CHAPTER VIII

THE GUARDIANSHIP OF THE PERSIAN GULF

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, England's ascendancy over the Persian Gulf was challenged from the north by Russia. Thwarted in her designs over the Straits, St. Petersburg embarked upon the political and economic penetration of north Persia in the decades following the Crimean War. In 1879 the Tsarist Government established, and thereafter controlled, the only effective military force in the country - the Persian Cossack Brigade. When in 1889 a British subject, Baron Julius de Reuter, obtained a concession for setting up the Imperial Bank of Persia, Russia riposted by securing the right to open the Banque d'Escompte de Perse, which was virtually a branch of the Russian Military of Finance. Similarly, the restrictive railroad concession of 1890 reflected Russian determination to prevent the construction, by other than her subjects, of railways in Persia for fear that they might one day carry British troops to Central Asia.1 By the 1890's

Russian hegemony over north Persia had become so tangible a reality that a British publicist could confidently assert that no Russian statesman "would pen a report upon Russian policy towards Persia that did not involve as a major premise the annexation of ... the whole of north Persia ...."¹

The lengthening shadow of Russian influence over Persia disturbed the British Foreign Office. Since they first became conscious of Russia as a rival in Central Asia, English statesmen had attempted to surround India with a ring of 'buffer' states, designed to insulate the empire from contact with a European power². The propping up of Persia, for instance, was one facet of this broad policy. However, as Russia penetrated progressively into the neutral zone, the Foreign Office began to cast about for an alternative means to defend its interests in Persia. British statesmen were thus led to abandon their traditional policy vis-a-vis Teheran for one that sought to safeguard their interests through the establishment of a sphere of influence over southern and central Persia.

CURZON AND THE PERSIAN QUESTION

The decline of British influence over Persia was a phenomenon which constantly preyed on the minds of British policy framers. In 1895 Sir Mortimer Durand, serving as Her Majesty's Minister at Teheran after a distinguished career in the Indian Foreign Department, addressed a memorandum to the Foreign Office on the subject. Sir Mortimer sketched the picture of an effete oriental monarchy around which the Russian net was drawing closer with each passing day. To stem the rot England could adopt either of two policies. She could, after securing Russian acquiescence, rejuvenate the country through imposing reforms on her. But there was little likelihood of St. Petersburg lending itself to such a design. A reformed Persia did not suit Russia's strategy in Asia. The alternative

1. H.M.'s Minister, Teheran to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated September, 1895; quoted in ibid. to ibid. dated 12 February, 1899; F.L.S.P. No. 10, November 1899.

2. Sir Robert Morier, British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, thus defined Russia's Persian policy: "The worse the condition of the neighbour, therefore, the more hopeless their squalor and decadence, the nearer she (Russia) is to the attainment of her goal and the less she can look with equanimity on any attempts made to endow them with the blessings of civilisation otherwise than as annexes of the Russian Empire ...." See Sir Robert Morier to Lord Salisbury dated 25 October, 1899; quoted in Greaves, op. cit., p. 138; Also see Frontier Despatch No. 27 to Secretary of State for India dated 4 February, 1904; P.D.F.B. No. 20, March 1904.
was to maintain a vigilant attitude towards Russian encroachments on the country. Durand felt that the British position at Teheran would be reinforced if Russia was warned that aggressive action on her part in the north would provoke similar action on the part of England in the south.

While Durand's exhortation failed to persuade the Foreign Office into adopting a bold Persian policy, events in the country drifted in a direction opposed to British interests. Nasir-ud-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896 after a reign during which he tried with some success to maintain an equilibrium between his two powerful neighbours. The maintenance of this precarious balance was beyond the capacity of his successor, Muzaffer-ud-Din Shah, who provided Russia with opportunities to consolidate her position in the country to the exclusion of British influence. By the close of the century Russia had built strategic railways in trans-Caspia, and had constructed a road from Resht to Teheran which gave her "a most important advantage ..., both from a commercial and from a military point of view."¹ More alarming was the appearance of Russian agents in the central and coastal regions, where they surveyed potential harbours,

¹ H.K.'s Minister, Teheran to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 12 February, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.10, November 1899.
and established relations with the local functionaries. Access to the Gulf was a basic motivation of Russian policy, and England read an ominous meaning in the peregrinations of Russian agents along the Persian littoral.

In 1809 Durand turned afresh to an examination of the British position in Persia. As on the former occasion, he emphasised the necessity of an active British policy in the country. In its naval supremacy the Imperial Government possessed a lever of pressure to which Persian statesmen were very sensitive. A warning that Russian aggression in the north would result in compensating moves by England in the south would stabilise the situation. Such a declaration,

1. For an excellent survey of Russian activity in South Persia see: J A. Saldanha, Precis of Correspondence on International Railway and British Policy in the Persian Gulf, (1872-1905), pp. 1-13; Also see J. C. Lorimer, Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia, (Calcutta 1915), I, Part II, pp. 2110-2124.

2. See Peter the Great's apocryphal will which supposedly guided Russian statesmen: "Hasten the decadence of Persia, penetrate to the Persian Gulf, re-establish the ancient commerce of the Levant, and advance to the Indies, which are the treasure house of the world"; quoted in Curzon, Op. cit., II, p. 601.

3. H.M's Minister, Teheran to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 12 February, 1809; F.D.S.P. No.10, November 1809.
Durand argued, would not embarrass Teheran; on the contrary, it would strengthen its hands in refusing any demands that Russia might make in respect of the northern provinces.

When Durand's despatch was referred to the Government of India, it elicited from Curzon a memorandum described as "the most ... comprehensive analysis in historical context of Britain's position in Persia at the century's end."¹ Premising his critique on the assumption that Persia faced dissolution in the immediate future, the Viceroy proceeded to enumerate British interests in the country.² They were both commercial and strategic. The total value of British trade with Persia was three and a half million pounds per annum. However, it was in its strategic implications that the country assumed a more significant aspect. Its eastern frontiers were coterminous with Afghanistan, a state whose borders were guaranteed by England, and Baluchistan, a British protectorate. Its southern coast was washed by the waters of the Gulfs of Persia and Oman, control over which was essential for the security of India. No

2. Secret Despatch No.176 to Secretary of State for India, dated 21 September, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.11, November 1899.
Indian administration could view with equanimity the preponderance of a European Power over Persia, considering the access such preponderance would give to avenues of exercising pressure over the subcontinent.

