The collapse of the conservative movement in Oman initiated a new phase in Indo-Masqat relations. Saiyid Turki was the ablest of Imam Said's sons. He was a protagonist of a pro-English policy and succeeded to power determined to maintain the closest of ties with the Government of India. Immediately after Azzan's death he appealed to the Indian authorities for recognition, making a plea for a renewal of the "friendly relations" which had subsisted between Oman and India during the reign of Saiyid Said.

**MAYO AND BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS OMAN**

Turki's request for recognition raised the question of the stability of his administration. The

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1. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, Cal dated 7 October, 1886: F.D.I.P. No.145, March 1886. Sir Bertie Frere, who visited Oman in 1873, has left us a sensitive portrait of Turki. He describes him as possessing "a fine face with a careworn expression lighting up now and then with a very bright expression, perfect self-possessed manners..." Vide Sir Bertie to Lady Frere dated 13 April, 1873: quoted in J. Martineau, The Life and Correspondence of Sir Bertie Frere, (London 1895), II, p. 105.

confederacy had been defeated. But it had not been crushed out of existence. Ibrahim bin Qais, a brother of Azzan, still controlled Sohar and the Batinah districts in addition to Rastaq. With a rival house in possession of the most fertile part of his territories, Turki's position could not be regarded as satisfactory.

Polly did not view the Saiyid's future with optimism. The tribes of Oman had undergone a sobering experience under the Azzan administration which had nearly consummated a policy of centralisation. They would consequently try to maintain a balance between the rival houses of Massaq and Rastaq; a balance that would ensure for them a position of independence. Major (later Sir Edward) Ross, the Political Agent at Masqat, was in agreement with the Resident. Turki's regime, he pointed out, embodied a basic element of instability in that it was isolated from the conservative masses of the interior. To expect the Saiyid to emulate the bold policies of his predecessor was


2. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Bombay Government dated 28 August, 1871: F.D.P.F. No. 356, January 1872.

to hope for the impossible. In the words of Ross:

It would require a very able and strong ruler, with the command of considerable revenues, to centralise authority and break the power of the feudal Chiefs. The Government of Azzan and Khaleele attained more nearly this object than is likely to be seen again; nor could it be done by a purely temporal ruler in the economical manner in which Khaleele could work, owing to his power of working on religious feelings.*

The advice reaching the Foreign Department painted a dismal picture of Turki's prospects. But Lord Mayo had already decided to have nothing to do with the dynastic squabbles of Oman. What prompted the Viceroy to embark upon a course he had long been contemplating was an act of indiscretion committed by the Bombay Government in course of the civil war between Azzan and Turki. It has been pointed out that Canning's arbitration had resulted in the projection of the maritime protectorate which the Government exercised over the Persian Gulf on to the Gulf of Oman. The peace of the Oman seas was upheld by Lawrence throughout the political changes which took place after Thawaini's assassination.  

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1. Ibid.  
3. See supra p. 33-34, 48-49.  
4. See Foreign Department Memorandum on British policy in the Gulf of Oman dated 15 June, 1881; F.D.P.P. No.460/462, June 1881.
Acting in the light of this policy, the Bombay Government had ordered the sinking of a Confederate vessel carrying reinforcements from Masqat to Matrah during hostilities between Azzan and the Saiyid.  

The Bombay Government's action, which it defended on grounds of precedent, provoked an outburst from Mayo. The Viceroy contended that

> from the time I came to India to the present I have had the misfortune to disagree with my predecessor in this Government, and also with the Secretary of State, on many points of the policy hitherto adopted with regard to the States of Oman and a portion of the Arabian coast.

According to him, interference in the internal affairs of Masqat, which had been resorted to so often during the closing years of Lawrence's viceroyalty, would lead the Government of India into difficulties out of proportion to the interests at stake. The extension of the maritime protectorate to the Gulf of Oman was untenable. Objective conditions off the Trucial Coast were different from those obtaining on the Masqat littoral. The naval movements of the Masqat ruler in his waters should, therefore, be unhindered and interference in


2. Secretary, Bombay Government to Secretary, Foreign Department, O.C.I dated 25 May, 1871: F.O.S.I. No.23, 1871.

his state reduced to a minimum.¹

Mayo’s plea for a policy of non-involvement was supported by Aitchison, who brought to bear a mature experience on the problems of Indian foreign policy.² The Foreign Secretary defined the extension of the maritime protectorate to the Gulf of Oman as "indefensible and dangerous". The regulations enforced in the Persian Gulf had their own rationale. The southern coast of the Gulf was inhabited by turbulent tribes who did not owe allegiance to a central authority and who were perennially fighting among themselves. India had a vital stake in the trade which flourished in the region. Consequently, the Government had been obliged to impose an interdict on naval warfare in the Gulf. The situation in waters close to the Imamate was different. The coastline of Masqat was under an orderly government. "War in that Gulf", Aitchison asserted, "is no concern of ours and no more affects our trade than war in the Pacific Ocean."³

The arguments advanced by Mayo and Aitchison for placing a limit on British commitments in Oman were opposed by an activist group in the Executive—

1. Ibid.
2. Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 9 March, 1871; P.D.S.I. No.44/58, 1871.
3. Ibid.
Council. B.H. Ellis, Member for the Home Department, was unable to subscribe to the reorientation proposed by the Viceroy. He objected to the attempt to differentiate between the Gulfs of Oman and Persia. Both had an equal strategic importance for India. It was, therefore, illogical to define one policy for the Persian Gulf, and a different one for the Gulf of Oman. Ellis' standpoint commended itself to Sir Richard Temple, the Finance Member of the Governor-General's Council.

Mayo did not see any substance in the viewpoint delineated by Ellis and Temple. Besides, his decision to withdraw from an active role in Oman was not wholly directed against what he regarded to be the indiscreet policy commitments of Lawrence. The imperial authorities were also partly responsible for it. During the chaos following Thalwani's assassination Majid had suspended payment of the subsidy he had contracted under the Canning Award. The Indian authorities took the stand that the subsidy was a permanent

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1. Minute by Home Member to the GOI dated 3 April, 1871; F.D.S.I.No. 57, 1871; Also see his Minute dated 27 February, 1871; F.D.S.I.No. 44/58, 1871.

2. Minute by Finance Member to the GOI dated 3 April, 1871; F.D.S.I.No. 57, 1871.

3. Minute by Viceroy dated 2 April, 1871; F.D.S.I.No.44/58, 1871.

4. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Bombay Government dated 2 June, 1867; F.D.P.P.No.202, December 1867.
obligation on the Zanzibar ruler and had to be paid
irrespective of any change of regime in Oman. Finding
the Indian authorities adamant, Majid requested the
Foreign Office that he be relieved of the financial
obligations he had contracted under the Canning settle-
ment. The Imperial Government was then contemplating
an anti-slave trade crusade in Zanzibar and East
Africa. Any step towards the latter objective would
have affected Majid's revenues adversely. His request
was, therefore, favourably received at London and
Calcutta was asked whether it could abrogate the finan-
cial clauses of the Canning settlement.

The issue raised by the Imperial authorities
was discussed at length in India. Mr. H.L.P. Wheeler,
Under-Secretary to the Foreign Department, reviewed
the events which had led to the Canning Award. He
thereby came to the conclusion that the financial
clauses of the settlement were essential to its coherence
as a whole. If the subsidy guaranteed to Masqat was
abrogated, the measure would irreparably damage the
confidence which the Arabs reposed in the integrity
of the British Government. More important still,

1. Viceroy to Sayid Majid dated 24 December,
1867: F.D.P.P. No.131, December, 1867.
2. Political Agent, Zanzibar to Secretary of
State for Foreign Affairs dated 28 September, 1867:
F.D.P.P.No.63, May 1868.
3. Political Despatch No.20 to Govt.of India
dated 15 February, 1868; F.D.P.P.No.62, May 1868;
Foreign Office to India Office dated 15 February,
1868; F.D.P.P.No.63, May 1868.
4. Note by Under-Secretary, Foreign Department,
CoI dated 29 April 1868; F.D.P.P.No.55/69, May 1868.
orderly administration in Oman would be impossible without financial assistance from Zanzíbar. The maintenance of British predominance in the Persian Gulf was linked up with a stable Oman. It was, consequently, not possible to amend the Canning Settlement.

Wheeler's critique of the Canning Award commended itself to Sir John Lawrence. The Viceroy too was convinced that his predecessor's settlement stood as a whole; its political clauses could not be separated from its financial stipulations. In communicating its considered opinion to London, the Government of India emphasised two points. The Canning Award was an integral whole and represented a permanent arrangement. To amend it partially would prove disastrous for British influence in the Persian Gulf. Besides, the subsidy was meant to compensate Oman for the loss it had suffered through the secession of Zanzíbar. Without financial assistance the viability of Oman would be subjected to a severe test. If the Imamate disintegrated, Indian interests would suffer. In the words of the despatch:

"The authority of the British Government

1. Minute by Viceroy dated 30 April, 1868; F.D.P.P. No.55/69, May 1868.
2. Political Despatch No.81 to Secretary of State for India dated 14 May, 1868; F.D.P.P. No.64, May 1868."
to preserve the peace of the Persian Gulf and suppress piratical aggressions, which are liable to occur where Wahhabi influence is felt, is inextricably linked up with the establishment of a firm Government at Masqat, and we strongly deplored the adoption of the measure tending to weaken the authority of the Sultan.*

Notwithstanding the stand taken by Lawrence, the subsidy question defied all attempts at resolution. The conservative revolution of 1868 encouraged the India Office to ask the Indian authorities to go afresh into the question. However, since the subsidy was premised on the concrete economic needs of Oman, not even a dynastic upset could convince the Foreign Department of the expediency of doing away with it. With Lawrence and the Imperial authorities adopting conflicting stands, the problem drifted into an impasse, from which no attempt was made to rescue it during the Azzan interlude.

