The principality of Kuwait is located towards the western head of the Persian Gulf in the form of a deep wedge between Iraq and the Saudi Arabian province of El Hassa. Comprising arid and inhabitable tracts, in the nineteenth century its sole importance lay in that it was regarded as the most feasible terminus for a railway system linking the eastern Mediterranean with the Persian Gulf. Kuwait was founded early in the eighteenth century by the Banu Utub tribe which migrated from the Arabian interior to the littoral due to conditions of drought. It enjoyed a de facto independence from the very commencement. But its chiefs recognised at different periods the shadowy suzerainty of the Ottoman Porte or the Wahhabi Imams of Riyadh.

The expedition of 1871 to Najd brought Kuwait directly within the orbit of Ottoman influence. The importance of the principality vis-à-vis the Mesopotamian route to India had attracted British attention

1. Precis on Kuwait Affairs by India Office; F.D.S.W.P. No.57, March 1901.
even earlier. But at the time of the Ottoman onslaught the Government of India was so busy salvaging its influence over the Trucial States, that Kuwait's fate did not attract any attention. An attitude of indifference towards the principality is also discernible in the tentative overtures which Salisbury made to the Ottoman Government in 1880 for a division of the Persian Gulf into spheres of influence.  

**THE POLITICAL STATUS OF KUWAIT**

Towards the 1890's a palace revolution in Kuwait first directed the attention of the British Government to its affairs. In 1892 one Mohammed bin Saheh succeeded to the chieftainship of the principality. The new ruler was an incompetent person and permitted control of affairs to drift into the hands of his grasping brother-in-law, one Yusuf bin Abdullah Al Ibrahim, a confirmed Turcophil bent upon a policy of Ottomanizing the principality. In Mohammed's half-brother, Mubarik, the patriotic party in Kuwait found a leader of outstanding ability and far reaching ambitions. In May, 1896, Mubarik assassinated the ruling chief and seized power for himself.  

The sordid coup in an obscure desert sheikdom

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1. Vide supra.
would hardly have attracted any attention at London, but intelligence reached the Foreign Office of the Porte's suspicion that the coup had been manoeuvred by the Government of India. It was believed at Constantinople that Mohammed bin Sabah had been killed at the instigation of the Resident at Bushire because of his refusal to join a pan-Arab alliance against Turkey in which the other participants were to be Amir Mohammed bin Rashid of Hail, Jasim bin Thani of Qatar and the Bahrein chief. The suspicions entertained at Constantinople were more symptomatic of the growing bitterness that had come to distinguish relations between England and Turkey than the actual situation in the Gulf. The Resident at Bushire indignantly refuted the charge levied against him as "ludicrously improbable and incongruous on the face of it". The Foreign Department forwarded his defence to the Imperial authorities without any observations of its own.

Soon after the aforementioned incident a series of piracies in the proximity of the Shatt-el-Ara


2. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, CCI dated 30 October, 1896: F.D.S.P. No.186, November 1896.

in which the hand of Kuwaiti subjects was suspected, obliged the British authorities to adopt a concrete attitude towards the political status of the principality. The Consul at Basra suggested that the Turkish Government be called upon to accept responsibility for the Sheikh of Kuwait's subjects. However, in transmitting his recommendation to the Foreign Office, Sir Philip Currie, the British Ambassador at Constantinople, drew Salisbury's attention to the wider implications of the question. He conceded that the Consul's proposal would affix responsibility for the maintenance of order in the Gulf on a civilised authority. Yet it also involved the recognition of Ottoman suzerainty over Mubarik who was "an independent potentate and only nominally subject to the Sultan." The question was then referred to the Government of India.

The Foreign Department did not suggest anything categoric in respect of the political status of Kuwait. It was reluctant to press an opinion on a question the implications of which it was not in a

1. H.M's Consul, Basra to Resident, Baghdad dated 3 August, 1896; F.D.S.P. No. 37, April 1897.
2. H.M's Consul, Basra to Resident, Baghdad dated 20 October, 1896; F.D.S.P. No. 62, April, 1897.
3. H.M's Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 24 November, 1896; F.D.S.P. No. 60, April 1897.
4. Ibid.
5. Secret Despatch No. 54 to Govt. of India dated 18 December, 1896; F.D.S.P. No. 57, April 1897.
position to assess. However, the benefits of holding a responsible government accountable for peace in the Gulf were too tangible to be lightly dismissed. The India Office was, therefore, informed that the Government was not aware of the facts which had led Currie to view Kuwait as independent of Turkey. But from the point of view of peace in the Gulf there would be "advantage in fixing upon the Turkish Government the responsibility for the Sheikh of Kuwait's actions."¹