Curzon next turned to assess the influence exercised by England and Russia in Persia. Russia's power over the country rested on the contiguity of her southern frontier with Persia's northern frontier. Similarly, the basis of British power lay in her naval supremacy over the Persian Gulf. The de jure position of the Gulf was that of a sea open to the flag of all nations. But its de facto position was different. The Gulf was a British preserve; and it would have to be maintained as one. A Russian base in it would impose a crippling burden on the resources of India, which were, as it was, proving unequal to the requirements of a defence buildup maintained to neutralise the proximity of Russia towards the north and north-east.1

What were the means open to England for the defence of her interests in Persia? In common with Sirajand, Curzon rejected the possibility of an Anglo-Russian understanding with the object of reforming Persia. As for the suggestion that both Russia and

1. Ibid.
Persia be warned that any encroachment by the former on the north would provoke corresponding measures by the British in the south, there was much to be said for such a step. It would deter Russia from embarking upon any aggressive measure. However, before resorting to so extreme a remedy, Curzon thought it worth-while to attempt, in collaboration with Russia, a demarcation of 'spheres of influence' in Persia. British interests - political, commercial and strategic - were concentrated in south and central Persia; Russian interests, on the other hand, concerned the north. A line drawn from Khenikin through Kermanshan, Hamadan, Kervin, and Yezd to Seistan could be taken to represent the boundary between the English and Russian spheres of interest. Curzon admitted that the arrangement he had suggested suffered from certain imperfections. For instance, Teheran, the capital, would be in the northern zone, giving Russia an advantage over England. More concretely, access to the Gulf through Mesopotamia still remained open to Russia. Yet in the balance the advantages of the proposal out-weighed its dis-advantages. If an agreement was reached, it would eliminate a basic point of friction between England and Russia in Asia.

Opinion in official circles in India was not
enthusiastic about the proposal to divide Persia into English and Russian spheres of influence, though hardly for the correct reasons. Colonel R. Gardiner, a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, protested against the passive tone of the despatch. He recommended the absorption of the southern and central regions of Persia as a policy which would pay better dividends. No doubt such an orientation would entail an increase in commitments. But it would also reduce Russian pressure on the frontiers of India. The entire strategic position in Central Asia would be reversed at a stroke; for

we would no threaten Russia's advance on India that it seems to me that the latter country would ... be practically safe. Instead of Russia constantly worrying us, she would, I submit, have the tables turned on her, and be in a position of dreading an advance by us which would threaten to cut her line of communication and possibly convert the Caspian from a Russian to an English lake.

A more cogent objection to Curzon's proposal was advanced by General Sir Edwin Collen, Military

1. Note by Col. R. Gardiner, Member for Public Works Department, GCI dated 6 September, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.10/11, November 1899; Also see Note by Sir C.Dawkins, Member for Finance Department, GCI dated 7 September, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.10/11, November 1899.

2. Ibid.
Member of the Executive Council. Collen questioned the wisdom of dividing Persia into spheres of influence on strategic grounds. Immediately after a demarcation had been effected, Russia would concentrate her energy in the sphere allocated to her and convert north Persia into a strong military position. It would be futile to hope for corresponding British activity in the south. The result would be the military entrenchment of Russia along the Khenikin-Seistan line, a couple of hundred miles to the south of the present position occupied by her. The only feasible policy, therefore, was to maintain the integrity of Persia and push Russian influence as much to the north as possible.

The views voiced in the Executive Council bore no relation to the realities of the Persian situation. For all his impetuosity, Curzon was nearer a viable policy than his colleagues. His marginal annotations on the memoranda penned by Collen and Gardiner give an indication of the arguments he advanced to free them of their illusions. Referring to Gardiner's proposal for a protectorate over southern and central Persia, he asserted that it would be impossible for India to bear so heavy a burden.

1. Note by Gen. Sir Siwin Collen, Member for Military Department, GOI dated 12 September, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.10/11, November 1899.

his reaction to Collen's suggestion that a policy of opposition to Russia in the north be pursued. The Viceroy stated that the proposals he had outlined were the maximum Her Majesty's Government would concede. The pitch their demands any higher would be to forfeit whatever chances there were of British influence being consolidated in south Persia. However, Curzon did not frame his proposals in an optimistic frame of mind. When a doubt was expressed as to the possibility of an agreement with Russia, he laid bare his scepticism in a revealing comment: "This is also my opinion, but it is not Lord Salisbury's."

Curzon's despatch reached London at a juncture when Russia had staged a coup in Persia at England's expense; a coup which was rendered possible through Teheran's financial insolvency. Naser-ud-Din Shah had left Persia in a solvent condition. But his successor led the country down the road to financial ruin. Within two years of his accession, Muzaffer-ud-Din Shah had accumulated liabilities to the extent of £1,000,000. When the British representative at Teheran -

1. Marginal comment by the Viceroy on Gen. Collen's note of 12 September, 1899; F.D.S.P.No.10/11, November 1899.

2. See Note by Sir Clinton Dawkins dated 7 September 1899 and comment thereupon by the Viceroy; F.D.S.P.No.10/11, November 1899.

learnt that overtures had been made in Paris for a loan on the security of the customs of the Gulf ports, he warned the Foreign Office of the dangers of French intrusion in a traditionally British preserve. Salisbury riposted by extracting from the Persian Government an assurance that the Gulf ports would not be pledged as security for a loan from any foreign country.1

Durand next attempted to persuade British capitalists to advance a loan to Teheran. The Imperial Bank of Persia indicated its willingness to advance £1,250,000 to the Persian Government on the security of the customs houses of Fars and the Gulf ports provided its agents were placed in actual control of these posts. The Bank's proposals were accepted by the pro-British Prime Minister, the Amin-ud-Dauleh. However, when the Bushire and Kermanshah customs posts were handed over to the Imperial Bank for an advance of £50,000, the transaction evoked so violent a protest from the Persian people, that the Shah was

1. H.M's Charge d'Affaires, Teheran to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 23 October, and 24 November, 1897; F.D.S.P. No.12 and 18, February 1898.

2. H.M's Charge d'Affaires, Teheran to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 1 February, 1898; F.D.S.P. No.115, March 1898.
forced to dismiss the Amin-ud-Daulah, and appointed in his place the Amin-es-Sultan, who was less friendly to the British.¹

The new Prime Minister did not terminate the negotiations for a loan. However, he made it clear to the British that he would not concede control over the customs houses to anyone. Such a concession, the Amin-es-Sultan argued, would encourage Russia to ask for compensation in the north, and thereby lead to the partition of the country.² On British capitalists proving reluctant to provide financial assistance on the Amin-es-Sultan's terms, the Persian authorities approached St. Petersburg for the resolution of their difficulty. Salisbury was not averse to a joint Anglo-Russian loan to Persia; and at first his feelers to this effect were favourably received at St. Petersburg.³ However, certain developments on the

¹. Tel. H.M's Minister, Teheran to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 8 July, 1899; F.D.S.P. No. 367, November 1898; Tel. H.M's Minister, Teheran to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 29 August, and 6 September, 1898; F.D.S.P. No. 16 and 17, December 1898.