Turki's victory over the Confederacy again directed the Government of India's attention to the subsidy question. The solution suggested by Mayo for the resolution of the problem was of a piece with his

1. Ibid.
2. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 6 March, 1869; F.D.P.P. No. 247, March 1869.
3. Political Despatch No. 100 to Secretary of State for India dated 20 March, 1869; F.D.P.P. No. 254, March 1869; Also see Secretary, Bombay Government to Secretary, Foreign Department, GCI dated 10 March, 1869; F.D.P.P. No. 251, March 1869.
attitude towards British responsibilities in Oman. He combined his plea for disengagement with the suggestion that, since Her Majesty's Government was unwilling to compel Majid to fulfil the financial terms of the Canning Award, the settlement ought to be repudiated as a whole. Turki ought to be recognised and the Oman seas thrown open to naval operations. If the Saiyid wanted to coerce Majid, no obstacle should be placed in his way.

The lines along which Mayo wanted to reorient British policy were embodied in a comprehensive despatch to the Imperial Government. Therein it was pointed out that the maritime policy pursued in the Persian Gulf rested on engagements contracted with the Trucial Chiefs. It had as its objective the protection of British trade. In the Gulf of Oman conditions were different. There the Government of India had committed itself to a policy of involvement for which there was no de jure basis, and to which it would be inexpedient to adhere. Turki's seizure of power offered a convenient pretext for breaking clear of past entanglements. The Saiyid could be told that in recognising him the Govern-

1. Minute by Viceroy dated 20 February, 1871; F.D.S.I. No. 44/58, 1871.

2. Secret Despatch No. 13 to Secretary of State for India dated 3 April, 1871; F.D.S.I. No. 58, 1871.
ment proposed to set aside the interdict it had earlier imposed on naval operations in the Gulf of Oman. In recommending such a course the Indian authorities were conscious of the need to maintain British influence over Oman. But they were convinced that their preponderance over the state could be maintained through means more subtle and less open to objection than those employed by Lawrence.¹

While Mayo’s despatch did not elicit any reply from the India Office, the Viceroy, interpreting silence as tacit assent, applied his ‘new line’ to the conduct of relations with Oman. When Turki sought permission to proceed against Ibrahim at Sohar by way of sea, the Foreign Department had no hesitation in according to his request.² The policy of ‘disengagement’ also emerged triumphant of a more exacting test. The undefined Indo-Persian border along Baluchistan had long been a point of friction between India and Persia.³ To eliminate this source of disharmony the demarcation of the frontier was undertaken by the Goldsmid Commission in 1871 at the initiative of the

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¹. Ibid.
². Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Bombay Government dated 14 March, 1871; F.D.S.I. No. 729, 1871; Tel. Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI to Secretary, Bombay Government dated 20 May, 1871; F.D.S.I. No. 742, 1871.
Foreign Office. Of the overseas possessions of Turki, Charbor on the Makran Coast fell west of a longitudinal axis which, according to Goldsmid, marked the eastern limits of Persia. Immediately after the Commission had pronounced its award, Teheran set aside Masqati claims over the port and forcibly occupied it. The seizure of Charbor raised the question whether any assistance was to be given to Turki as against the high-handed action of the Persian authorities. In arriving at a decision the Foreign Department was again guided by Mayo's 'new line'. Aitchison admitted that India had in the past treated Charbor as an Omani Outpost, and had even repudiated Teheran's claims over it. At the authorities were under no obligation to assist the Masqat ruler. So long as naval operations in the Gulf of Oman had been prohibited, Turki could legitimately claim British assistance. Now that he was "free to defend or strengthen Charbor", it was up to him to safeguard the integrity of his possessions.

1. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to H.H.'s Minister, Teheran dated 6 January, 1870; F.O.S.H. No.41, 1870.
3. Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 26 February, 1872; F.O.S.P. No.36/93, June 1873.
4. Ibid.
5. Secret Despatch to Secretary of State for India dated 27 March, 1872; F.O.S.P. No.47, June 1872; Also see Minute by Viceroy dated nil; F.O.S.P. No. 36/93, June 1872.
Mayo's policy towards Oman throws interesting light on his foreign policy orientation. It also shows that he subscribed to Lawrence's school in respect of the conduct of India's external relations. Yet surprisingly enough in the Persian Gulf Mayo's measures were conceived and executed in a more rigorous spirit of non-involvement than those of his predecessor. The reason for this anomaly lies in the ill-considered advice which Lawrence received in 1867 from the Masqat Agency. However, the fact remains that if it was Lawrence who defined the premises of 'masterly inactivity' for the Gulf, it was left to Mayo to give concrete form to the policy bequeathed to him.

THE FRERE MISSION AND THE INTERNAL PROTECTORATE OVER OMAN

Mayo's policy of disengagement was soon reversed by events which bound Oman with ties of great intimacy to the British Government. These events had their origin in England's determination to abolish the slave trade which flourished between Arabia and East Africa. In the 1870's radical pressure on the liberal party in power compelled the Imperial Government to assume the initiative in respect of the suppression
of the traffic in human flesh. The Foreign Office selected Sir Bartle Frere, the veteran Indian administrator, to negotiate anti-slave trade treaties with the rulers of Masqat and Zanzibar. To induce the Saiyids to fall in line with the wishes of the British Government, Frere was authorised to assure them that England would assume the responsibility to pay the 'Zanzibar' subsidy if she received co-operation in her anti-slave trade measures.

While Frere was initially unsuccessful at Zanzibar, Turki extended co-operation to him in the fullest measure. The Saiyid readily agreed to the

1. See L. E. Hollingsworth, Zanzibar Under The Foreign Office, (1890-1913), (London 1953), pp. 13-14; The British Government had already contracted two engagements with Imam Said, one in 1822, and the other in 1845, for the eradication of the slave trade. However, it was universally recognised that the evil had remained unchecked. For texts of the Treaties see: C.J. Atchison, A Collection of Treaties etc., Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries, (Delhi 1933), 1, pp. 228-32, 300-02.

2. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Sir Bartle Frere dated 9 November, 1872: F.D.S.P. No. 130, February 1873.

3. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Sultans of Masqat and Zanzibar dated 9 November, 1872: F.D.S.P. No. 130, February 1873.

proposals put forward by the Envoy which sought the "perpetual abolition" of slavery in his territory. Now Sir Bartle had no illusions as to the ability of Turk to institute so radical a reform in Oman. But he interpreted the engagement purely in a political light. After signing the anti-slave treaty Turk broached the subject of the 'Zanzibar' subsidy with Frere. Sir Bartle's re-action to the Sayyid's overture assumes comprehensibility only in the context of his foreign policy orientation. Political considerations, he asserted in a communication to the Government of India, had made it imperative for the British authorities to support Imam Said's dynasty in Oman. For

with a port and position so capable of fortification as Muscat, so close to India, it can never be a matter of indifference to us who rules there, even if all the commerce of the country were not so exclusively Indian as it is.

The best way to ensure British interests was to assume

1. Treaty between H.M.C. and the Sultan of Masqat dated 14 April, 1873: F.D.P.P. No.477, June 1873.
2. Sir Bartle Frere to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 16 April, 1873: F.D.P.P. No. 477, June 1873.
Frere's plea for closer relations with Masqat commended itself to Lord Northbrook, Mayo's successor in India, and Turki was promised payment of the subsidy stipulated in the Canning Award so long as he remained faithful to the obligations he had contracted with the British authorities. The assumption of this responsibility led to consequences which only Frere could have anticipated, or wholly approved. It constituted a definite reversal of the policy of non-involvement which Mayo had tried to work out before his tragic end. By agreeing to subsidise the Imamate, the Government assumed something akin to an 'internal protectorate' over the country, an interpretation English publicists themselves advanced in a later context, when the British hold over Oman was challenged by France.

The consequences of the responsibility assumed by Northbrook became evident in the degree to which the Government of India was led to associate itself with the internal problems of Oman. With the resumption

1. Viceroy to Saayid Turki dated 9 June, 1873; F.D.P. No. 485, June 1873.

2. According to Curzon: "Oman may, indeed, be justifiably regarded as a British dependency. We subsidise its ruler; we dictate its policy; we should tolerate no alien interference". Vide G.N. Curzon, Persia And The Persian question, (London 1892), II, p. 443; Also see H.J. Whigham, The Persian Problem, (London 1903), p. 19.
of the subsidy Turki attempted to purchase the loyalty of the tribes of the interior, virtually elevating bribery to a political system. But his attempts to this effect were not at all successful. For early in 1874, Saleh bin Ali, a surviving member of the conservative triumvirate, raised once again the 'mutawiah' banner of revolt. The Saiyid's forces were defeated and Matrah fell into the hands of Saleh, whose Bedouin followers pillaged the city. Turki inevitably turned to the British for help. The Masqat ruler's application for assistance placed the Foreign Department in a quandary. In 1871 Mayo had trenchantly argued the case for non-involvement in Oman. Frere, slightly later, had advocated an active British role in maritime Arabia. The Government had already committed itself in so far as it had resumed the subsidy to the Saiyid on the envoy's recommendation. Aitchison, who had earlier defended Mayo's orientation, now came out with a plausible rationalisation in support of Turki's request for assistance.

1. Political Agent, Masqat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 16 October, 1874; F.D.P.P. No. 117, December, 1874.
2. Tel. Political Agent, Masqat to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 19 January, 1874; F.D.P.P. No. 205, March 1874; Political Agent, Masqat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 18 January, 1874; F.D.P.P. No. 228, March 1874.
3. Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 20 January, 1874; F.D.P.P. No. 205/222, March 1874.
British interests. Saleh's Bedouin miscellany had "maltreated and plundered" British subjects at Matrah. The Saiyid should, therefore, be assisted with the naval forces at the Government's disposal in the Persian Gulf.  

The Government of India's attitude was decisive in resolving the crisis in Oman. Finding the British authorities opposed to him, Saleh withdrew into the interior on receipt of a liberal bribe from Turki, who was too weak to eject him by force. Saleh's withdrawal by no means put an end to the Saiyid's troubles. Shortly after his departure Ibrahim bin Yais descended upon the satinah and had to be shelled out of the citadel of Masnaah by a British man-of-war. The Agent at Masqat aptly summed up the situation when he stated that but for British help "Ibrahim would have been at this moment in Muscat and Syud Toorkee a fugitive ...."  