Currie, in the meanwhile, had come in possession of intelligence which should have led to a reconsideration of his views regarding the 'independence' of the principality.² After the consolidation of Ottoman influence over Arabia in 1871 every chief of Kuwait had, as a matter of prudence, sought support for his succession by inducing the Porte to appoint him amiragam over the territory. Mubarik's position was particularly vulnerable. The elder brother whom he assassinated had left behind two sons who could be anticipated to seek Ottoman countenance in making good

¹. Secret Despatch No. 27 to Secretary of State for India dated 24 February, 1897; F.D.S.P. No. 66, April 1897; Also see Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 13 February, 1897; F.D.S.P. No.36/73, April 1897.

². Memorandum on Kuwait by H.M's Consul, Basra dated nil; F.D.S.P. No.108, May 1897.
their pretensions. Consequently, immediately after assuming power Mubarak applied to Constantinople through Basra for recognition of his succession. However, Hamdi Pasha, the Governor-General of the Vilayat, refused to extend his good offices to the fratricide. Instead, he proposed to Constantinople that the opportunity he exploited to bring Kuwait directly under Ottoman rule. Luckily for Mubarak, Hamdi Pasha was replaced at this crucial juncture by one Mohain Pasha. The chief won over the new Governor-General through generous bribes and was thus able to secure confirmation of his position at Turkish hands. In communicating these details to Currie the Consul at Basra stated that the acceptance by Mubarak "of an appointment from the Porte as Kaimakam precludes the possibility of any foreign power recognising under the present conditions his independence."

For an appreciation of Salisbury's attitude towards Kuwait it is essential to bear in mind the volte face executed by the Foreign Office in respect of its Near East policy in the 1890's. It has been emphasised earlier that England supported the integrity of the Ottoman Empire in order to keep the routes to India under a power over whom a commanding influence

1. Ibid.
could be exercised; this policy rested on British naval supremacy in the Mediterranean. The reapprochement between France and Russia after the fall of Bismarck put an end to British predominance in the Mediterranean. Salisbury was, thereafter, obliged to carry out a reappraisal of the policy he had inherited from Palmerston. He adapted himself to the new power equilibrium with little difficulty since in Egypt his country had acquired a position from which the approaches to India could be safeguarded. So dramatically had the situation in the Near East altered after the Franco-Russian alliance that in 1895 we find the British Foreign Minister propounding his great, albeit abortive, scheme for the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire.

Equally decisive in moulding Salisbury’s outlook was the question of physical control over the lines of communication to India. The invention of the


In the first quarter of the eighteenth century focused attention on the routes to India through Egypt and Turkish Arabia. In the 1830's a survey party under Colonel (later General F.R.) Chesney was sent to explore the Euphrates and report on its navigability. Chesney's report was favourable and in the following decade steamship traffic was opened up between the Gulf and Baghdad on the initiative of a British Company. On the close of the Crimean War the project was taken up once again by W.P. Andrew, Chairman of the Sind Railway, who put forward a scheme for a railway from the Gulf of Alexandretta to Jaber Castle on the upper Euphrates. Andrew ultimately planned to extend the line to Baghdad and Basra, where ocean going ships could call. He succeeded in arousing the interest of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, the influential British Ambassador at Constantinople, in the scheme. However, out of consideration for the French, who had important interests in the Levant, Palmerston refused a Government guarantee which was considered essential for the project.

1. See Parliamentary Paper No. 478 of 1834; Report from Select Committee on Steam Navigation to India.  
The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 gave a new impetus to the scheme. Articulate English opinion was of the view that an alternative route to the French Built Canal ought to be there. In 1871 a Select Committee of the Commons was appointed to go into the question.\footnote{Parliamentary paper No.386 of 1871: Report from the Select Committee on Euphrates Valley Railway.} The Committee recommended the construction of a line from Alexandretta to Kuwait. It laid emphasis on the commercial as well as the political-strategic aspects of the problem. England's already extensive trade with Mesopotamia would receive further encouragement through the construction of the line. Besides, it would provide a speedy means for transporting troops to India in an emergency and serve to block Russia's southward advance towards the Persian Gulf and India. It was, however, evident that the scheme would not be commercially viable unless a state guarantee was given. This was not forthcoming, and the project fizzled out, never again to be seriously revived under British auspices.\footnote{Hopkins, op. cit., p. 428.}

