was possible only in alliance with either of the aforementioned powers. Left to themselves, the Al Saud would have plumbed for an English alliance. Turkey was for them the traditionally imperialist power. Besides, it was England, with her supremacy over the adjoining seas, that held the key to the Arabian Peninsula in her hands. However, in view of the reluctance of the British Government to be exploited to serve Wahhabi ends, Abdul Aziz had a difficult role to play between the two countries.

The dilemma confronting the Wahhabis explains their diplomatic manoeuvres at this juncture. In March, 1906, a representative of the Saudi Amir called upon the Political Agent at Bahrein. The envoy again told Prideaux that his master would throw the Turks out of El Hasa if England pledged to protect his littoral. In return, Abdul Aziz would permit the stationing of a British representative in one of his coastal towns. Prideaux refrained from giving any

1. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GJI dated 6 March, 1901; F.D.S.P. No. 775, May 1906.
encouragement to the Wahhabi envoy. Thereupon the
latter proceeded to Bushire and addressed a long
telegram to Constantinople assuring Abdul Hamid of
the loyalty of the Al Saud. Cox was not unduly
perturbed at the envoy's behaviour. The Amir was
obviously sitting on the fence. However, the fact
that his agent had first approached a British repre-
sentative was indicative of his real feelings.

Notwithstanding an attitude of indifference,
Abdul Aziz persisted in sending feelers to the English
representatives in the Gulf. The Resident, on his
part, felt that the situation in Central Arabia had
crystallised and a reconsideration of British policy
was imperative. Her Majesty's Government did not
regard the establishment of Turkish influence over
Rajah with favour. Yet it refused to be drawn into
the turbulent politics of Central Arabia. However,
could such a policy of abstention be pursued indefinite-
ly without proving detrimental to British interests?
It was conceivable that if Wahhabi feelers did not
evoke a satisfactory response, Riyadh would view the

1. Tal. Abdul Aziz Al Saud to Sultan Abdul
Hamid dated 18 February, 1906: F.O.S.F. No.775, May
1906.

2. Political Agent, Kuwait to Resident,
Persian Gulf dated 28 August, 1906: F.O.S.F. No.488,
November 1906.

3. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign
Department, G.1 dated 16 September, 1906: F.O.S.F. No.
488, November 1906.
British Government with hostility. The peoples of Arabia seemed disposed to group themselves under the Al Saud to free their country of the Turks. Realising that they were not strong enough to stand alone, they wanted to enlist the support of a European Power. If England did not respond, they would approach some other country. Besides, an understanding with the Al Saud would of itself safeguard the maritime districts under British protection. Cox stated in conclusion that he did not want the outright assumption of a protectorate over Najd. But the minimum British interests demanded was that the agreement of 1901 be interpreted in favour of an independent Central Arabia.

The Resident's arguments failed to convince the Foreign Office and the Indian authorities were told that there was to be no alteration in the policy pursued towards the Wahhabis. However, Abdul Aziz chose this juncture to make another overture to the Government. He explained to the Resident that the resources of Najd had been strained to the utmost in the wars with Ibn Rashid and that it

1. Demi-Official, Maj. F.Z. Cox to Sir Louis Dane dated 16 September, 1906; F.D.S.P. No.434/Sl1, November 1906; Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, COI dated 9 October, 1906; F.D.S.P. No.493, November 1906.

2. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 9 November, 1906; F.D.S.P. No.507, November 1906.
was essential for him on economic grounds to secure El Hasa, one of the most productive regions of Arabia. To this end the Amir desired to enter into a secret compact with the British Government. He planned to apply to the Porte for the Governorship of El Hasa. If his application was granted, he would declare himself independent at an opportune moment. If not, he would invade the province as soon as he was ready. In either case, a public appeal for British protection would be made only after the rupture. In return, Abdul Aziz would accept a treaty similar to that contracted by the Trucial Chiefs. The Amir's overture, which exhibited sensitivity towards England's diplomatic entanglements with Turkey, convinced Cox of Riyadh's earnestness and he told Calcutta that diplomatic courtesy demanded that some reply, positive or negative, be given to the Wahhabis.