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1. Tel. Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 20 January, 1874: P.D.P.P. No.207, March 1874.
2. Political Agent, Masqat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 6 February, 1874: P.D.P.P. No.226, March 1874; Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Bombay Government dated 31 January, 1874: P.D.P.P. No.227, March 1874.
3. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Bombay Government dated 1 April, 1874: P.D.P.P. No.252, June 1874.
4. Memorandum on the Political Situation in Oman by Political Agent, Masqat dated 1 May, 1874: P.D.P.P. No. 260, June 1874.
The opening years of Turki's rule thus throw into bold relief the cardinal realities of Omani politics. Unlike the Azman confederacy, the Saiyid lacked a religious hold over the orthodox tribes of the Omani interior; consequently, he did not exercise any control over the hinterland of Masqat. Further, even his position on the littoral rested on British support; for the Government of India was reluctant to permit the conservative party to control the entire country.

Turki did not harbour any illusions about his position. He even tried to bolster his regime by inviting as co-ruler to Masqat his younger brother, Abdul Aziz bin Said. But the experiment turned out to be a singularly unhappy one. Abdul Aziz concentrated power in his hands to an extent where the Saiyid had to seek safety in a flight across the Gulf to Gwadar, an Omani outpost on the Makran Coast. With Abdul Aziz in control at Masqat the Foreign Department toyed with the idea of "recognising ...(him) at Muscat, while Turki would still be recognised as

1. Saiyid Turki to Political Agent, Masqat dated 16 April, 1874; F.D.P.P. No.260, June 1874.

2. Political Agent, Muscat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 28 May, and 8 July, 1875; F.D.P.P. No.82 and 93, September 1875; Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GCI dated 21 August, 1875; F.D.P.P. No.107, September 1875.
Ruler of Gwadar. However, the cementing of an alliance between Aziz and the conservative movement led the Indian authorities to view him with a decidedly unfriendly eye. The 'Zanzibar' subsidy, which was essential for the smooth running of the administration in Oman, was not paid to Abdul Aziz and the Government of India thereby facilitated Turki's return to power.

The conservative threat to Turki manifested itself again in 1877 in the form of a Saleh-Ibrahim combination. Repeating the manoeuvre of 1874, the confederate forces captured Matrah and then advanced to invest the capital. Turki's position became desperate and only British intervention saved him from certain defeat. After the Saiyid had survived the attack, the Agent at Masqat tried to argue the Foreign Department into pledging itself openly to his support. He asserted that the Masqat ruler had absolutely no control over the tribes of the interior.

1. Note by Under-Secretary, Foreign Department, GDI dated 22 October, 1875; F.D.P.P. No.97/156, March 1876. The Under-Secretary's suggestion was inspired by Lawrence's policy of recognising Afzal Khan as Ruler of Kabul, and Sher Ali as Ruler of Herat, during the Afghan Civil War; see J.S.W. Tyllie, "The Foreign Policy of Lord Lawrence", in "W." Hunter, ed., Essays on The External Policy of India, (London 1875), p.48.

2. Secretary, Foreign Department, GDI to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 26 October, 1875; F.D.P.P. No.112, March 1876.

3. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GDI dated 26 June, 1877; F.D.P.P. No.105(k), November 1878.

4. Note by Under-Secretary, Foreign Department, GDI dated 29 June, 1877; F.D.P.P. No.105(a to l), November 1878.
Sven in the littoral areas he could hold his own only because of British assistance. Why then did the Government not openly declare that it would support his regime? Such a pronouncement would put an end to the periodic Bedouin incursions on Masqat. Yet it would not commit the Foreign Department to a responsibility greater than the one it already "tacitly accepted".

At a time when Afghan affairs were claiming the exclusive attention of the Government of India, the plea for a rational and consistent policy towards Oman fell upon deaf ears. Yet even otherwise there was an air of unreality about the Foreign Department's approach to the question. This becomes obvious when one examines the attitude it assumed in 1882 when Abdul Aziz informed the Resident at Bushire of his determination to lead the country against Turki.

Official response to Aziz's warning reflected a strange confusion of ideas. Mr. C. Grant, Secretary to the

1. Political Agent, Muscat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 3 December, 1879; F.D.P.F. No. 22, February 1880.

2. Note by Assistant Secretary, Foreign Department, Gulf dated 30 January, 1880; F.D.P.F. No. 212/233, February 1880.

3. Abdul Aziz to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 13 January, 1882; F.D.P.F. No. 85, March 1882; Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, Gulf dated 30 January, 1882; F.D.P.F. No. 84, February, 1882.
Foreign Department, stated that it was fixed British policy not to interfere in the dynastic disputes of Oman. However, this did not exclude assistance to the established authority against "malcontent" elements. The Government's reaction to Aziz's uprising would depend upon whether or not it assumed a "quasi-national character". To quote Grant:

If Syud Abdol Azeez has at his command, or under his influence, a sufficiently large party in the State to give him a good chance of success, then we certainly should not interfere. If he is not likely to get beyond fomenting tribal disturbances, then we might at any rate give the Sultan (Turki) as much aid as we have done on former occasions.  

A puerile exercise in semantic hair-splitting!

While Aziz's movement of 1882 collapsed after a futile advance in the direction of Masqat, next year he again marched towards the capital in alliance with Saleh bin Ali. As on former occasions, it was the British Navy which came to Turki's rescue. The policy of 'non-intervention' had by now worn so hollow that when in 1885 disturbances again threatened Oman,

1. Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, C/O dated 1 February, 1883; F.D.P.F. No.84/88, February 1882.
2. Ibid.
3. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, C/O dated 25 October, 1883; F.D.P.F. No.107, November 1883.
4. Political Agent, Masqat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 30 October, 1883; F.D.P.F. No.142, March 1884.
Ross revived the suggestion initially made by the Agent at Masqat in a communication to the Government of India. British interests in Oman, he asserted, would be well served if the tribes of the interior were told that the Government was determined to protect Turki's authority on the coast. The British had assisted Turki on so many occasions that to withhold support from him in the future would result in a serious loss of prestige. It would be in the fitness of things to accept involvement in Oman as consistent policy.

Ross' suggestion was discussed at length in the Foreign Department, but official opinion was unable to reconcile itself to any step that would impose a measure of restraint on the Government's liberty of action. The assistance extended to Turki was interpreted as designed to protect British commercial interests.

Mr. (later Sir W.J.) Cunningham, Under-Secretary to the Foreign Department, referred to Grant's contention that it would be wrong to place any obstacle in the way of an uprising that was of a "quasi-national character." The

1. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GCI dated 12 August, 1885; F.D.P.E. No.142, March 1886.


3. Note by Assistant-Secretary, Foreign Department, GCI dated 4 September, 1885; F.D.P.E.No.142/152, March 1886.

4. Note by Under-Secretary, Foreign Department, GCI dated 9 September, 1885; F.D.P.E.No.142/152, March 1886.
Resident's recommendation obviously violated this dictum. It could lead the Government to support a ruler "against whom the strength of the country would have been declared."\(^1\) The reservations voiced in the Foreign Department were communicated to Ross for comment.\(^2\)

The Resident's reply constituted a reiteration of the views he had already expressed.\(^3\) His proposal, he emphasised, did not recommend a change of policy. It merely advocated the rationalisation of what had become accepted practice. Throughout Oman Turki was held to be an English protege; and this belief gave his opponents a lever with which to arouse conservative sentiment against him. The Government could not, therefore, afford to abandon him. Ross' plea was supported by Colonel S. B. Miles, the Agent at Muscat. According to him the declaration proposed by the Resident merely involved pursuing existing policy to its "logical and ultimate end."\(^4\) Qualms about supporting the Sayyid against popular manifestations were not

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1. Ibid.
2. Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI to Resident Persian Gulf dated 16 September, 1885: F.D.P.E. No.147, March 1886.
3. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 7 October, 1885: F.D.P.E. No.148, March 1886.
irrelevant. But if one looked to the crux of the problem, the issue resolved itself with surprising ease. For, Miles pointed out, as regards Turki's inability to maintain his position without support, I may be permitted to remark that His Highness' famous father, Seyyid Saeed, notwithstanding his prestige and remarkable ability ... was equally compelled to lean on the arms of the British Government. On several occasions Seyyid Saeed ... would have been driven from power by his turbulent subjects unless supported by the armed intervention of the Indian Navy.¹

Miles' critique of Omani politics induced the Government of India to give its hesitant consent to the policy advocated by its representatives in the Gulf.² At a formal durbar in Masqat, Ross declared that the Indian authorities would uphold the Saiyid's authority in maritime Oman against aggression from the interior. The pronouncement of British support had the anticipated effect and during the remaining years of his reign the Saiyid was not harassed by the conservative party. Turki passed away in June, 1888,

¹. Ibid.
². Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 9 February, 1886; F.D.P.E. No.150, March 1886; Also see Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 26 January, 1886; F.D.P.E. No.142/152, March 1886.
after a long but troubled reign of two decades.

The declaration of 1886 marked the culmination of the orientation given to British policy in Oman by Sir Bartle Frere in 1873. The assumption of the responsibility to pay the 'Zanzibar' subsidy disrupted the pattern into which Mayo had attempted to mould Indo-Oman relations. Yet even otherwise the basic contradiction which dominated Omani politics would go to indicate that a 'liberal' regime could survive only through British support. Ross had stated in 1871 that Turki would never consolidate his position on a firm basis. The course of events during the Saiyid's reign confirmed his prognosis. For in the ultimate analysis Imam Said's dynasty could maintain itself in power only because of British support.

THE BEGINNINGS OF ANGLO-FRENCH RIVALRY IN OMAN

Saiyid Turki's death in 1888 raised anew the question of succession in Oman. Three claimants dominated the political field: Abdul Aziz bin Said, Ibrahim bin Oais and Faisal bin Turki, the second son of the late ruler. The attitude to be adopted —


2. Note by Under-Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 19 May, 1888: F.O.E.P. No. 176/192, June 1888.
in the event of Turki's death had been discussed in the Foreign Department in 1881, when the Saiyid had made tentative overtures to the ruler of Zanzibar for securing the re-unification of Oman with its former African dependency. It had been decided that the Government would remain neutral in any war of succession beyond preventing the re-unification of Zanzibar and Mascat under a single sovereign. Of course, the accession to power of a direct descendant of Imam Said was to be welcomed, but only within the premises of non-involvement. Opinion in the Foreign Department in 1888 was still partial to the orientation delineated in 1881. No doubt was entertained that the declaration of 1886 was meant solely for Turki. Mr. (later Sir H.M.) Durand, Secretary to the Foreign Department, characteristically resigned himself to a time of troubles in Oman from which one of the three contenders would ultimately emerge triumphant.