With Kuwait occupying so commanding a position in relation to one of the routes to India, it was manifestly against British interests to give de jure acknowledgment to the tenuous ties which existed between the
principality and the Porte. The inexpediency of such a step became all the more patent when Mubarik confidentially intimated the British Consul at Basra of his desire to be taken under the Government's protection. Salisbury felt that in view of possible international complications a protectorate would be difficult to assume. Neither Russia nor Germany would acquiesce in such a move. However, Mubarik could be safely promised British good offices in resisting Ottoman encroachments on his independence. The Foreign Minister's decision was received with satisfaction at Calcutta as amounting to "the thin edge of a wedge towards asserting a British protectorate over Kuwait, and if Her Majesty's Government so desire, it is a good thing to forward that object."

THE KAPNIIST RAILWAY CONCESSION

Though Salisbury had desisted from setting up a protectorate over Kuwait for fear of international complications, developments in the Middle East soon obliged him to adopt a more active interest in the principality. Notwithstanding the Select Committee of 1871, the effect of the opening of the Suez Canal was

1. Sir T. Lee-Warner, Secretary, Secret and Political Department, India Office to Sir W. J. Cunningham (semi-official), dated 15 April, 1897: F.D.S.P. No. 101/115, May 1897.

2. Ibid.

3. Note by Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 7 May, 1897; F.D.S.P. No. 101/115, May 1897.
that England gradually lost interest in the Mesopotamian route to India as such. However, the problem of communications in Asia Minor also revolved around another axis: the economic stabilisation of Abdul Hamid's Asiatic possessions as an instrument against Russia's southward expansion. The question had been reviewed in 1887 by Sir William White, the then British Ambassador at Constantinople. White drew two important conclusions: it was in British interests that there should be rail communications in Asiatic Turkey; further, it was desirable that British enterprise should be associated with railway construction in the region, and that such railways should not be permitted to fall into the hands of Russia.

Given the premises of British policy in Asiatic Turkey, it was with an interest bordering on concern that the Foreign Office learnt in 1888 that a Russian subject, one Count Vladimir Kapnist, had applied to the Ottoman Government for a concession to construct a railway from the Syrian port of Tripoli to Kuwait on the Persian Gulf. Kapnist had access to influential

2. Smith, op. cit., Chapter V, passim.
3. Memorandum by Sir William White entitled: "Remarks applying to different British schemes for the construction of Turkish Railways in Asia" dated 25 July, 1887; Smith, op. cit., Appendix IV.
4. H.M.'s Charge d'Affaires, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 1 August, 1898; F.D.S.P. No.50, May 1899.
circles in Constantinople and it was believed that his application would receive favourable consideration at Turkish hands. The principal features of his application were as follows:

1. That a concession should be granted for the construction of a trunk line from Tripoli to Kuwait via Homs, Haiden, Baghdad and Basra. The concession was to be inclusive of certain branch lines and terminal port establishments at Kuwait and Tripoli.

2. That the Ottoman Government should guarantee a return of 6 per cent on the capital employed in the project.

3. That the concessionaire should have the right to exploit all mineral deposits which lay within 50 kilometres of the line.

4. That the concessionaire should also have the right to provide for irrigation in the areas adjoining the rivers Tigris, Euphrates and the Shatt-al-Arab.

1. Petition presented by Count Kajmist to the Ottoman Government dated nil: F.D.S.P. No.51, May 1899.
The Kapnist scheme was an ambitious undertaking. It was estimated that, inclusive of subsidiary works, the project would involve an outlay of £30 million. Private capital in Russia being scarce, Kapnist approached financiers in London and Paris with a view to securing their co-operation for the realisation of his scheme. Besides other parties, he approached the London firm of Messrs Williams, Meyer and Co. The English firm was favourably inclined towards the project. However, since participation in the scheme involved political consideration, it approached the Foreign Office for guidance, indicating that its response to Kapnist’s overture would depend upon whether the project was considered expedient by Her Majesty’s Government.