The Wahhabi Amir's final overture induced the Imperial Government to ask for the views of the Indian Government regarding the policy to be pursued towards Arabia. This query led to a review of Arab politics.

1. Political Agent, Bahrain to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 17 November, 1906; F.D.S.P. No. 739, March 1907.

2. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GCI dated 24 November, 1906; F.D.S.P. No. 739, March 1907.

3. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 1 February, 1907; F.D.S.P. No. 762, March 1907.
which is illustrative of the trends of opinion prevailing in the Foreign Department. The incipient forces of Arab nationalism had already attracted attention in official circles. Interest was specially aroused by the speculations of a French journalist, M. Eugene Jung, who had written of Arab nationalism manifesting itself in the form of a great Wahhabi Empire, stretching from Egypt to Persia and Aden to the Gulf, and launched under the aegis of the triple entente. Jung’s idea was that the creation of such a state would serve as a check on the German ambition of establishing a protectorate over the Ottoman Empire.

How did Jung’s suggestion strike the Foreign Department? It would be pertinent to recollect that England had consistently opposed Turkish expansion in Arabia because Ottoman ambitions in the peninsula clashed with British interests in the Gulf. It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that the idea of an Arab national state partitioned off an empire which was fast becoming a German protectorate was not entirely repugnant to British opinion. As a Foreign Department

1. Extract from the "Mihanuaad &n" dated 17 September, 1906; F.D.S.P. No.492, November 1906.
analyst stated:

If a great Arab Empire were on the verge of materialisation, it would very likely be to England's advantage to give the magic touch which would call it into being, provided that to do so would not disastrously affect the balance of power elsewhere, and provided that the ruler of the new Empire would undertake to regard British ambitions and desires with a sympathetic eye.

Yet this very commentator confessed that the Government's policy had to be based on concrete premises rather than on abstract speculations. The question of an Arab national revival did not belong to the sphere of practical politics. Again, Turkey was deeply interested in Arabia. So long as this interest remained, it would be a diplomatic blunder to promote the disintegration of the empire.

The problem could also be viewed from the angle of the British protected maritime states, whose politics was inseparable from that of Central Arabia. So far as these were concerned, the growth of Wahhabi power involved disturbing considerations. For a consolidated power in the interior would necessarily attempt to break through to the Gulf. However,

1. Note by R.E. Holland, Assistant Secretary, Foreign Department, QDI dated 16 October, 1906; P.D.S.P. No.434/511, November 1906.
assuming the validity of this argument, it was El Hamza which offered the path of least resistance to the Wahhabis. Hence the repeated attempts at striking a bargain with England; attempts which were equally aimed at undermining Turkey's strategic hold over the peninsula. The power whose interests were irreconcilably hostile to Wahhabi aspirations was Turkey and not England.

The one effective argument which Cox had advanced against a negative policy in Arabia was that if Wahhabi overtures were spurned, they would assume a different direction. But was such an apprehension justified? England was supreme in the Gulf, with its naval vulnerability, no matter when Abdul Aziz delivered the coup de grace to Ottoman rule in Arabia, it was to the British that he would turn for protection. The Foreign Office could then decide upon its attitude, taking into consideration its relations with Constantinople.

The conclusions emerging of the aforementioned analysis were presented to the Imperial Government.

1. Note by R.F. Holland, Assistant Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 22 January, 1907: F.D.S.P. No. 734/76, March 1907.

2. Ibid.

3. Secret Despatch to Secretary of State for India No. 28 dated 1 April, 1907: F.D.S.P. No. 448, September 1907.
The Government of India maintained a discreet silence regarding the question of an Arab revival under the Wahhabis; but it placed on record its belief that the Al Saud would seek an early opportunity to clear El Hasa of the Turks. Such a consummation would result in the stabilization of their authority. British interests on the Arab littoral required an understanding with Riyadh if and when this happened. In the meanwhile, there was no risk of alienating the Wahhabis if their overtures remained unanswered, for Abdul Aziz could not afford to antagonise the British authorities. The best course of action would be to turn down the request for protection; at the same time, the Amir could be told that the British Government wanted to maintain friendly relations with him so long as he left the maritime Arab states alone.