After Turki's death it was Faisal who seized power in Mascat. However, the Indian authorities were sceptical

1. Political Agent, Zanzibar to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 8 March, 1880; F.D.B.P. No. 180, June 1880.
2. Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 25 June, 1881; F.D.B.P. No. 452, June 1881.
3. Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 20 May, 1881; F.D.B.P. No. 176/192, June 1881.
4. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 6 June, 1888; F.D.B.P. No. 187, June 1888.
of his ability to hold his own against his rivals and turned down his request for recognition. Nevertheless, the Government made a gesture which indicated that it viewed Faisal's accession to power with favour. On the suggestion of the Resident, payment of the 'Zanziber' subsidy was resumed to him on the plea that it was "necessary to carry on de facto Government and maintain order".

Faisal, on his part, was not lacking in shrewdness. His first concern after seizure of power was to drive a wedge between the conservative alliance with had bedeviled Murki. A liberal subsidy won over to his side the Sharqiyyah chief, Selah bin Ali. As for Ibrahim and Aziz, the declaration of 1886 had so inhibited them that they were unwilling to assume the offensive because of the apprehension that the British would support the late ruler's son. After an interval

1. Tel. Siyyid Faisal to Viceroy dated 6 June, 1888: F.O.S.P. No.188, June 1888; Tel. Secretary, Foreign Department, J.I to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 6 June, 1888: F.O.E.P. No.189, June 1888.

2. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 29 June, 1888: F.O.S.P. No.294, May 1889.


the two chiefs sent cautious feelers to the British representative. An emissary of Ibrahim bin Qais asked of the Agent at Masqat whether the Government would remain neutral in case a struggle for power broke out. Abdul Aziz was more forthright. He outright requested the British authorities to countenance his pretensions.1

Ross’ reply to Abdul Aziz was a minor masterpiece of diplomacy. The British authorities, he stated, were interested in supporting a stable regime in Oman. They would consequently recognise whosoever was acceptable to the people of the country. The Resident’s reply proved a bitter blow to Aziz, and he gave expression to his frustration in a revealing letter.3 The standards of public morality in Oman, he asserted, had been debased to a level where it was impossible for the right candidate (presumably Aziz himself) to be selected. Aziz asked of Ross:

I ask how can there be expected from people in such a condition good deeds, and the choosing of rulers fit to guide them? It is absurd - absurd to expect such of them — for they are utterly lacking in good deeds and integrity, and by nature imbued with evil and strife.4

1. Political Agent, Masqat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 1 July, 1888; F.D.S.F.No.96, August 1888; Also see Abdul Aziz to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 15 June, 1888; F.D.S.F.No.96, August 1888.


3. Abdul Aziz to Political Agent, Masqat dated 10 August, 1888; F.D.S.F.No.244, September 1888.

4. Ibid.
The only remedy was to forge an alliance with the conservative party in order to cleanse Oman of the corruption that had crept into the social body in the guise of innovation.

By detaching Saleh from the confederate ranks Faisal had made impossible the combination to which Aziz turned in the absence of British support for his pretensions. He could, therefore, muster to his ranks only Saud bin Azzan, a son of the late confederate leader, and he expended his strength in a series of futile movements in the direction of the Omani capital.¹

The discomfiture of Abdul Aziz led Major C.S. Yate, the Political Agent at Masqat, to raise the question of Faisal's recognition with the Government of India.² Of the Saiyid's two opponents, one had been worsted in the field of battle, while the other, Ibrahim, apparently possessed no inclination to stir out of Rastaq. Given the political conditions of Oman, Faisal would never consolidate his position more than he had already done. It would, therefore, be opportune to recognise him. Yate also

¹. Political Agent, Masqat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 8 August, and 6 October, 1889: F.D.E.P.No. 146, September 1889 and No.142, November 1889; Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Deptt. GOI dated 15 January, 1890: F.D.E.P.No.22,February 1890; Saiyid Faisal to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 2 February, 1890: F.D.E.P.No.318, March 1890.
². Political Agent, Masqat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 23 February, 1890:F.D.E.P.No.129, July 1890.
directed the attention of the Foreign Department to the international setting of the Persian Gulf. Both Persia and Turkey, behind whom loomed the ominous shadow of Russia, were showing signs of renewed interest in the region. British influence was admittedly supreme in Oman. But it rested on insecure foundations in that it had no *de jure* basis. It was, therefore, imperative that "Muscat be brought within the sphere of our prescriptive influence". Failing such a step, the tragedy enacted in East Africa would be repeated in maritime Arabia.

The Resident at Bushire agreed with Yate only in respect of the recommendation that Faisal be recognised. Ross felt that the assumption of a protectorate over Oman was ruled out by the Anglo-French Convention of 1862. At the same time, he viewed Yate's prognosis as unwarrantably pessimistic. British influence over Oman was something linked to the location of the Indian Empire and imperial control of the seas. The comparison with East Africa was hardly pertinent:

The geographical position of Oman puts it on a different footing as regards British interests than Zanzibar and neither France nor any other power could with justice deny that Oman falls legitimately within the

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2. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, OGI dated 3 March, 1890. F.D.E.P. No.128, July 1890.
sphere of British "influence" and I see no reason to apprehend any diminution in that influence. 1

Because of the Resident's re-assuring appraisal the Foreign Department did not react enthusiastically to Yate's suggestion and recognition was conferred on the Masqat ruler without any addition to the contractual obligations of the Government of India in the Gulf. 2

While Yate's proposal for a protectorate over Oman was dismissed without serious consideration, the inexorable logic of events soon placed the question with an added emphasis before the Indian authorities. The closing decades of the nineteenth century caught Europe in a great political-economic ferment defined as 'imperialism'. Into the precise reasons behind this phenomenon the present study does not propose to go. 3 Suffice it to mention here that the European powers were led, under its impulse, into a feverish scramble for the acquisition of colonies in the empty

1. Ibid.
2. Minute by Viceroy dated 27 March, 1890; F.D.E.P. No.126/142, July 1890; Also see Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 26 March, 1890; F.D.E.P. No.126/142, July 1890.
Since England was the greatest colonial power it was for her that this wave of expansionism created the most pressing problems. The two countries whose imperial aspirations proved particularly embarrassing for England were France and Russia. Oman and the Middle East were regions of historic interest for France, witness Palgrave’s mission under the third Napoleon, or the duel fought between England and France half a century earlier. Towards the 1880’s the Colonial Party in France started showing a renewed interest in Oman through interpellations in the Chamber of Deputies regarding the protection of French interests in the state. At London, however, no exaggerated significance was attached to the activities of the French Colonial Party. The Imperial Government was confident of its ability to hold its own in Arabia. "Lord Salisbury and I are both agreed", Viscount Cross, the Secretary of State for India, wrote to the Viceroy, "that we will have nothing to do with the French in these parts, and shall insist that they shall have nothing to do with us".

Cross’ hint that the Oman question had acquired

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1. See supra pp. 9-16, 51-52.
a new dimension led the Government of India to analyse
the premises of its influence over the Imamate. A
Foreign Department official held that India exercised
an "informal protectorate" over Oman. Canning's
arbitration of 1861; the payment of a subsidy to the
ruler; and the numerous occasions on which the Govern-
ment had interfered in questions of internal interest
stood to vindicate this contention. Yet Cunningham,
own Secretary to the Foreign Department, pointed out
that while the authorities had often intervened in
dynastic struggles, they had never protected the
Imamate from a European power. Of course, the desir-
ability of establishing a protectorate over Oman was
never questioned in India. Lord Lansdowne, the
Viceroy, told Cross that since the Convention of 1862
had projected the question in the sphere of Anglo-
French relations, his Government was reluctant to pass
judgment over the issue in so far as it affected the
international situation. But from the Indian standpoint
there were
good reasons for asserting a virtual protect-
orate over Muscat, and when our relations
with that country and its rulers for nearly
a century past are taken into consideration,

1. Note by Under Secretary, Foreign Department,
GOI dated 16 August, 1890: F.D.S.P. No. 248/253, September
1890.
2. Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI
dated 16 August, 1890: F.D.S.P. No. 248/253, September
1890.
3. Secret Despatch No. 113 to Secretary of
State for India dated 8 September, 1890: F.D.S.P.
No. 263, September 1890.
we feel that neither France nor other
powers could, with justice, deny that
Muscat falls legitimately within the
sphere of British influence.1

The Secretary of State for India agreed with
the sentiments expressed by Lansdowne. He told
Salisbury that the time was opportune to assume a
protectorate over Muscat since the Convention of
1862 had been nullified through French acceptance
of a British protectorate over Zanzibar.2 Yet Cross
had reckoned without his host. For anticipating a
move in the direction suggested by him, the French
Deputy François Deloncle, a leading spokesman of the
Colonial Party, prompted a declaration from the Paris
Government that events in Africa had not invalidated
the Convention of 1862 in respect of Muscat.3

As distinct from the India Office, Salisbury
had no illusions as to the attitude the quai d'Orsay
would assume if England attempted to take Oman under
her protection. For Anglo-French relations were
decidedly unfriendly in 1890. In the month of June,

1. Ibid.
2. India Office to Foreign Office dated 3 October,
1890: F.O. 337, No. 117, September 1890.
3. See Extract from "Journal Official" dated
111: F.O. 337, No. 124, September 1890.
England and Germany had concluded an agreement under which Berlin made important concessions to the British in East Africa in return for Heligoland, a strategic North Sea island. The agreement was in itself unimportant; but it brought the two countries together and alarmed St. Peters burg and Paris. Staal, the Russian Ambassador at London, wrote to his Government: "the entente with Germany is virtually accomplished...."

The pattern of European alignments set France in opposition to England. Small wonder then that Salisbury felt that any unilateral step in Oman would be "resented" in Paris. However, recognising the need to exclude alien influences from the region, he instructed the Indian authorities to secure a declaration from Faisal that he would not lease or alienate any part of his territory to a foreign power without British consent. The Non-Alienation Agreement of 1891 was a shrewd stroke on the part of Salisbury. While

3. Foreign Office to India Office dated 1 August, 1890; F.D.S.P. No.252, September, 1890.
4. Foreign Office to India Office dated 24 October, 1890; F.D.S.P.No.120, July 1891; Declaration by Sayid Faisal dated 20 March, 1891; F.D.S.P.No.226, July 1891.
all but converting Oman into a protectorate, it bypassed the Convention of 1862, and strengthened England in her endeavour to keep the Imamate under her influence.