As outlined to the Foreign Office by Messrs Williams, Meyer and Co., the Kapnist scheme presented several features of interest. The trunk line from Tripoli to Kuwait would cost £16 million. The English firm viewed the commercial aspects of the project with optimism. It asserted that on completion the line would earn enough to yield a remunerative return on

1. Memorandum on Kapnist Scheme by Genl. Sir James Ardagh dated 29 November, 1898; F.D.S.P.No.61, May 1899.
the capital invested. The question of administrative control over the railway was an issue of transcendental importance. The understanding between Kapnist and the British firm was that half the capital of the proposed company would be reserved for issue in Russia; and correspondingly, half the Board of Directors was to comprise persons of Russian nationality. Ostensibly such an arrangement meant Russian control over the railway. But Messrs. Williams, Meyer and Co., had anticipated the impossibility of raising a sum of the magnitude involved in the Russian money market. They had, consequently, stipulated that Russian representation in the Board of Directors would be in proportion to the amount of capital actually subscribed in Russia, without in any case exceeding half its full strength. Such an arrangement, it was held, would prevent the undertaking from becoming a Russian monopoly. On the other hand, if British capital was discouraged from participating in the project, the abandoned opportunity would be eagerly seized by "financial groups of another nationality, anxious for political as well as financial reasons to acquire increased influence in the country."

1. Ibid. The other groups referred to are obviously French.
The reaction to the Kapnist project of Sir Nicholas O'Connor, who had succeeded Currie at Constantinople, was in agreement with the critique presented by White to the Foreign Office a decade earlier. The proposed line, he pointed out, would run through a region where vital British interests were involved. If the Mediterranean was to be at all linked with the Persian Gulf, it was undesirable to leave the task to Russian enterprise. Even if Kapnist sought the necessary capital for his project in England, he would lean on his own government for support; and it was to Russia that the political advantages arising of the scheme would inevitably flow. The Foreign Office could more profitably lend its support to a British entrepreneur, Mr. Pilbery, who was in possession of an unexploited concession for a line from Haifa to Damascus. O'Connor persuaded Pilbery to apply to the Porte for an extension of his concession to cover a line till Baghdad and the Gulf, though nothing concrete emerged of the measure.

Sir Charles Scott, the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, too did not look upon the scheme with

1. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 12 October, 1898; F.D.S.P. No.63, May 1899.

2. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 22 December, 1898; F.D.S.P. No.66, May 1899.
enthusiasm. Scott felt that Kapnist had been unable to arouse the interest of his government in the project to any appreciable extent. He would, therefore, encounter considerable difficulty in securing the requisite financial support in Russia. It was believed that Count Witte, the Russian statesman who was the moving spirit behind his country's grandiose railway projects, had at first shown an interest in the scheme; but on discerning that French or English capital would play a leading role in its realisation, he had washed his hands off the entire affair.

The advice reaching the Foreign Office from Constantinople and St. Petersburg must have made Salisbury chary of giving encouragement to the English promoters of the Kapnist project. However, the most cogently adverse evaluation of the scheme was made by General Sir James Ardagh, a soldier who had seen service in Turkey. Ardagh drew pointed attention to the fact that the terms of the concession involved an exclusive right of exploitation of the entire economic

1. H.M.'s Ambassador, St. Petersburg to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 17 November, 1899; January, 1899: F.D.S.P. No. 50 and 72, May 1899.

2. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 22 December, 1898; F.D.S.P. No. 66, May 1899.

Resources of the Euphrates-Tigris basin. The Railway Company, and whosoever controlled it, would thus yield a decisive influence over the region. The Board of Directors, on the other hand, would be so composed, half the seats being filled by Russian nationals, that the project would be essentially a "Russian Monopoly". The English promoters were banking upon the inability of private finance in Russia to raise the money necessary to secure a fifty per cent representation in the Board of Directors. But their optimism was premised on a misapprehension. It was incontestable that private finance in Russia would prove unequal to the magnitude of the scheme. However, the terms to which Kapnist’s assent had been obtained could hardly have been intended to open a field of investment for private capital in Russia. Kapnist’s objective was the creation of an opportunity for Russian state finance “to acquire predominant influence in the basins of the Euphrates and the Tigris with a view to their eventual inheritance.” The analogy of the Manchurian Railway was too obvious for England to look upon the materialisation of the project with equanimity.