While the Indian Government refused to go all the way suggested by Cox, even its cautious recommendations were considered inexpedient by O'Connor. The Ambassador conceded that the Wahhabis had to an extent consolidated their authority, though he did not rule out the possibility of the Turks reasserting themselves. However, his most cogent argument against

1. H.M's Ambassador, Constantinople to Foreign Office, dated 1 April, 1907; F.D.S.P. No. 448, September 1907.
England binding herself to pro-Wahhabi orientation was based on considerations in which Arabia figured only indirectly. He prognosticated that before the much talked of Arab national revival manifested itself concretely the chances are that the present Ottoman regime will have come to an end and be succeeded by a nationalist and popular Government, or that the disintegration of the component parts of the Empire will have begun. In the latter case we cannot escape our responsibility, but I should be sorry to see England enter into relations with a new Turkish regime, having previously agreed to a secret arrangement with Ibn Saud for the disruption of the Empire.1

O'Connor's contention that support to secessionist elements in Arabia would damage beyond repair the chances of an emancipated Turkey being weaned out of its pro-German orientation apparently clinched the issue. For we find the Imperial Government instructing the Indian authorities that it would be unwise to seek involvement, in any respect whatsoever, in the affairs of Central Arabia.2

The rejection by England of the Wahhabi request for protection, acquiescence in which would have amounted to an anti-Turkish alliance, has been dubbed a blunder

1. Ibid.
2. Secret Despatch to the GOI No.17, dated 3 May, 1907; F.D.S.P. No.448, September 1907.
by certain Arabists. Two specific charges are levelled against the Government: firstly that it was embarking upon a futile policy of appeasement towards Turkey, and secondly, that it failed to appreciate the sentiments of 'nationalism' which were activating the Arab people, and which found articulation in Abdul Aziz Al Saud.

Critics of British policy would do well to remember that England was then the greatest imperialist power in the world, and that the actions of governments are not usually inspired by altruistic motives. However, it is wrong to contend that Arab nationalism was totally lost on the British Government. Nor was O'Connor incorrect in asserting that support to the Wahhabis would irretrievably condemn Turkey to a German orientation. In the balance of international politics a friendly Turkey out-weighed the advantages which could accrue of an understanding with Riyadh.

Yet even if we confine ourselves to Arabia, the crux of the problem lay deeper than appears at first sight. As British diplomacy surveyed the peninsula in 1907, it saw little reason to be particularly enthusiastic about the Arab national revival under the aegis of Riyadh.

A revival on terms of amity with Turkey, which was inherently impossible, would have been disastrous for British policy in the Gulf. But short of such an eventuality, there was no fundamental clash between British and Turkish objectives in Central Arabia. The Ottoman Government, knowing that it would be unable to control a consolidated Arab state, pursued a 'divide and rule' policy. The emergence of a unified political entity was equally dangerous for British interests on the Arab coast.

The solitary danger which can be associated with the policy adopted by England lay in Abdul Aziz making common cause with some other European Power. But this was again a remote possibility so long as England remained supreme in the Gulf. It was not altogether without reason that the Government of India asserted that the Wahhabis could never pursue an anti-British orientation. Whenever they liberated Arabia from Turkey they would be compelled to turn to the British Government for protection against attacks by sea, and H.M.G. will be in a position, if they consider it to be to their advantage ..., to stretch out a hand which Bin Saood will be compelled, in his own interest, to take.1

In other words, the Wahhabis would be dependent upon

1. Secret Despatch to Secretary of State for India No. 28 dated 1 April, 1907; F.D.S.P. No.448, September 1907.
England diplomatically and strategically for a considerable time to come.

While the British Government was unwilling to help the Wahhabis directly there can be little doubt that Abdul Aziz's success would have been impossible of accomplishment but for British support for the integrity of Kuwait. England was vitally interested in the latter principality; and it was only through an anti-Ottoman alliance with Mubarak that the Al Saud found the means to rehabilitate themselves. In countenancing Kuwait, England supported the Wahhabis; and it is in this support that we observe a factor which contributed significantly to the contemporary Wahhabi revival.