If the Anglo-German 'disengagement' of 1890 destroyed the insularity of the Persian Gulf, the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1894 transformed it into a centre of international rivalry. According to Langer anti-British sentiment played a significant role in bringing together Paris and St. Petersburg. It would be futile to deny that the agreement was ultimately "a weapon loaded only against Germany ...." But the then European situation ruled out any genuine understanding between France and Russia on a purely anti-German programme. The French in North Africa, and the Russians in the Near, the Middle, and the Far East, regarded England as the major obstacle towards the realisation of their ambitions. It was, therefore, in its anti-British facet that the alliance first manifested itself. "Its serious intention", states A.J.P. Taylor, "so far as it had one, was to keep Germany neutral while the Powers pursued their several objects elsewhere".


3. Ibid., p. 345; Also see A.J. Marder, British Naval Policy (1880-1906), (London 1940), p. 13.
England did not wait for long to experience the hostility of the new combination in the Gulf. Even before the conclusion of the alliance M. Deloncie had started agitating for the appointment of a Consular representative at Masqat, a right which accrued to France by virtue of the Treaty of 1844 with the then Imam of Oman. Deloncie made no secret of the motive behind his demand. England, he asserted, had appropriated to herself so many arbitrary prerogatives in the Gulf. A combined Franco-Russian assault on her position would remedy matters since of late years Russian influence had begun to make headway against that of Great Britain in the Persian Gulf .... (Besides) his proposal would be a proof of the combined action of France with the great nation which is her ally. While the motives behind the appointment of a French Consul in Oman were appreciated in India, the


2. Extract from Debate in the French Assembly: P.D.S.P. No. 3, May 1893; Also see L. Fraser, India Under Curzon And After, (London 1911), p. 133.


4. Secret Despatch No.147 to Secretary of State for India dated 18 July, 1893: F.D.S.P. No. 328, August 1893.
formally an independent ruler. What did lie within the Government's control was the initiation of a policy which took into account the new situation in the Gulf. But in this respect it failed initially. A similar lack of discrimination was exhibited in the selection of Agents for Masqat. M. Paul Octavi, the French Consul, was an accomplished diplomat, with a flair for intrigue. Against him the Government of India pitted a series of officers whose diplomatic experience was limited to the congenial task of twisting the tails of the Princes of India.

The British role in the rebellion of 1895 illustrates the above contention. In 1894 intrigues between the mutawiah party and Hamid bin Thuwaini, the ruler of Zanzibar, for the re-unification of the latter state and Oman were brought to the notice of the Foreign Department. These intrigues bore fruit next year when the conservative party under Abdullah bin Saleh, the son of Saleh bin Ali, seized Masqat through a stratagem and forced Faisal to take shelter in the harbour fortresses. When the Masqat ruler

2. Political Agent, Zanzibar to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 14 February, 1894; F.D.S.P. No. 60, July 1894.
3. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 15 February, 1895; F.D.S.P. No. 176, July 1895; Also see Persian Gulf Residency Report for 1894-95, p.17; GOI Selection No. 326.
turn to the Indian authorities for assistance, his request was turned down on the plea that British policy was to abstain from involvement in Oman in so far as Indian interests were not threatened. Primary responsibility for advising the Government to adopt a policy of 'neutrality' rested on Colonel F.A. Wilson, the Resident at Bushire, whose relations with Faisal left much to be desired. Left to fend for himself, Faisal purchased peace by appeasing his opponents. But the incident rankled in his mind and set him on the path to a rupture with the Government of India.

Of Ottavi’s role in the rebellion of 1895 we have no direct evidence. Yet the Consul could not have remained an idle spectator of events. It is probable that he offered Faisal assistance in overcoming the rebels. For shortly after the insurrectionists had departed from the capital a French man-of-war, the

1. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 21 February, 1895; F.D.S.P. No. 194, July 1895; Tel. Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 17 February, 1895; F.D.S.P. No. 185, July 1895.


"Troude", steamed into Masqat harbour. An account of the rebellion appearing in a Cairo journal throws fascinating light on the reasons behind the "Troude's" appearance in Oman waters. The report, which was inspired by Faisal, speaks of the Saiyid's vain bid for British assistance and went on to assert that

at the time of the occurrence of the calamity the Consul for the French came to us and offered his services but we did not desire to trouble him. Their (the French) man-of-war came and her officers landed and visited us, but when she arrived the war was over. The friendly relations existing between us and the French are firmly established and unalterable.

The disquieting symptoms accompanying the rebellion of 1895 led the Political Agent at Masqat, Major J.H. Sadler, to examine afresh the premises of British policy in Oman. According to Sadler three alternative courses were open to adoption to secure British interests in the region: the annexation of Masqat and Matrah; the assumption of a protectorate over Oman; and, last of all, a reiteration of the declaration of 1886 in favour of Faisal. The Agent

1. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 16 March, 1895: F.D.S.P. No.214, March 1895.
4. Political Agent, Musqat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 10 April, 1895: F.D.S.P. No.356, July 1895.
admitted that the first proposal was justifiable only as an extreme step. The second alternative was the most expedient of all. The people of Oman would welcome a protectorate as an end to chronic political instability. The measure would also thwart those who were challenging the British position in the Gulf with an insistence which increased with each passing day. The steady advance of Russia towards south Persia, and the interest which France was taking in an area where her commercial interests were negligible, would raise momentous questions of policy and strategy for the Government in the future. A secure hold over Oman would render those questions easy of solution. Yet if international considerations ruled out the second alternative, then an assurance to the Masqat ruler that the Government would protect his authority on the littoral constituted an essential minimum. It would go some distance towards placating Faisal.¹

There was ample support in the Foreign Department and the India Office² for Sadler’s proposal for a

¹. IMD.
². Secret Despatch No. 133 to Secretary of State for India dated 9 July, 1895; F.D.S.P. No. 357, July 1895; Note by Viceroy dated 13 June, 1895; F.D.S.P. No. 356/357, July 1895; Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 9 June, 1895; F.D.S.P. No. 355/357, July 1895.
³. Secret Despatch No. 32 to Government of India dated 30 August, 1895; F.D.S.P. No. 103, April 1896.
protectorate over Oman. But everything depended upon the French attitude and Salisbury confessed that there was no reason to presume that the Paris Government would prove more accommodating than it had in the past. All that resulted of Sadler’s initiative was the assumption by the Government of India of the responsibility to defend Faisal’s authority on the littoral against aggression from the interior.

While the ill-grace with which Faisal received the Government’s assurance indicated the extent to which he had been alienated, it was the Dhofar question which fully revealed the breach that had come to divide Oman and India. Dhofar is a province on the Hadramaut coast in the extreme south-west of Oman where the Saiyids enjoyed a precarious authority. Already in 1880’s Turki’s sovereignty over Dhofar had been challenged by one Saiyid Fakil, a Turkish pretender. However, through British assistance Turki succeeded in maintaining control over the province. In 1896

1. Foreign Office to India Office dated 22 August, 1896; F.D.S.P. No.165, April 1896.
the Ottoman protege, Fazil, recommended intriguing against the Masqat ruler. In Cairo an emissary of the pretender approached Lord Cromer, the British Consul-General in Egypt, with the offer that if Her Majesty’s Government countenanced his master’s pretensions over Dhofar, Fazil would, on a quid pro quo basis, encourage British interests there. The Foreign Office refused to take the overture very seriously, since Fazil’s connections with the Ottoman Porte were notorious.

Shortly after the pretender’s feeler to Lord Cromer, Dhofar revolted against the Masqat ruler. While no ostensible connection between the rebels and Fazil could be established, the event excited concern in British circles since it would have been dangerous to permit an Ottoman protege to establish control over a portion of the strategic Hadramaut coast. Lord Elgin, the Viceroy, asked the India Office that his Government

2. Foreign Office to India Office dated 26 March, 1895: F.D.S.P. No.148, September 1895.
be permitted to lend naval assistance to Faisal in reasserting his authority over the province. The Foreign Office was not averse to the suggestion. But Salisbury apprehended that France would interpret British assistance as a violation of the Convention of 1862. He consequently informed the French Ambassador at London of the action he contemplated and assured him that no intention of taking Masqat under protection was entertained. Even with Salisbury's assurance the Ambassador held that "unilateral action of this nature was to be deprecated in view of the existing arrangement between the two countries to respect the independence of Masqat." However, in spite of the French attitude, Her Majesty's Government agreed to Elgin's proposal.

At Masqat, in the meanwhile, Ottavi had not been inactive. Through the agency of one Abdul Aziz, who worked in Faisal's Secretariat, he established a channel of communication with the Saiyid and inculcated in him a deep suspicion of British motives. The result

1. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 22 April, 1896: F.D.S.P. No.12, June 1896.
3. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 28 March, 1896: F.D.S.P. No.326, July 1896.
Also see Note by Assistant-Secretary, Foreign Department, GCI dated 13 June, 1896: F.D.S.P. No.157/164, April 1896.
was that when the Agent at Masqat approached Faisal with an offer of assistance, it was turned down on the pretext that it concealed an intention to establish a protectorate over Dhofar. The British representatives were astonished at Faisal's presumption. Wilson was sure that "some outside influence had been at work". Both he and his locum tenens in Oman pressed the Government to take the Imamate under its protection.