². Tel. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to H.M's Minister, Teheran dated 19 July, 1899; F.D.S.P. No. 8, March 1900.

³. H.M's Ambassador, St. Petersburg to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 26 September, 1899; F.D.S.P. No. 24, March 1900; H.M's Charge d'Affaires, St. Petersburg to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 29 September, 1899; F.D.S.P. No. 37, March 1900.
international plane encouraged the Russian Government
to present Her Majesty's Government with a fait
accompli in Persia. England's entry into the South
African War and the reverses she experienced in its
earlier stages conveyed to her European rivals an
impression of striking military impotence. More
significantly, about this time Turkey granted to
Germany a concession to construct a railway from the
Bosphorus to the Persian Gulf.

The Bagdad Railway concession excited
serious concern at St. Petersburg. As mentioned
earlier, Russia discerned in it an Anglo-German
deal in the Middle East at her expense and apprehended
that the railway would, on completion, stand as an
insurmountable obstacle between her and the Gulf. She
counter-attacked by assuming the offensive in
Persia. A loan of £2,400,000 was immediately
granted to the Teheran Government on the security
of all the Persian customs except those of Pars and
the Gulf ports. The Russian press looked upon the
transaction as something that would compensate the
country for German gains in Mesopotamia, then it

2. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy
dated 1 February, 1900; F.D.S.F. No. 51, March 1900; War
Office Memorandum on Russian Loan to Persia dated nil;
F.D.S.F. No. 2, June 1900; The Times dated 5 February, 1900.
3. H.M.'s Ambassador, St. Petersburg to Secretary
of State for Foreign Affairs dated 6 February, 1900;
F.D.S.F. No. 10, June 1900.
was pointed out to Mouravieff that it was contrary to diplomatic practice to present 'friendly' Governments with accomplished facts in regions where they had recognised interests, the Russian Foreign Minister retorted that it was Berlin which had set the example in showing indifference for the susceptibilities of other powers.

The fact of the matter was that with the South African War in progress, England was in no position to make an effective protest. The Times, for instance, reviewed the implications of the loan in a cautious leader, trying to draw some consolation from the fact that the Gulf ports and Fars had not been named as security for the loan - "a tacit recognition of our interests in Persia". Yet it warned St. Petersburg that England had no intention of being "squeezed out" of the regions in Persia which were of concern to her.

With the St. Petersburg press jubilant over the Persian loan, the Foreign Office did not consider it expedient to take up Curzon's proposal with the Russian Government. Indeed, the burden of Lord George

1. H.M.'s Ambassador, St. Petersburg to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 30 January, 1900.
2. The Times dated 5 February, 1900.
3. The Times dated 15 February, 1900.
4. See extract from "Novoe Vremya" dated nil:
F.D.S.P. No.160, July 1900; Also see article in "Exchange Gazette" digested in The Times dated 5 February, 1900.
5. Secret Despatch No.14 to Government of India dated 6 July, 1900; F.D.S.P.No.76, October 1900.
Hamilton's reply to the Curzon memorandum was that the game was practically lost so far as the Persian mainland was concerned. While the Gulf remained the base of British strength, Russia had penetrated deep into the country and had already gained on land a position which dominates and threatens about the whole of Persia, and enables her under cover of concessions and monopolies, to exercise a practical and exclusive control over a considerable portion of the administration of the country.¹

Even the status of the Gulf was in dispute. France had made a bid to revive her rights in Oman. Germany was participating in the economic development of Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, and sought a débouché for the Berlin-Baghdad Railway on the Gulf. In short, it was no longer possible to assert that the Gulf was an exclusive British preserve. The despatch concluded with an enumeration of the interests which the Imperial Government regarded as imperative. England enjoyed a sizable trade with Persia. Besides, her Indian Empire was co-terminus with eastern Persia and extended on to the Gulf of Oman; further, the maritime states of Oman looked up to her for protection. In view of these considerations, Her Majesty's Government would not permit any power to exercise control over the ports of the Persian Gulf.

¹ Ibid.
As Curzon scanned the Imperial Government's reply, only the assertion concerning the Gulf ports gave him satisfaction. But here too he was sceptical. The important question was whether the Foreign Office was serious about the whole affair? Whether the statement concerning the Gulf ports was merely the expression of a pious opinion, or a categoric policy statement? The Viceroy addressed the Imperial Government a second time on the question. At the very outset he referred to the difference in the appraisals of the Persian situation made by London and Calcutta, emphasising the former's admission that Russia was in a position to dominate the whole of the country. In Curzon's opinion the extent to which St. Petersburg would influence Persia depended upon the quantum of resistance it experienced at British hands. The Imperial Government's attitude was, therefore, unwarrantably pessimistic. Yet the Viceroy thought it fit to "rejoice" over the fact that, equally with the Government of India, the Foreign Office was determined to resist European encroachments on the shores of the Persian Gulf. His 'rejoicing', however, was soon to prove almost premature.


2. Secret Despatch No.127 to Secretary of State for India dated 6 September, 1900, F.D.S.P.No.77, September 1900.
While British policy towards Persia was being hammered out in a series of exchanges between Calcutta and the India Office, sections of the Russian press urged the Czarist Government to exploit England's difficulties in South Africa through securing a base in the Gulf. The St. Petersburg Zeitung, for instance, referred to the triumphs of Russian diplomacy in Persia and contended that

our policy had broken the resistance of England in Eastern Asia .... If only we possessed enough initiative, we are assured that the question of acquiring a port on the Persian Gulf would also lose a great deal of its "terrible" character.1

However, when Mouravieff was questioned on the point, he stated that Russia had no intention of acquiring an additional responsibility in the form of a base in the Gulf.2

Notwithstanding the Russian Foreign Minister's disavowal, the Government of India became alarmed when it learnt in February 1900, that a Russian ship-of-war, the "Gilyak", was heading towards the Persian

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1. Extract from "St. Peters burg Zeitung" dated 4 February, 1900; F.D.S.F. No.12, June 1900; Also see extract from "Moscow Viedomosti" dated 20 January, 1900; F.D.S.F. No.3, June 1900.

2. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 15 March, 1899; F.D.S.F. No.160, May 1899.
The Resident at Bushire was instructed to ensure that the British Navy was represented in strength in the Gulf during the "Gilyak's" tour. Simultaneously, the Imperial Government was consulted on the steps to be taken in case the Russians tried to occupy a naval position in the area.

As events subsequently revealed, British apprehensions were not altogether groundless. When the "Gilyak" touched Bander Abbas, its Commander made overtures to the local Governor for the lease of a coaling station, but the request was turned down.