**The British Protectorate over Kuwait**

Ardegh’s critique of the Kapnist project, which

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1. Ibid.
drew the conclusion that the realisation of the scheme would transform Turkish Arabia into a Russian province, converted Salisbury to the view that it was essential to acquire a controlling hand over Kuwait. Predominance over the principality would enable England to thwart any scheme for linking the Mediterranean with the Persian Gulf which ran contrary to her interests in Mesopotamia. This was so because Kuwait was the only feasible terminus on the Persian Gulf; and no system of communications would be commercially viable so long as it did not have access to the sea.

However, before any step could be taken to convert Kuwait into a protectorate, O'Connor sounded a note of caution. He pointed out to Salisbury that although the question of Turkish sovereignty over the principality had never been specifically discussed, England had by implication recognised the Sultan's jurisdiction over the Arab littoral as far east as Qatif in more than one communication addressed to the Ottoman Government concerning Gulf affairs. An abrupt volte face would, therefore, be inexpedient. It would be better to exploit maritime irregularities by Kuwaiti subjects to the end of establishing a channel of

1. Foreign Office to India Office dated 5 December, 1898; F.D.S.P. No. 677, March 1899; Tel. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 24 December, 1898; F.D.S.P. No. 582, March 1899.

2. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 22 December, 1898; F.D.S.P. No. 658, March 1899.
direct communication with Mubarak which could be gradually transformed into a position of predominance. To take Kuwait outright under protection would be considered little short of a hostile act by Turkey, and in any case, it would be sure to produce very serious diplomatic complications not only with this country, but probably also with Russia.¹

It was conceivable for St. Petersburg to come out openly with the demand for a naval station in the Gulf as a measure of compensation.

While O'Connor recommended an attitude of circumspection on the part of the Foreign Office, the situation in Constantinople acquired a new urgency. On 30 December, 1898, the Turkish Government formally granted to Kapnist the concession for which he had presented an application earlier.² Thereby, what had been a possibility was transferred to the plane of concrete politics.

Salisbury decided to apply to Kuwait the formula he had devised in respect of Masqat in 1891, for he felt that it was necessary to take precautions against "the establishment of a territorial claim on part of Russia in that district (Kuwait), such as

1. Ibid.
2. Tel. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 30 December, 1898; F.D.S.P. No. 66, March 1899.
might possibly result from the present negotiations by Count Kapnist. ..." 0'Connor had ruled out the assumption of a protectorate over the principality. But British interests would be equally well served if Mubarik agreed not to lease or alienate any part of his territory to a foreign power without the permission of Her Majesty's Government.

When the Resident proceeded to Kuwait to negotiate an agreement with the chief, he came across a fresh obstacle. For Mabarik demanded, on a quid pro quo basis, a categoric pledge of support from the British Government. Meade told him that to include such a stipulation in the engagement would be impossible. He had no authority to do so. Besides, even the Trucial Chiefs had not received any express promise of support, though their interests had been protected by the authorities. After protracted negotiations the problem was resolved in a novel fashion. A formal Convention was signed by Mubarik whereby he bound himself not to lease his territory to any alien power.


2. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GOI dated 30 January, 1899: F.D.S.P. No.642, March 1899.
without British consent. Affixed to this engagement was a letter from Colonel Meade to the chief assuring him of the Government's "good offices" so long as he remained faithful to the British alliance. 1

While the understanding with Mubarik placed Indian interests on a secure footing, it was not to be expected that Turkey would acquiesce in the further extension of the British sphere of influence in the Gulf at her expense. The reappointment of Hamdi Pasha as Governor-General of Basra was, in the above context, a step pregnant with significance. 2 The Pasha was known to be an advocate of a forward policy in respect of Kuwait. Apprehending that his appointment signified a change for the worse in Ottoman policy in the Gulf, the Government of India urged the Foreign Office to warn Abdul Hamid of the responsibilities which England had of late acquired vis-à-vis Kuwait. 3


2. H.M's Consul, Basra to H.M's Ambassador, Constantinople dated 22 April, 1899: F.D.S.P.No.110, June 1899.

3. Secret Despatch No.101 to Secretary of State for India dated 1 June, 1899: F.D.S.P.No.116, June 1899.
O'Connor too had been disturbed by the reappearance of Hamdi Pasha at Basra. He confessed to Salisbury that if the Pasha succeeded in converting Constantinople to an aggressive policy, it would become essential to warn the Porte against encroaching on the territories of Kuwait. Such a warning would lead to complications. But it would also clarify the position. On the other hand, if the Consul at Basra told Hamdi Pasha of the engagement which bound Kuwait to the British Government, Turkey would hesitate to embark upon any extreme measures. O'Connor favoured the latter procedure, as it would have eliminated friction with the authorities at Constantinople. But the Indian authorities disagreed with the ambassador's suggestion. They wanted the Porte to be warned that Her Majesty's Government would not tolerate any interference in Kuwait.