In spite of the delicate situation in Arabia, Salisbury was obliged to turn down the Indian recommendation for the assumption of a protectorate over Oman. France, he pointed out, would concede nothing; and the Conservative Government's parliamentary position did not permit it to denounce the Convention of 1862. However, the India Office was not prepared to

1. Political Agent, Masqat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 15 April, 1896; F.D.S.P.No.361, July 1896.
2. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOL dated 25 April, 1896; F.D.S.P.No.366, July 1896.
4. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 25 June, 1896; F.D.S.P. No.161, August 1896.
5. Foreign Office to India Office dated 9 July, and 22 October, 1896; F.D.S.P.No.17 and 180, June 1897.
abandon the question so easily. Lord George Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India, reminded the Foreign Office of the policy of masking the Arab littoral through protectorates over the maritime states lying across the imperial line of communication to India and the further East. Muscat had not been taken under protection because of the agreement with France; but it had been assumed that the principality would pursue a pro-British orientation. Faisal's intransigence, however, threatened to undermine the foundations of British policy. The situation had not assumed the proportions of an acute crisis. But if there was any danger of France or Turkey interfering in Dhofar, a drastic solution would have to be improvised.1

Reassuring advice reached London from Paris and Constantinople.2 The British Ambassadors at these capitals reported that the situation in Dhofar was not attracting any attention locally. With the external situation in its favour, Her Majesty's Government decided upon resolving the problem through a conciliatory

1. India Office to Foreign Office dated 7 August, 1896; F.D.S.P. No. 11, June 1897; Also see Sir R. Lee-Warner, Secretary, Secret and Political Department, India Office to H.S. Warner (demi-official) dated 7 August, 1897; F.D.S.P. No. 11/76, June 1897. 2. Foreign Office to India Office dated 11 September, 1896; F.D.S.P. No. 19, June 1897; H.M.'s Ambassador, Paris to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 31st August, 1896; F.D.S.P. No. 20, June 1897.
policy. The Indian authorities, who had threatened Faisal with the suspension of the 'Zanzibar' subsidy, were instructed to placate the Masqat ruler. For with France exhibiting so mischievous an interest in the region, and English hands tied diplomatically, the only way out was to humour Faisal. As a result of the Imperial Government's injunction Wilson was sent on a mission of conciliation to Oman. The Resident's mission was successful for having come to realise the weakness of his position, Faisal proved eminently tractable and recovered Dhofar through British assistance.

**THE BANDAR JISSAH QUESTION**

Anglo-French rivalry in Oman attained its climax in the Bandar Jissah question. The earlier antagonisms merely paved the way for this controversy, which nearly wrecked an understanding between the two countries on a question (Fashoda and the upper Nile Valley) of primary importance in respect of European diplomacy. Jissah was Ottavi's great master-stroke; a consummation which almost succeeded in destroying the influence which England had built for herself in

1. Secret Despatch No.38 to Government of India dated 11 September, 1896; F.D.S.P. No.74, February 1897.

2. Tel. Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 4 January, 1897; F.D.S.P. No.28, June 1897.

3. Secret Despatch No.18 to Secretary of State for India dated 18 May, 1897; F.D.S.P.No.68, June 1897.
In the autumn of 1833 Sur revolted against the Masqat ruler. The occurrence led to a discussion in the Foreign Department as to the assistance it was necessary to extend to Faisal. While Calcutta was debating questions of policy, a French ship-of-war, the "scorpion", sailed into Masqat harbour. A suspicion was at first entertained that it had come to assist Faisal in reducing Sur to obedience. But fears to this effect were set at rest when intelligence of ominous happenings in Oman was received at Calcutta. The Masqat ruler held a durbar to welcome the "Scorpion", and the occasion was marked by an exchange of presents between Faisal and a representative of the French President. At the durbar Ottavi made an ostentatious declaration on behalf of the French Government of its desire to cultivate closer relations with Oman. Faisal replied in an equally cordial vein, assuring the Consul of his "affectionate inclinations" towards the French.

1. Political Agent, Masqat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 30 September, 1898: F.D.S.P.No.91A, February 1899.
2. Minute by Viceroy and Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, GCI dated 13 October, 1898: F.D.S.P. No.90/182, February 1899.
3. Tel. Political Agent, Masqat to Secretary, Foreign Department, GCI dated 11 October, 1898: F.D.S.P. No.92, February 1899.
The meaning behind the "Scorpion's" visit became clear through a report in the Paris newspaper, the Journal de Debats, that Faisal had leased a harbour called Bander Jissah to France in the neighbourhood of Masqat for the erection of a coaling station.

M. Delcasse, the French Foreign Minister, denied knowledge of the concession on being questioned by Sir Edmund Monson, the British Ambassador at Paris. But the Foreign Office was not satisfied with his denial and inquired of the Government of India whether it was aware of the lease.

For Salisbury the Jissah crisis came, perhaps not entirely fortuitously, at a highly inconvenient moment. In the autumn of 1898 the conflict between England and France concerning dominance over the upper Nile Valley, and thereby over Egypt, had reached its climax. The struggle for control over the Nile Valley marked the most crucial phase of Salisbury's career.

1. Tel. Political Agent, Masqat to Secretary, Foreign Department, C.I dated 18 October, 1898: F.D.S.P. No.92, February 1899; Also see Texts of Addresses by M. Ottavi and Saiyid Faisal in the Durbar of 13 October, 1898: F.D.S.P. No.126, February 1899.

2. Tel. H.M's Ambassador, Paris to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 2 December, 1898: F.D.S.P. No.149, February 1899.

3. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 13 December, 1898: F.D.S.P. No.134, February 1899.
a phase for which he had sedulously prepared ground since over a decade. Egypt was the keystone of British imperial strategy. To abandon predominance over it would have been a disaster of overwhelming proportions for the empire.¹

From the very start the concurrent dispute with France over Fashoda threw Her Majesty’s Government on the defensive in the Persian Gulf. Lord George Hamilton told Elgin that if the Debets’ report turned out to be true, he would be prepared to contemplate any step likely to resolve the issue in so far as French rights, as embodied in the Convention of 1862, were not contravened.² The Government of India, on its part, instructed Colonel M.J.Meade, the Resident at Bushire, to question Faisal about the lease. The Masqat ruler could be warned that such a concessions would be contrary to the Engagement of 1891, and would not be tolerated by the British authorities.³ Indian opinion had reacted very sharply to the Paris newsreport

² Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 3 January, 1899: F.D.S.P.No.147, February 1899.
³ Tel. Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 11 January, 1899: F.D. F. No.151, February 1899.
and was in no mood for equivocal measures. As an influential journal put it:

There is no need at this moment to point out the grave contingencies which would ensue if a French Naval Station were established at the entrance of the Persian Gulf. The one fact which comes to us in that such an event would be a direct blow to British supremacy in the Gulf, and a constant menace to the peace of the Indian seas.

In Masqat an interview between Faisal and Major C.G.F. Fagan, the Political Agent, resulted in a confirmation of the Debate report. The Saiyid at first refused to acknowledge anything, though he asserted that the grant of a coaling station did not conflict with his obligations to the British Government. On close questioning he confessed to having given the French permission to erect a "coaling place", but reiterated that the concession did not violate British rights, since France was entitled to an equality of treatment with England. If the Imperial Government objected to the transaction, it was at liberty to address the French Government on the question, and secure a cancellation of the lease. The Political

1. See Times of India dated 10 February, 1899; Also see Englishman dated 11 February, 1899.
2. Tel. Political Agent, Masqat to Secretary, Foreign Department, C/O dated 18 January, 1899; F.O.S. P. No.153, February 1899.
Agent's exchanges with the Masqat ruler aggravated tension without bringing the problem any nearer solution. Pagan, of course, was not inclined to belittle the seriousness of the question. His survey of Bandar Jissah had revealed that the harbour could be converted into a naval fortress. Drawing the Foreign Department's attention to this fact, he suggested that Faisal be made to realise the gravity of the situation through the suspension of the 'Zanzibar' subsidy. The Agent's recommendation was immediately accepted by the India Office.

The assumption, at this juncture, of viceregal office by Lord Curzon conferred a new urgency on events. Curzon was among the most forceful of British imperialists at the turn of the century. He came to India obsessed with the idea that England's European rivals were determined to reduce her to a cypher in imperial politics. A decade earlier Curzon had journeyed through Persia and the Gulf. From his travels emerged his

1. Tel. political Agent, Masqat to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 18 January, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.153, February 1899; also see political Agent, Masqat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 21 January, 1899; F. D.S.P. No.180, February 1899.

2. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 20 January, 1899; F.D.S.P.No.159, February 1899.

monumental "Persia And The Persian question", a two-volume study which remains a standard work even today, and in which he lays emphasis on British predominance in the Gulf as a strategic imperative. Curzon's warning to British statesmen regarding the Gulf is so well-known that its quotation in the present context is inevitable:

I should regard the concession of a port upon the Persian Gulf to Russia by any power as a deliberate insult to Great Britain, as a wanton rupture of the status quo, and as an international provocation to war; and I should impeach the British Minister, who was guilty of acquiescing in such a surrender, as a traitor to his country. 2

Through an ironic twist of destiny he arrived in India to confront a situation comparable to the one he had contemplated in such forceful language in 1892.

Curzon reacted to the French challenge in Oman with characteristic energy. He proposed to the Imperial authorities that a warning be served to Faisal for his unfriendly conduct. 3 The suggestion was approved by the India Office, the Viceroy being authorised to remind the Saiyid of the various ways in which India had supported his regime. If Faisal, on

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2. Ibid, II, p. 466.
his part, persisted in adopting a hostile attitude towards British interests, the Government would be obliged to withdraw the moral and material support which alone maintained him in power.\footnote{1}

The Viceroy next drafted an ultimatum in the light of Lord George Hamilton's instructions.\footnote{2} Therein he reminded Faisal of the means through which the Government had supported him, referring, among other things, to the "Zanzibar" subsidy; his recognition, notwithstanding the formidable claims of his opponents; the declaration to uphold his authority on the littoral; and finally, the assistance given towards the recovery of Dhofar. In spite of these demonstrations of goodwill the Saïyid had leased a naval base to France in violation of the Engagement of 1891. The concession to France indicated that he was hostile towards the British Government. Faisal would have to furnish tangible proof to the contrary before relations between the two Governments could become normal.\footnote{3}

Curzon's ultimatum makes interesting reading. To avoid wounding French susceptibilities he had not made any direct demand for the cancellation of the

\footnote{1. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 25 January, 1899; P.D.S.P. No.188, February 1899.}
\footnote{2. Memorandum by Viceroy dated nil; P.D.S.P. No.192, March 1899.}
\footnote{3. Ibid.}
Jissah lease. Yet the ultimatum was so phrased as to make it plain to Faisal that only a revocation of the concession would remedy matters. However, the Resident viewed Curzon's ultimatum too mild to be effective. Meade held that the Seiyid ought to be threatened with reprisals if he had not revoked the lease he had conferred on the French authorities. While Curzon was agreeable to Meade's suggestion, the Imperial authorities were hesitant. Salisbury, having already secured the evacuation of Fashoda, was in the midst of negotiations having for their objective the recognition by France of the Bahr-el-Ghazal region as a British sphere of influence, a consummation which would have rendered British dominance over Egypt unquestioned. British demands were, as it was, exciting strong opposition in France. The last thing the Foreign Minister wanted was an additional point of friction between the two countries.