In the meanwhile the Imperial Government instructed the Senior Naval Officer in the Persian Gulf that if the "Gilyak" attempted to occupy Bander Abbas, he was to protest formally against the action. If his protest was permitted to pass unheeded, he was to occupy an island near Bander Abbas (Hormuz or Herjam or Kiam) for the establishment of a base in the Gulf. However, the Russians desisted from pressing

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1. Tel. Secretary, Bombay Government to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 7 February, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.113, June 1900.
2. Tel. Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 8 February, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.116, June 1900; Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 10 February, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.122, June 1900.
3. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 16 February, and 19 February, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.133 and 135, June 1900.
4. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 14 February, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.141, June 1900.
matters to a crisis and the "Gilyak" soon departed from the Gulf with its objective unrealised.¹

The "Gilyak" incident reveals that though the Imperial Government was unwilling to seek involvement in Persia to the extent advocated by Curzon, it was determined to maintain its control over the Gulf proper. However, about this time sections of opinion in England launched a campaign for an entente with Russia, even at the cost of surrendering a base in the Gulf.² An analysis of the forces trying to align England along an anti-German orientation reveals interesting evidence. The unification of Germany had been followed by a period of rapid development, and with the turn of the century she had overtaken England to become the leading industrial nation of Europe.³ The threat which she thereby posed to English commerce aroused concern in British circles.⁴ In fact,

¹. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 4 March, 1900: F.D.S.F. No. 146, June 1900.
⁴. See Article on "The Chief Danger to British Trade" by Mr. Birchenough in Nineteenth Century; Digested in Review of Reviews dated 1 December, 1900; also see article by Capt. Cobbler in ibid.
The main argument of the advocates of an Anglo-Russian understanding was that the clash of economic interests between England and Germany made any lasting arrangement between them impossible. To quote Sir Rowland Blennerhasset, a protagonist of a Russian orientation:

The notion that a foreign policy, worthy of England and in accordance with her general interests, can be formulated on the basis of intimate agreement with Germany is a mischievous illusion. German statesmen, under the dictates of what they believe to be economic necessity, have adopted a deliberate policy which puts it out of the question. It is our business to recognize that in their opinion German and British interests are not only not identical but generally the reverse.

The plea for an Anglo-Russian understanding was first voiced in the *Fortnightly Review*. A commentator disguising his identity under the pseudonym of "Calchas" asserted that only Germany stood to gain from Anglo-Russian rivalry and that it was foolish to permit such a state of affairs to continue. Of the points of friction between the two powers, Persia was the most important of all. Russia had made it clear

1. Letter by Sir Rowland Blennerhasset; The Times dated 31 August, 1901; Also see article by Calchas entitled "England and Germany" appearing in Fortnightly Review; Digested in Review of Reviews dated 2 December, 1901.

2. See article entitled "External Policy of Russia" by Calchas; Digested in Review of Reviews dated 1 July, 1901.
that she had no designs upon India; only she must have a débouche upon the Gulf. In the light of such considerations, opposition to a Russian base upon the Gulf was no longer rational, particularly in view of the fact that Germany too had of late appeared as a rival in the Middle East. Once Russian ambitions in Persia were appeased, her attention would be directed towards the Balkans, where the responsibility for restraining her would rest on the shoulders of the Berlin-Vienna axis.

"Calchas’" cry was taken up by the National Review. Harping on the theme of Anglo-German hostility, the anonymous authors (A.B.C.) of an article on "British Foreign Policy" pointed to the desirability of an arrangement between England and Russia. An understanding between the two countries could be based upon freedom of action in the Balkans in return for a free hand in Egypt; a commercial outlet for Russia in the Gulf in return for a promise on her part to respect the status quo there; and a Far Eastern settlement reconciling the legitimate aspirations of the various powers interested in China.

1. See article entitled "British Foreign Policy" by A.B.C.; Digested in Review of Reviews dated 1 November, 1901; Also see letter by "W" in The Times dated 12 September, 1901.
How did the suggestions thrown out by "A.B.C." and "Calchas" strike The Times? At first the journal did not approve of the programme voiced by them.\(^1\) Concessions in China and Turkey were understandable; but it was to be wondered whether British interests could permit "a Foreign Power ... to establish itself in the Gulf".\(^2\) However, reverting to the issue slightly later, The Times revealed that it had come to accept a more flexible attitude. It was not "absolutely inconceivable" that Russia might be conceded a base in the Gulf as part of a general settlement. However, the Gulf concerned India most of all, and in determining "our attitude in the Persian Gulf, the views of (the Government of) India must be of great weight".\(^2\)

The Times' leader was an invitation to the Curzon Administration to present its views on the question of an Anglo-Russian entente. Calcutta responded with an emphatic note of protest against any measure of appeasement in Persia.\(^3\) It asserted that the maintenance of supremacy over the Gulf and south Persia should remain a basic axiom of British policy. Having "observed indications of a willingness in some quarters to recede

1. Ibid.
2. The Times dated 12 September, 1901.
3. Secret Despatch No.181 to Secretary of State for India dated 7 November, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.61, November 1901.
from ... this attitude", the Government considered it obligatory on its part to place the question in a correct perspective.

The task of demolishing the arguments advanced by the protagonists of an understanding with Russia was performed by Curzon. The Viceroy pointed out that it was a fallacy to believe that Russia wanted an outlet in the Gulf for "commercial" purposes. Her ambition arose of political and strategic objectives. She wanted a fortified naval base in waters close to India; a base which would in course of time be linked to her railways in Central Asia. What would be the effect of such a consummation? It had been argued that a base in the Gulf would not add to the strength of Russia, but would expose her to retribution through naval means. However, this argument was not valid. Russia could fortify the position, as she had fortified Port Arthur, and render it invulnerable to naval attack. Again, the Russian Navy was currently not a very impressive force. But would it be so far all time to come? One could legitimately assume that with her ambitions

1. Ibid.
2. Minute by Viceroy dated 28 October, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.61, November 1901.
in the Bosphorus, the north China Seas and the Gulf, Russia would in the future emerge as a formidable naval power. If its repercussions on Persia and India were taken into consideration, Russian access to the Gulf would raise serious problems for England. The Shah’s empire would be reduced to the status of a Central Asian Khanate. This would in turn affect India. From bases in eastern and southern Persia, Russia would menace western Afghanistan and turn the flank of the Quetta-Peshawar line on which the defence of the sub-continent had been premised. In addition, a hostile fleet in the Gulf would necessitate an increase in the strength of the East India Squadron. Indian military and naval commitments would thus be more than doubled.