Before Salisbury could reconcile the viewpoints of the Calcutta authorities and O'Connor, an overture from Hamdi Pasha revealed that Turkey was sensible to the advantages of an understanding with the

1. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 29 May, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.100, June 1899.

2. India Office to Foreign Office dated 7 June, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.102, June 1899.
British Government. Subtly ploying on British fears, the Governor-General of Basra told Consul Wratislaw that Abdul Hamid had of late been considerably exercised over reports of English activity in Kuwait. The Sultan's anxiety was being skilfully exploited by the European Ambassadors to the prejudice of Anglo-Turkish relations. Could not the issue be resolved by a friendly discussion between O'Connor and the Porte? Turkey knew how essential it was for England that no foreign power should gain access to Kuwait. An arrangement safeguarding British interests in the principality could easily be negotiated at Constantinople.

O'Connor viewed Hamdi Pasha's feeler with satisfaction. It was, he told Salisbury, clear that the Porte knew of the secret understanding with Mubarik. It would be equally legitimate to assume that if England tacitly acknowledged the Sultan's jurisdiction over Kuwait, Abdul Hamid would undertake not to lease the principality to a power whose interests were antagonistic to those of England. The Ambassador was in favour of coming of terms with Turkey. For to assume an

1. Tel. H.M.'s Consul, Basra to H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople dated 4 June, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.115, November 1899; H.M.'s Consul, Basra to H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople dated 3 June, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.129, November 1899.

2. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Office dated 6 June, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.114, November 1899.
inflexible stand would bring the discussion to a deadlock at once and make the Sultan appeal to the other Ambassadors for guidance as to his line of action, and leave the question as far as we are concerned, much in its present condition.¹

The Ambassador's recommendation for the adoption of a conciliatory attitude towards Turkey immediately brought on his head the wrath of the India Office.² The Secretary of State for India conceded that a forthright declaration of the independence of Kuwait would create an impossible situation. But the alternative suggested by O'Connor was open to equally serious objections. The Convention of 1899 had been contracted on the promise that Kuwait was independent of Turkey. To seek an understanding with the Porte for the protection of British interests in the principality would, therefore, be contradictory of the letter as well as the spirit of this engagement. The British response to Hamdi Pasha's overture ought to be so framed as to leave the Government complete liberty of action in relation to the obligations it had contracted with Mubarak.³

With Lord George Hamilton having vetoed an understanding with Turkey over Kuwait, it rested on

¹. Ibid.
². India Office to Foreign Office dated 18 July, 1899; F.D.S.P.No.126, November 1899.
³. Ibid.
the Ottoman authorities to make the next move. Nor was
it delayed for long. The Consul at Basra soon sent
reports of troop concentrations in the Vilayet, and
the intention of the military party to forcibly occupy
the principality. When Wratisslaw warned Hamdi Pasha
that Her Majesty's Government would not view with
indifference any hostile proceedings against Kuwait, the
Pasha ostensibly washed his hands off the entire affair.
He asserted that the situation was completely out
of his control and wholly in the hands of the military
faction. Yet as a possible way out he again suggested
the resolution of the problem on a diplomatic plane.
After all, it was in the interest of Great Britain
for Kuwait to be in the hands of Turkey rather than
to be exposed to the intrigues of hostile powers. An
understanding between the Viceroy and the Foreign Office
on the question was not only feasible, but also
desirable.  

Hamdi Pasha's reaction to the warning held out
by Wratisslaw indicates that the military moves in
Basra merely constituted a bid to browbeat England into

1. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India
dated 2 September, 1899; F.D.S.P. No. 140, November 1899;
Tel. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Viceroy dated
3 September, 1899; F.D.S.P. No. 146, November 1899.