The hesitation voiced by the Foreign Office aroused an apprehension in Curzon's mind that Indian interests were being sacrificed to secure gains in North Africa.

1. Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 8 February, 1899: F.D.S.P. No. 4, March 1899.
2. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 10 February, 1899: F.D.S.P. No. 143, March 1899.
3. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 9 February, 1899: F.D.S.P. No. 147, March 1899.
The Viceroy protested to the India Office that to reject the Resident's recommendation would strip the ultimatum to Faisal of its principal purpose. His argument did not convince the Foreign Office, which viewed the inclusion of a demand for the cancellation of the lease as a "personal collision with the French." But it reluctantly agreed to the conditions set forth by Curzon on the understanding that Meade would proceed with the utmost of circumspection in securing the objectives the Government had in view. The Foreign Department communicated the note of caution struck by the Imperial authorities to the Resident at Muscat.  

Notwithstanding the circumspection advised by Her Majesty's Government, Meade exceeded his instructions in presenting the British demands to Faisal. He not only asked for a cancellation of the Jissah lease, but insisted that the Muscat ruler issue a proclamation to this effect in a durbar.  

1. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 10 February, 1899: F.O.S.P. No. 146, March 1899.  
2. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 11 February, 1899: F.O.S.P. No. 156, March 1899.  
3. Tel. Secretary, Foreign Department, C.I. to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 12 February, 1899: F.O.S.P. No. 168, March 1899.  
to evade compliance on the plea that Ottavi had refused to agree to a revocation of the concession. But when the guns of a British ship-of-war, which Curzon had despatched to the Gulf to back Meade's ultimatum, were ostentatiously trained on Masqat and a threat of bombardment held out, he tamely yielded to the British demands.¹

Meade's bellicose assertion of British pre-dominance over Oman won for Curzon unstinted praise from the press in India and England. The Times congratulated the Viceroy for his "promptitude and decision"² in defending British interests in the Gulf and went on to define the extent to which England could accommodate France:

"We can neither ourselves agree nor allow the Sayyid to agree to concessions, whether to France or to any other power, which might hereafter be a plausible ground for ... (political) claims .... There can be no question of a "coaling station" in the usual and natural sense of the term .... But if France wants to establish a coal depot ... we shall gladly acknowledge her perfect right to do so."³

¹ Saiyid Faisal to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 11 February, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.181, March 1899; Tel. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 19 February, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.166, March 1899.

² The Times dated 14 February, 1899.

³ Ibid. Also see comments of Daily Chronicle and Pall Mall Gazette given in Pioneer dated 13 March, 1899; For Indian viewpoint see Times of India dated 22 February, 1899 and Pioneer dated 25 February 1899.
In spite of the jingoistic satisfaction voiced by the press, Meade's flamboyant vindication of British interests in Oman gravely embarrassed Salisbury who was engaged in "the more pressing question ... (of bringing) our African negotiations to a decent conclusion."

It must be borne in mind that Delcasse, who negotiated the Sudan issue from the French side, had throughout the African deliberations to fight against the colonial activists in his country. Meade's indiscretion gave the French Minister's critics their chance and they openly attacked his foreign policy.

Pointing to the national humiliation in the Gulf, the Journal de Debats pontificated:

If the news ... (of the cancellation of the Jissah lease) is confirmed it is calculated to convince those of our countrymen who were hesitating as to the conclusion to be drawn with regard to the direction of our whole foreign policy from the Fashoda affair, soon followed by that of the Shanghai Concession.

With the Colonial Party in Paris crying for Delcasse's blood, Salisbury faced an interview with Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador at London, which


3. The Times dated 23 February, 1899.
opened on an acrimonious note. The Ambassador commented on the tone of the English press and communicated to Salisbury his Government's disapproval of the proceedings of Meade. The British Minister confessed that the incident had been handled with a certain amount of tactlessness. But on the question of principle he remained firm. In securing the Jissah lease France had violated the Convention of 1862. After the scramble for concessions in China, it was impossible to say what larger acquisitive designs the lease concealed, and it had been incumbent on Her Majesty's Government to vindicate British interests in the Gulf. Cambon disputed Salisbury's interpretation of the Engagement of 1862. He further argued that even if England was inclined to interpret the Convention in such a manner, the matter could have been settled through negotiations. A crude exhibition of force was uncalled for. As for British suspicions regarding French ambitions, Cambon was willing to furnish the Foreign Office with an assurance that France's demand for a coaling station not have any acquisitive overtures to it.

The French Ambassador's attitude led Salisbury

2. Ibid.
to look on the problem in a conciliatory light and he asked the Indian authorities to review the issue in its new perspective. Curzon saw in Salisbury's request an incipiently dangerous development and rushed to the defence of his Oman policy. He asserted that French activity in the Gulf subsequent to 1894 had been "inspired by (a) calculated hostility to Great Britain". His Government did not want to deprive France of her legitimate rights in Oman. What India resented was the exercise by the Paris Government of its prerogatives in a manner detrimental to British interests. For this very reason the Government of India had a strong objection to the reopening of the Jissah issue. If French susceptibilities had been wounded through a vindication of British interests in Oman, then Calcutta had a more valid ground for resentment against a course of action aimed at supplanting British influence in the region.  

Before Curzon's despatch embodying a defence of his Oman policy could reach London, Salisbury had been forced to retreat from his earlier stand. On Cambon accepting his interpretation of the Convention of 1862, he agreed to France's right to obtain coaling

1. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 28 February, 1899: F.D.S.P. No.204, March 1899.
2. Secret Despatch No.38 to Secretary of State for India dated 2 March, 1899: F.D.S.P. No.260, March 1899.
facilities in Oman on the same terms as England. The Foreign Minister yielded on this point, because, as he put it, it would have been unjustifiable interpretation of British rights to debar France from acquiring coaling facilities which did not involve a territorial claim.²

While Salisbury's concession was in itself harmless, political pressure on Delcassé led him to exploit it in a fashion which resulted in inflamed passions in England. Confronted with a hostile Chamber of Deputies bent upon exploiting the Oman issue, Delcassé pressed Monson for the understanding reached between Salisbury and Cambon to be made public so as to enable him to thwart his opponents.³

For, he contended, in an oblique reference to the more important African negotiations, it would endanger his parliamentary position "to acquire the reputation of being a Minister too ready to make concessions".⁴

He had to throw a sop to French pride.

1. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to H.M.'s Ambassador, Paris dated 27 February, 1899: F.D.S.F. No.281, June 1899.


4. Tel. H.M.'s Ambassador, Paris to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 1 March, 1899: F.D.S.F. No.286, June 1899.
With Delcasse's fate hanging in the balance, Her Majesty's Government agreed with alacrity to the understanding between Salisbury and Cambon being made public. The trouble started when the French Minister described the position in the French Parliament as amounting to a diplomatic triumph for his country. Answering M. Brunet in the Chamber of Deputies, he stated that it had been recognised by all concerned that it would be a singular lack of statesmanship to magnify the Oman question out of its perspective at a moment when the "two Governments were negotiating the African frontier in a spirit of conciliation ...." England had admitted that France enjoyed an equality of status with her in Oman. The British Foreign Office had also expressed its "profound regret" at Meade's proceedings, and no obstacle would be placed in the way of French acquisition of coaling facilities in the region.

Delcasse's version of the Jissah incident was more than what the British Government or press could stomach. Lord George Hamilton characterised it as an

1. Tel. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to H.M.'s Ambassador, Paris, dated 3 March, 1899; F.D.S.F. No.293, June 1899.

2. The Times dated 7 March, 1899; Also see extract from "Journal Official" dated 7 March, 1899; F.D.S.F. No.331, June 1899.
"imprudent travesty" of the London conversations between Salisbury and Cambon. The Times dubbed it as "incredible" and called for a white paper on the question. Indian opinion was even more agitated, but its reaction reflected an under-current of fear that the Nile issue had exacted its toll in the Gulf. Could, the Times of India asked itself, the British Cabinet have made the confession it was credited with by Delcassé?

If it has really done so, it is plain that the era of "graceful concessions" is by no means over. That is plainer is that the interests of India have again been sacrificed ... to the requirements of the career of African adventure upon which Great Britain has embarked.

Yet Indian apprehensions were totally off the mark and Mr. St. John Brodrick (later Viscount Middleton), the Under-Secretary of State for India, set the record straight for his Government. Answering Sir Charles Dilke in the Commons, Brodrick explained the circumstances in which the French lease had been cancelled by Saiyid Faisal. The Imperial Government's

1. See Ronaldshay, op. cit., II, p. 46.
2. The Times dated 7 March, 1899.
3. Times of India dated 8 March, 1899; Also see Pioneer dated 9 March, 1899.
4. The Times dated 8 March, 1899.
opinion, he stated, was that France could not be legiti-
mately debarred from acquiring coaling facilities
at Masqat provided no territorial concession came
into the picture. As for the action taken by Meade,
it was fully authorised, and the Government had never
retreated from this stand.

While Brodrick's statement set at rest fears
that the Imperial Government had capitulated to France
in respect of the Jissah concession, even the partial
retreat executed by Salisbury caused concern at Calcutta.
In Indian eyes the Foreign Office had compromised on
a vital question of principle. If Salisbury had given
in to the French today, would he not yield to St.
Petersburg tomorrow? Once Russia established herself
on the Gulf, British influence in the region would
become a thing of the past. It was with such apprehen-
sions in his mind that Curzon confessed to Lord George
Hamilton in a rare mood of self-denigration: "I am
afraid I have inadequately conveyed to Her Majesty's
Government (the) seriousness of the intrigue against
British interests".