In conclusion, Curzon contested the thesis that an understanding with Russia was possible. The ambitions of the Czarist Government embraced the whole of Asia. No piecemeal act of appeasement would, therefore, satisfy St. Petersburg. The whole idea of an Anglo-Russian entente was based on false premises. The Viceroy stated:

like many other students of Asian problems I have often wondered ... whether we could, by a friendly arrangement with Russia, arrive at such a demarcation of our respective interests as would enable us to eschew rivalry .... I have found that in such an
arrangement the giving would be all on our side and the receiving on the other. The satisfaction of Russian interests could not be allowed except by an intolerable sacrifice of our own."

Curzon's minute makes interesting reading in the context of his despatch advocating the division of Persia into spheres of influence in agreement with Russia. Obviously, the purpose of the despatch was to inveigle the Foreign Office into adopting an active role in Persia. The Imperial Government, on its part, shunned precipitate involvement in Persia. But concerning the Gulf it maintained a firm attitude, in spite of a belief in certain quarters that the article by "A.B.C." was a *ballon d'esai* by Lansdowne. The Foreign Minister, as we shall see, was not prepared to purchase Russian friendship at the price of a base in the Gulf.

The feelers thrown out in the pro-Russian press did not lead to tangible results and with the stabilisation of the position in South Africa, the Imperial Government viewed events in Persia with renewed confidence. Towards the middle of 1901, the earlier loan having been exhausted, the Persian Government sounded London and St. Petersburg on the possibility

1. * Ibid. *
2. See *The Times* dated 18 November, 1901.
Lansdowne seized the opportunity to forward a proposal which meant the division of Persia into two spheres of influence. He suggested that England and Russia should approach Teheran with the offer of a joint loan. Since Russian interests were concentrated in the north, and English interests concerned the south, the two countries could demand as security the revenues of the provinces falling within their respective spheres of interest. However, the suggestion was summarily dismissed by St. Petersburg. The Foreign Office was told that Russia would not submit to any restriction on her freedom of action in the country, and that she had "never been in favour of the virtual partition of Persia into Russian and British spheres of influence."

No sooner was Lansdowne's proposal rejected than events in Teheran moved fast towards a climax.

Sir Arthur Hardinge, who had replaced Durand as British...
Minister at Teheran, told the Foreign Office that the acquisition by Russia of an exclusive control over Persian finances would spell the ruin of whatever British influence remained in the country. To relieve Teheran of the necessity of going to Russia, begging bowl in hand, an offer for a loan was advanced to the Persian Government on behalf of the Government of India. However, the offer was turned down on the plea that Persia could not accept financial assistance from any country without the prior permission of Russia because of a secret understanding reached at the time of the financial transaction of 1900.

The rejection of the offer of a British loan convinced Curzon that the time had come for the adoption

1. India Office to Foreign Office dated 12 November, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.440, March 1902.

2. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 6 November, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.416, March 1902. The terms of the loan were:

(a) The money was to be advanced on the security of the customs revenue of the Gulf ports.

(b) The loan would be repaid only after the expiry of ten years.

(c) The Persian Government would reaffirm its assurances concerning south Persia and the Gulf ports.

3. H.M's Minister, Teheran to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 13 November, 1901; F.D.S.P. No.466, March 1902.
of stringent measures. The Viceroy requested the Foreign Office to acquaint the Teheran Government of the interests in Persia it deemed essential and which it would safeguard at all costs. However, the Imperial Government hardly required any prodding at this juncture. Developments in the Persian capital had left Lansdowne with no alternative, unless he could reconcile himself to a policy of abandonment. Besides, the negotiation of an Anglo-Japanese alliance, which was directed against Russia in north China, had augmented British capacity to resist Russian advances in Asia.

In a despatch to Hardinge, which the Minister was instructed to communicate to Muzaffar-ud-Din Shah, Lansdowne annunciated with brutal frankness British policy towards Persia. England was interested in maintaining the integrity of the states bordering India so as to prevent contact between her Asiatic Empire and the possessions of other European Powers. However, such a policy could be upheld only if the buffer region did not fall under alien domination. So far as Persia was concerned, Lansdowne recognised the superior interests of Russia in the north of the country; but towards the south and along the littoral, England

1. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 30 November, 1901; F.D.S.P. No. 452, March 1902.
2. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to H.M's Minister, Teheran dated 6 January, 1902; F.D.S.P. No. 502, March 1902.
enjoyed a similar position. Her Majesty’s Government would not, therefore, acquiesce in the concession to Russia of preferential rights in her sphere of influence. More particularly would it resent the acquisition by Russia of a base in the Gulf, for such a base would be a standing threat to India. In so far as the Persian Government respected England’s interests in south Persia, the Foreign Office would defend Persian integrity. But if Teheran chose to encourage Russia’s advance towards the Gulf, the British Government would consider itself justified in taking such measures as might appear to them best calculated to protect the interests so endangered, even though into adoption of such measures it might no longer be possible to make the integrity and independence of Persia their first object as hitherto.

The Foreign Minister’s communication elicited an autograph letter from the Shah which Harding considered of outstanding significance, even though it did not answer all the points raised by Lansdowne. Muzaffar-ud-Din commenced with a definition of his basic stand in foreign affairs. His Government had always laboured to “preserve the balance of friendship”

1. Fidd.

2. H.M’s Minister, Teheran to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 16 February, 1902; F.D.S.P. No.279, July 1902.

between England and Russia. It was equally determined to safeguard its sovereign prerogatives. In conformity with these principles, Persia would never concede the concessions which London apprehended to so great a degree. As the Shah put it, he would not

agree to any understanding with any power against the British Government, and has never desired, and does not now, to alienate any part of his territory, to the extent of a span, to anyone for the erection of fortifications against the English Government.  

The exchanges between Lansdowne and Mizaffar-ud-Din Shah denote the crystallisation of a new British orientation towards Persia. As the Russian colossus strengthened its hold over Teheran, Great Britain found it increasingly difficult to defend her interests in the country within the premises of Persian integrity. Hence a shift in British policy towards the establishment of an exclusive sphere of predominance over southern and eastern Persia, regions which had a direct bearing on the defence of India. Borrowing a formula with which the diplomatic world had first been familiarised in China, Curzon suggested the division of Persia into two zones in agreement with St. Petersburg. However, Russian statesmen showed no inclination to fall in line with his suggestion, not because of any moral scruples, but

1.Ibid.
because they wanted to absorb the whole of the Shah's dominions. Yet in pitching her demands so high, Russia underestimated British capacity for resistance. Once the Transvaal War had taken a favourable turn, and an understanding with Japan secured the Far Eastern situation, London made it plain to all concerned that it would resolutely oppose any encroachment on its interests in Persia.

**Lansdowne's Monroe Doctrine for the Persian Gulf**

The warning to Teheran that England's adherence to the policy of defending Persian integrity was conditional upon her interests in the country being respected was only one of the ways in which the Imperial Government sought to buttress its influence over the Shah's dominions. Towards the middle of 1902 Husaffar-ud-Din Shah paid a 'good-will' visit to England in course of a continental tour undertaken for reasons of health. During his stay in London Lansdowne assured him that the Imperial Government still adhered to its traditional policy in Persia, subject to the reservations voiced through Hardinge. Similarly, The Times voiced the hope that the Shah would carry away with him the conviction that Great Britain desired nothing more than the prosperity and integrity of the Persian Monarchy. However, in

1. The Times dated 23 August, 1902.
the very next breath it analyzed the position of Persia as between Russia and England, referring significantly to the fact that "nature appears to have marked out so plainly the spheres in which the co-operation respectively of Great Britain and Russia can be exercised ... that there should be no excuse for jealousies ...."¹ Yet all the journal earned for its pains was a brusque reminder from the Novoe Vremya that St. Petersburg did not desire the partition of the country. On the contrary, Russia wanted Persia to be free of all outside interference, for only then could she be sure of access to the Gulf.²

In the meanwhile, complications of a different nature were exercising the attention of the Foreign Office. During the last decade of the nineteenth century the propagandist activity of one Jamaluddin, a Muslim theologian who preached the message of pan-Islamic revivalism, had attracted considerable attention among the Persian intelligentsia. Jamaluddin's ideas gave rise to an incipiently nationalist movement in the country, spear-headed by the conservative Shiah clergy. By the turn of the century the priestly class had developed into a powerful force, which viewed with

¹. The Times dated 16 August, 1902.
². The Times dated 1 September, and 17 September, 1902.
alarm Persia's growing dependence upon the Powers of Europe, particularly Russia.

During Muzaffar-ud-Din's sojourn in England, Hardinge brought to the notice of Lansdowne the discontent which the subserviency of the Shah to Russia was exciting in clerical circles. There was every likelihood of popular feeling against Russia assuming the form of an open outbreak. Such a consummation would mean the "pacification" of Persia through the armed intervention of St. Petersburg: What was Great Britain to do when confronted with such a course of events?

The question was discussed at length by Hardinge and Lansdowne. Two conclusions emerged of the exchange of views between them: firstly, that if Russian troops penetrated into north Persia to suppress any mass upsurge, Her Majesty's Government should concert a

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2. Sir Arthur Hardinge to Lord Lansdowne (with marginal annotations by Lansdowne) dated 27 August, 1904; F.D.F.B. No.1, March 1904.
corresponding move in the littoral provinces in order to oblige Russia to discuss with it a return to the status quo ante; and secondly, that England ought to intimate both Teheran and St. Petersburg of the action it would take when confronted with the above eventuality.

A. J. Balfour expressed agreement with the opinions voiced by Lansdowne and Hardinge. The moment Russia moved into north Persia, Great Britain ought to execute a compensating movement in the south. However, the Prime Minister also directed attention towards certain questions arising of this decision. What should be the extent of British penetration in Persia? Would it suffice to hold a few strategic points on the Gulf, or would a large scale occupation of the hinterland be necessary? Again, would Russia regard the British counter-move as a provocation to war? And if so, was it expedient to seek a conflict with Russia in Persia?

Because of the questions posed by Balfour, the Persian situation was comprehensively reviewed in the War Office. Colonel W. R. Robertson, the Assistant

1. Ibid.
3. Memorandum by Col. W. R. Robertson, Assistant Quartermaster General, on "Strategic Relations between England and Russia with regard to Persia" dated 4 October, 1902; F. D. F. B. No. 7, March 1904.
Quartermaster-General, pointed out that with her ambitions checked in the Near East, Russia was channelising her energy solely towards the Gulf, where England had to bear the brunt of her opposition single-handed. St. Petersburg could over-run north Persia in a matter of weeks. Once established in the north, Russia would extend her influence to the Baluch border on the east, and the Gulf on the south. To prevent such a consummation England could demand the territory south of the "Curzon" line as lying within her sphere of influence. Yet the chances were that Russia would go to war rather than acquiesce in such a demand. On the other hand, the military occupation of the whole of south Persia was a task which England would be unable to perform with the limited resources at her disposal. Consequently, in the event of any Russian move in the north, the British would have to rest content with the occupation of Seistan; while any footing which St. Petersburg might acquire in the Gulf could be neutralised by the seizure of Bandar Abbas and the adjoining islands.

Robertson's gloomy survey of the Persian scene was confirmed by another War Office expert, who, if anything, struck an even deeper note of pessimism.

1. Memorandum by Col. E. A. Althea, Assistant Quartermaster-General dated 14 October, 1902; F.D.F.B. No. 8, March 1904.
Involvement with Russia would inevitably drag France into the conflict, and it was a patent fact that, with the scope of the Anglo-Japanese alliance restricted to China, England was in no position to face the Dual alliance. However, an understanding with Berlin would completely change the situation:

Germany is concerned equally with ourselves in thwarting a Russian advance which might end in Russia dominating not only all Persia, but Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf. A mutual understanding between Germany and Great Britain... would enable Russia to be checkmated without her daring to risk war, or, if war ensued, it would be a war the results of which we need not fear.

The recommendation for a German alliance to meet the military requirements of the empire commanded itself to General Sir W.G. Nicolson, the Director of Military Intelligence. But Lord Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief, did not succumb to the pessimism which appears to have overwhelmed the War Office. He pointed out that the occupation of Seistan and Bender Abbas, regions vital for the defence of India, could be accomplished by England single-handed. As for the suggested re-

1. Ibid.
2. Memorandum by Director-General of Military Intelligence dated 16 October, 1902: F.D.F.B. No.9, March 1904.
orientation of foreign policy, it was doubtful whether there is any immediate chance of our being able to come to an alliance with Germany, and it would be safer and better in every way to act as if we had only ourselves to depend upon as regards European nations.¹

Roberts' stand was supported by Mr. St. John Broderick, the Under-Secretary of State for India.² The argument that England would confront the dual alliance in Persia was untenable. The understanding between Paris and St. Petersburg had relevance only to Europe and China; besides, there was little reason to believe that France was particularly interested in helping Russia to grab the Gulf. As for the proposal for an understanding with Germany, it was hardly practicable. Berlin would without fail claim Kuwait as a terminus for the Baghdad Railway; and to acquiesce in her demand would introduce yet another power in a region which England wanted to monopolise all by herself.