Brodrick's statement in the Commons did not

1. Times of India dated 6 March, and 8 March,
1899; Englishman dated 11 March, 1899; Pioneer dated
6 March, 1899.

2. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for
India dated 1 March, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.206, March
1899.
mark the end of the Jissah dispute, but French interest in the question cooled off once the Nile question had been resolved in England's favour in March 1899.\(^1\) After an year of disinterested bargaining Delcasse agreed to share with England the coaling station which the British had erected in Masqat in 1877, a concession which the French never cared to exploit.\(^2\)

A retrospective assessment of the Jissah crisis leads one to conclude that Oman was of interest to France only as a diversion to the duel being fought out in North Africa. The positions adopted by Curzon and Salisbury \textit{vis-a-vis} the question should be appraised against this perspective. No difference of principle stood between the two statesmen. Both wanted to maintain British predominance over Oman. But the concurrent African crisis imposed over Salisbury a restraint to which Curzon, as spokesman of Indian interests, was not sensitive. Yet if we overlook the Sudanese imbroglio, temperamental differences too help in explaining the divergent stands of Curzon and Salisbury. According to Ronaldshay, the Viceroy's biographer, Curzon was always impatient of obstacles

\(^1\) Taylor, op. cit., p. 382.
\(^2\) Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 16 May, 1900; F.D.S.P. No. 89, October 1900.
standing in the way of an object he wanted to attain, and inclined to rush at things. As opposed to this, Salisbury brought a "coldly critical mind and a dispassionate judgment" to bear upon the difficulties which had to be overcome in achieving a desired end. Ronaldshay's appraisal of the two statesmen is relevant to the differences which sprung up between them over the Jissah issue. In his impetuosity Curzon, and his protegé in the Gulf, provided the Paris Government with the very weapon (an agitated public opinion) which Salisbury would have denied to it at all costs. For had the foresight to visualise that France would lose interest in the Gulf once Sudan no longer remained a bone of contention between the two countries.

While the conclusion of the Jissah affair marked an end to the most serious challenge to British interests in Oman, the Government of India still had certain problems to resolve before it could rest content with the situation in the Gulf. Foremost of all was the subsidy question. Shortly after the Jissah concession had been annulled, the India Office directed the attention of the Indian Government to the importance of normalising relations with Faisal. A resumption

2. Ibid.
of the subsidy would facilitate such a consummation.
Acting on the Imperial Government's suggestion, Curzon
chose Captain (later Major-General Sir P.Z.) Cox
to initiate a policy of conciliation towards Oman.
In selecting Cox the Viceroy made an excellent choice,
for he was one of the most talented officers of the
Political Department, and played a prominent part
in Middle Eastern politics during and after World
War I. Soon after his arrival in Oman the Agent
gained the confidence of Faisal, and, on his recommend-
dation, payment of the subsidy was resumed to the
Saiyid.

Notwithstanding the reapproachment with Saiyid
Faisal, the Indian authorities faced in the French
flag question an issue of considerable importance.
As early as the 1890's France had embarked upon a
scheme of advancing her influence over the Inmate
through giving her flag to Masqati ship-owners from
Sur. Faisal, who had realized that the French

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Sir Percy Cox, (London ?).
2. Secret Despatch No.11 to Secretary of
State for India dated 25 January, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.105,
February 1900; Political Agent, Masqat to Resident,
Persian Gulf dated 24 October, 1899; F.D.S.P.No.93,
February 1900; Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary,
Foreign Department, GOI dated 2 December, 1899;F.D.S.P.
No.98, February 1900.
3. Cassettier of the Persian Gulf, I, Part I,
p. 548.
claim to protect Omani vessels would develop into a pretension to protect his subjects connected with those vessels, raised the issue with the Foreign Department. But the only advice he got was that the use of the French flag by his subjects did not invalidate his jurisdiction over them.

The flag question remained unresolved for over a decade, much to the annoyance of Faisal and the Indian authorities, who saw in it possibilities of serious embarrassment. However, shortly after his arrival at Masqat, Cox decided to strike at the roots of the problem. With his backing Faisal undertook a journey to Sur abroad H.M.S. "Sphinx" in course of which he persuaded the French flag-holders to renounce the benefits of French protection and to return the flags in their possession to the French authorities. He further proclaimed that he would not, in the future, recognise the practice of taking flags from foreign Governments, and that the possession of such flags would not bestow on their owners immunity from the laws of the land.

1. Political Agent, Masqat to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 11 June, 1891: F.D.S.P.No.15, September 1891.
2. Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI to Resident, Persian Gulf dated 17 August, 1891: F.D.S.P.No.22, September 1891.
3. Tel. Political Agent, Masqat to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 3 July, 1900: F.D.S.P.No.35, September 1900; Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 16 June, 1900: F.D.S.P. No.23, September 1900.
Although the aforementioned developments marked a signal victory for Indian interests, British involvement in the Transvaal War prevented the Imperial authorities from supporting Cox's initiative to the extent they would have done otherwise. Cambon protested to the Foreign Office against British complicity in the events which had occurred in Oman, and a French ship-of-war sailed to Masqat to induce Faisal to surrender the papers of registration which some French protégés had handed over to him. The Seiyid resisted the French demand with British support; but since Her Majesty's Government hesitated from making an open declaration in his favour, his proclamation remained a dead letter.

A lengthy correspondence now ensued between the Foreign Office and the High Commissioner on the flag question, which suddenly acquired an ominous aspect in 1903. In the month of April quarantine was broken

2. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to H.M.'s Ambassador, Paris dated 20 June, 1900: F.D.S.P. No.61, September 1900; Tel. Political Agent, Masqat to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 24 August, and 5 September, 1900: F.D.S.P. No.333 and 354, October 1900; Tel. Political Agent, Masqat to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 19 September, 1900: F.D.S.P. No. 358, March 1901.
at Muscat by five residents of Sur who arrived in a steamer from Bombay. Of these three possessed French papers, and were regarded by the French Vice-Consul as under his protection. The fugitives, who made for Sur in a sailing-boat, were pursued and recaptured by a Muscati functionary, whereupon the French representative demanded their immediate release. Faisal flatly refused to do so, though he declared his readiness to be bound by a joint decision of the British and French Governments in the case.

Intelligence of events in Oman caused concern in London, since the Foreign Office had by this time initiated conversations with France with the object of effecting an entente, to clear the way for which Edward VII was due to pay a visit to Paris. The Indian authorities were consequently instructed to "avoid any action which might tend to aggravate the situation, or bring out a crisis which would be particularly unfortunate at (the) moment of (the) King's visit to Paris". Lord Lansdowne, the Secretary

1. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 16 April, 1903: F.O. 838, No. 277, September 1903; Tel. Political Agent, Muscat to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 11 April, and 12 April, 1903: F.O. 838, No. 272 and 273, September 1903.

of State for Foreign Affairs, broached the subject with Cambon, who demanded the immediate release of the French proteges imprisoned by Faisal. The British Minister took the stand that French protection did not impart immunity in relation to the local laws of Oman. Yet out of consideration for France, Her Majesty's Government was prepared to advise the Masqat ruler to release the prisoners if the Paris Government, on its part, agreed to submit the question to the Hague Court for arbitration. Lansdowne's suggestion was accepted by the French Government.

The French and English cases were presented before the Hague Court in 1905. The British arguments were: that without the consent of the Masqat ruler, Omani subjects could not receive French flags and papers; that under Article XXXII of the Brussels Act of 1890 France was debarred from granting flags and papers to Arabs who were not her proteges; that

1. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 21 May, 1903; F.D.S.P. No.332, September 1903.

2. Tel. Secretary of State for India to Secretary, Foreign Departments, GOI dated 22 May, 1903; F.D.S.P. No.334, September 1903.

3. The Brussels Act was passed by a European Conference which met in 1889 in the Belgian capital to devise measures for suppressing the slave trade in Africa. See Encyclopaedia Britannica (London 1955), XX, p. 786.
the withdrawal of Omani subjects from Faisal's jurisdiction through the conferment of the flag constituted a violation of the Convention of 1862; and, finally, that the issue of papers could not immunise their holders from the Masqat ruler's jurisdiction in Oman. The French, on their part, held that the conditions of citizenship in Oman were indefinite; and that the status of the flag holders was of a sea-faring community whose connection with the French colonies of East Africa was not less intimate than their link with Oman. Besides, Oman, as a Muslim power, was liable to be dealt with on the analogy of the Turkish Empire as subject to a "regime du capitulation".

In its judgment the Hague Court observed that the position was in the main determined by the Brussels Act of 1890, which France had ratified in 1892. Before that date France was authorised to grant her flag to Omani subjects; but thereafter she could confer that right only on her proteges. Finally, Omani vessels

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2. Arguments before the Hague Court on behalf of the French Republic: F.D.S.P. No.263 and 280, October 1905.
4. The Court's definition of a protege embraced the following categories: (1) Persons being subjects of a country which is under the protectorate of the power whose protection they claim; (2) Persons who have been defined as proteges under a special and specific Treaty.
flying the French flag were entitled to inviolability, as provided by the Franco-Omani treaty of 1844, in the territorial waters of the Imamate. But subjects of the Muscat ruler who owned such vessels did not enjoy any rights of extra-territoriality.

The Court's decision was, by and large, a vindication of the British position. Cox expressed official reaction to it in the words that "neither His Highness nor we have any reason to regret having committed the issue to the Tribunal." As a matter of fact, the association of England with France after the entente cordiale of 1804 had altered the international situation to such an extent that even the Indian press, which had assumed so inflexible an attitude during the Jissah crisis, was willing to confess that anything which helps to clear up past causes of difference between Great Britain and France is welcome, and in that light... we must welcome the partial elimination of a difficulty between two great nations now bound together in the ties of closest friendship.

The resolution of the flag question culminated the duel which England and France had fought in the Persian Gulf for over a decade after the signing of

1. Major F. Cox to Secretary, Foreign Department, GGI dated 17 September, 1905. F.D.S.P. No.317, October 1806.
2. Times of India dated 11 August, 1905.
the Franco-Russian alliance of 1894. One would be justified in contending that as early as 1899 France had given up the struggle through her acquiescence in the cancellation of the Jissah lease. It could have hardly been otherwise. For in spite of the fulminations of Cambon at London, and the bluster of the Colonial Party in the Chamber of Deputies, control over the Indian seas placed in the hands of English statesmen an argument which no amount of diplomatic ingenuity could overwhelm. Yet even otherwise Oman was, for France, a region of peripheral interest. In the ultimate analysis, French attempts to secure a position of influence there were motivated more by the desire to build up a bargaining position in North Africa than by any other factor.