An Admiralty review of the problem revealed concurrence in the views expressed by the War Office.³ It was held that if St. Petersburg, after having built

1. Ibid.
3. Admiralty memorandum dated 27 August, 1902 on "the effect which the occupation of a port in the Persian Gulf would exert on the Naval position of Great Britain"; F.D.F.B. No.12, March 1904.
a base in the Gulf, chose to concentrate her naval strength there, then British communications to India and the further East would be threatened. However, such an eventuality was improbable, if not altogether impossible. Pressure of the Northern powers in the Baltic, and Japan in the Pacific, would not permit Russia to concentrate her navy near Indian waters. Consequently, the occupation by Russia of a base in the Gulf "would be a sure cause of increased Naval expenditure, but not, per se, a sufficient cause
belli".  

The whole issue was finally debated at an Inter-Departmental Conference at the highest level. The War Office and Admiralty representatives reiterated the views which their departments had expressed earlier. Speaking for the Admiralty, Prince Louis of Battenburg, 

1. ibid.

2. Minutes of an Inter-Departmental Conference on the Persian question held on 19 November, 1902; F.D.F.S. No.13, March 1904. The Conference was attended by the undermentioned:-

(a) Prince Louis of Battenberg, Director of Naval Intelligence.

(b) Sir T. Sanderson, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

(c) Sir A. Godley, Under-Secretary of State for India.

(d) Sir W. Lee-Warner, Secretary, Secret and Political Department, India Office.

(e) Gen. Sir W.G. Nicolson, Director-General of Military Intelligence.
the Director of Naval Intelligence, stated that no British base was required in the Gulf; and that a Russian station there would not present any problem unless it was well fortified and connected to Russian Central Asia through a railway. As for the War Office spokesman, he dwelt upon the military inferiority of England as compared to Russia, and stressed the inadvisability of assuming forward positions from which it would be necessary to retreat on the outbreak of hostilities. It was, therefore, recommended that to neutralise

a Russian occupation in the north, we should at once occupy Bandar Abbas, and the islands of Hormuz, Kishmand Benjam; and that we should watch ... British interests at Bushire; that we should occupy ... Sistan .... But it was held that no other occupation of territory or operations in land should be attempted.

The deliberations of 1902 mark an important stage in the evolution of a new British policy towards Persia, which found its culmination in the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. So far as the Gulf was concerned, the Imperial Government was confident of its ability to hold its own against encroachments from alien quarters, and determined to do so in practice. Lansdowne incisively summed up British sentiment on the question when, in course of a debate in the Lords, he declared that

we should regard the establishment of a naval base, or of a fortified port, in the Persian

1. Ibid.
Gulf by any other power as a grave menace to British interests, and we should certainly resist it with all the means at our disposal.*

While Lansdowne's 'Monroe' doctrine for the Gulf was viewed with satisfaction in British circles, it requires little imagination to visualise the impression created by the proceedings of the Inter-Departmental Conference on Hardinge. They were, to say the least, at complete variance with the optimistic tone in which Lansdowne and the British Minister at Teheran had discussed the Persian situation earlier. Hardinge described the recommendations as amounting to the "virtual abdication of our position in this country...." He had contemplated the occupation of Ispahan by a British force as a riposte to any Russian move in the north. Such a step would cut across the line of Russian advance to Bender Abbas, and frustrate one of the basic objectives of Russia's policy in Asia. On the other hand, the mere occupation of Seistan and Bender Abbas would prove a futile gesture. For if England

2. See Englishman dated 8 May, 1903; Also see Statesman dated 20 May, 1903. Curzon welcomed the statement as a vindication of the stand he had taken right from the outset. He wrote to Lord George Hamilton: "I am glad when at length and for the first time I read the statement of a British Foreign Minister in Parliament, that Great Britain would in no circumstances tolerate the creation of a naval base by any Foreign Power in the Persian Gulf"; quoted in Ronaldshay,op.cit.,II,p.312.
3.M's Minister, Teheran to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 17 June, 1903; F.D.F.B.No.16, March 1904; Also see Sir Arthur Hardinge to Lord Lansdowne dated 3 January, 1903; F.D.F.B.No.14A, March 1904.
occupied only these two places, Russia would have every reason to be satisfied with the rest of the country in her hands. Indeed, she might even agree to evacuate the territory occupied by her, on the condition of a simultaneous withdrawal by England. Yet such a consummation would leave Persia "to all intents and purposes a Russian Egypt ...."\(^1\)

The important question was whether Russia would consider the occupation of Ispahan a provocation to war. Hardinge was inclined to answer this question in the negative. Immediately after the advance, England should offer to St. Petersburg a peaceful settlement of the issue. If Russia turned down the offer, she would be waging an aggressive war, in which case France would not support her. On the other hand, even if the move precipitated a conflict, Seistan would be as difficult to hold as Ispahan, while the occupation of the latter place would serve better the cause of British influence in the country.\(^2\)

Hardinge's arguments failed to convince the Imperial Government, which was reluctant to commit its military potential to the holding of positions which were not absolutely essential to the defence of India.\(^3\)

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. See War Office Memorandum dated 9 April, 1903; F.D.F.B. No.15, March 1904.
However, Curzon too was not impressed by the deliberations of the Inter-Departmental Conference, which appeared to him to have been conducted in "a theoretical or dogmatic spirit, somewhat detached from the facts". The Viceroy elaborated his viewpoint on the Persian situation in a despatch to the India Office. He expressed doubt as to whether Russia intended to annex Persia outright. The acquisition of control over Asia from the Caspian to the China seas had placed a heavy burden on the Tsarist Government and it had, for the present, no desire to occupy further territory. All that Russia wanted was that Persia should be so weak as to be dependent, but not so weak as to fall absolutely to pieces. The screen of the National Government must be kept intact, so as to cover what might otherwise have the appearance of hostile designs.

Once the validity of this analysis was conceded, England had to prepare herself for two distinct contingencies: the advance of Russia, for the purpose of "pacification", towards a single objective like Teheran.

1. Note by Viceroy dated 17 December, 1903; F.D.F.B. No.1/21, March 1904; Also see Note by Lord Kitchener dated 16 January, 1904; F.D.F.B.No.1/21, March 1904.

2. Secret Despatch No.27 to Secretary of State for India dated 4 February, 1904; F.D.F.B.No.20, March 1904.

3. Ibid.
or Fabrizi and the wholesale investment of north Persia. Needless to say, the possibility of the latter eventuality coming to pass was a remote one.

In the event of a limited Russian advance in north Persia, Great Britain should retaliate through executing a corresponding movement along the frontier accessible to her forces. This movement would not be a prelude to permanent occupation. On the contrary, it would be accompanied by an invitation to Russia to discuss terms for a return to the status quo ante. Considering that the British counter-move would cut across the line of Russian advance to the Gulf, there was every reason to believe that it would "bring home to the Russian Government the advantages of ...(a) settlement with ourselves". A large scale Russian investment of north Persia, while in itself less probable, would raise more serious questions. Hardinge had recommended an advance into the interior of Persia (Ispehan) in addition to the occupation of the Gulf ports. Was his suggestion practicable? The answer to this question depended upon several factors. Given a pro-English Viceroy in the southern provinces of Persia, and a feeling friendly to the British among the people, the idea was "deserving of consideration". Yet a final decision could only be made in the light of

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
the conditions obtaining when the contingency presented itself.

CURZON'S TOUR OF THE PERSIAN GULF

While the Persian imbroglio defied the ingenuity of statesmen at Calcutta and London, Curzon decided upon giving substance to Lansdowne's Monroe doctrine for the Gulf through a gesture that would demonstrate to all and sundry England's determination to defend her position in the region at all costs. As early as 1901 he had suggested a viceregal tour of the Gulf to voice the Imperial Government's determination to pursue a policy of "resolution and strength" there. When the idea was originally sounded, it alarmed the India Office. Lord George Hamilton described it as "risky and inopportune". Till the Transvaal War was over, England would have to keep quiet elsewhere. Curzon's views concerning Persia were well-known, and a tour undertaken by him across the Gulf would excite disquiet in all the European capitals.

However, in 1903 the situation had altogether altered. Consequently, when Curzon revived his proposal for a cruise in the Gulf to testify to England's "paramount

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1. Lord Curzon to Lord George Hamilton (private) dated 22 May, 1901; quoted in Ronaldshay, op. cit., II, p. 313.

political and commercial ascendency over the region, the India Office replied in the affirmative. At the same time, the Secretary of State for India addressed a note of caution to the Viceroy. Curzon’s position at Masqat and Kuwait would be difficult one. While the rulers of both these states wanted to come formally under British protection, London was not in a position to accede to this request. The status of Masqat had been defined in a treaty with France (the Convention of 1862) of which it was impossible to secure a cancellation. Similarly, the Foreign Office had given certain assurances to Turkey and Germany concerning Kuwait. The Viceroy would have to bear in mind these commitments while touring the Gulf.

Curzon’s tour commenced in “swashbuckling style” from Karachi on 10 November, 1903. The Viceroy was escorted by a flotilla comprising the most impressive exhibition of British naval strength in the Gulf. The first port of call was Masqat, where a durbar was held at which the Sultan was invested with the G.C.I.E. Faisal welcome the Viceroy in a dignified speech.

1. Secret Despatch No. 148 to Secretary of State for India dated 17 September, 1903: F.D.S.P. No. 142, February 1904.


referring to the bonds which linked his state to the British Government, and expressing the hope that his successors would further strengthen the "strong and ancient friendship" between Maqat and India. In his reply the Viceroy gave a brief resume of the relations which had existed between the two Governments since 1798. He proceeded to enumerate British commercial and strategic interests in the region, and ended with a warning to "discontented persons or classes" (the conservative party) that his Government would not permit the tranquillity of Oman to be disturbed by their machinations.

From Maqat the flotilla headed towards the Trucial Coast, where another durbar was held off Shargah on 21 November. In attendance were the chiefs of Abu Dhabi, Shargah, Debal, Ajman and Um-al-Kuwait. As at Maqat, the Viceroy addressed the assembled gathering. However, Curzon now spoke to a wider audience, for his speech was addressed to the Chancellories of St. Petersburg, Paris and Berlin rather than the petty Arab chiefs facing him. The Viceroy briefly recapitulated the history of maritime Arabia.


2. See text of speech by Lord Curzon at durbar of 19 November, 1903: ibid., pp. 2633-34.
since the British first appeared in the Gulf. He also referred to the treaties which the Government had contracted with the Arab chiefs to enforce peace in the Gulf, and the predominance which it had thereby established over the region. In certain quarters, the Viceroy continued, the question was being asked with increasing insistence as to why Great Britain should be permitted to monopolise the Gulf:

The history of your States ... is the answer. We were here before any other power .... We found strife and we have created order .... The great Empire of India, which it is our duty to defend, lies almost at your gates .... We are not going to throw away this century of costly and triumphant enterprise; we shall not wipe out the most unselfish pages in history. The peace of these waters must still be maintained; your independence will continue to be upheld; and the influence of the British Government must remain supreme.

Curzon's tour through the Gulf was followed with interest in England as well as Russia. Indian journals like the Englishman interpreted the visit as a striking demonstration of the Government's determination, already expressed by Lansdowne, to defend its hegemony over the region. St. Petersburg, on the


2. See Englishman dated 23 November and 26 November, 1903.
other hand, watched the proceedings with distinct concern. The *Novoe Vremya*, for instance, suspected that England was preparing to exploit Russia's difficulties in the Far East towards the annexation of the Oman States. However, it warned the English that Arabia was a "large morsel", and that the European Powers would not permit it to pass into anybody's hands "without (adequate) payment".

It was left to *The Times* to reply to the accusations of the *Novoe Vremya*. The journal maintained that there were "several points of view from which Lord Curzon's visit to the Gulf attracts the imagination ...." During the past twelve months Her Majesty's Government had made it clear through the policy statements voiced by its spokesmen that it would not permit its influence in the Gulf to be eclipsed by anyone. The Viceroy's tour further revealed England's determination to maintain her influence in the Gulf as a living influence. However, British policy in the Gulf should not cause anxiety to anyone, since it was "essentially a defensive one ...." At the

1. Despatch from St. Petersburg Correspondent: *The Times* dated 2 December, and 4 December, 1903.
3. *Ibid*.
4. *Ibid*.
same time, England could not afford to jeopardise her position in the region, not merely for the sake of Anglo-Persian trade, but for reasons of imperial security. The presence of a European Power in the Gulf, or in the contiguous tracts of southern Persia, would place the Indian Empire in a position of grave peril.

In linking the security of India with British predominance over the Gulf and south Persia, The Times laid bare the crux of the whole problem since concern for the safety of the Indian sub-continent was the main-spring of British policy in the region. The so-called "Persian question", of which the Gulf constituted a facet, presented a real dilemma to British statesmen. In Persia, Great Britain confronted a superior military power (Russia) which commanded direct access to her sphere of influence in the country. Admittedly, England was supreme on the seas; but her naval supremacy could not influence events in a theatre removed from the Gulf, which explains the desperate ring of the War Office memoranda reviewing the situation in 1902. Yet it was sea-power alone which prevented England from being presented with an unpalatable fait accompli during the crucial phases of the Transvaal War. For with her naval vulnerability, Russia was understandably reluctant to establish a base in the Gulf.