2. Tel. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to
Viceroy dated 11 September, 1899; F.D.S.P. No. 157,
November 1899.
an agreement concerning Kuwait. Yet Abdul Hamid miscalculated British determination to temporise not at all in a matter which so vitally affected Indian interests. A naval squadron was rushed to the Gulf to prevent an occupation of the principality on the part of the Ottoman authorities.¹ Simultaneously, Salisbury instructed O'Connor to warn the Turkish Government against making a move in the direction of Kuwait.² England, on her part, he was to warn the Porte, had no hostile designs on the principality. Yet the friendly relations obtaining between the Government and Mubarak obliged it to view with concern recent developments which could conceivably raise "very disagreeable and inconvenient" questions.

Immediately on receipt of the instructions from the Foreign Office, O'Connor sought an interview with Tewfik Pasha, the Ottoman Foreign Minister, in course of which he made a pointed reference to the "preponderant interests" of England in the Persian Gulf, and communicated the warning held out by Salisbury.³

¹ Tél. Secretary of State for India to Viceroy dated 9 September, 1899; F.O.S.P. No.140, November 1899.
² Tél. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople dated 6 September, 1899; F.O.S.P. No.171, November 1899.
³ H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 13 September, 1899; F.O.S.P. No.194, November 1899.
The Pasha did not comment on O'Connor's meaningful reference to British interests in the Gulf. He also avoided the vexed question of Anglo-Kuwait relations. But towards the end of the interview he significantly remarked that when Hamdi Pasha had advocated a military occupation of the principality in 1897, the Sultan had refused his permission on the premise that "it was not worth the risk or expense." 1

Shortly after the Ottoman Minister's exchanges with the British Ambassador, Anthopoulos Pasba, a Turkish diplomat who had represented his country in England, hastened to the British Embassy with a personal message from the Sultan. 2 Abdul Hamid, he told O'Connor, had been disturbed by the stand taken by the Foreign Office in respect of Kuwait. Surely Salisbury did not desire to curtail his liberty of action over a territory that was so incontestably a part of his empire? The Sultan, the Pasha stated, was aware of the important interests of England in the Persian Gulf and of the desire of Her Majesty's Government not to allow any Foreign power to interfere with their road towards India. His Majesty had, therefore, desired him to state that if British interests were threatened by another Power he was ready and willing to prevent this by armed force. 3

1. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
From the language held out by Anthopoulos Pasha it is clear that he had been instructed to advance the proposal initially put forward by Hamdi Pasha; namely, that Turkey was prepared to safeguard British interests in Kuwait in return for the recognition of her pretensions over the principality. O'Connor, as we have seen, was in favour of such a bargain. But the Indian authorities were unalterably opposed to any understanding with the portee. The Ambassador, therefore, repeated to Anthopoulos Pasha what he had told the Foreign Minister earlier. England had no aggressive designs on Kuwait. Only she was on the most friendly terms with Mubarik and would not permit the conduct of hostilities against him.

With the rejection of Abdul Hamid's overture the die was cast. Prodded on by the India Office, Salisbury had made it plain to Turkey that he would not accord her any rights over Kuwait. In contrast to the British attitude, the Sultan's stand on the problem was characterised by a willingness to accommodate England in so far as her essential interests were concerned. He kept the door leading to a negotiated settlement wide open throughout. However, Salisbury had even earlier abandoned the policy of safeguarding British interests in the region through upholding the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. It is, therefore, doubtful whether O'Connor's counsel for moderation
would have prevailed even if the rigid position assumed by the India Office is discounted. Be that as it may, England's special position in Kuwait, as embodied in the secret Convention of 1899, placed in her hands a powerful lever for the protection of her political, commercial and strategic interests in the region.

The Trade of 1899

Though the Convention of 1899 with Mubarik was in the first instance directed against Russia, it proved equally effective when British interests in Asiatic Turkey were threatened by Germany. German interest in the problem of communications in the Ottoman Empire dated to the 1870's when von Pressel, an Austrian engineer, constructed a line for the Turkish Government from Coutari to Ismidt which was turned over to an English company for exploitation in 1880. Besides being an engineer of genius, Pressel was a visionary who planned to link the whole of Asiatic Turkey by a chain of railways stretching from the Bosphorus to Baghdad and Basra. His scheme involved the colonisation and economic penetration of the region by Germany on an extensive scale. It was, therefore, viewed with suspicion at Constantinople.

and for two decades no progress was made along the lines suggested by him. Besides, official support for his scheme was also lacking, since Bismarck was sensitive to the hostility with which St. Petersburg viewed German involvement in the Ottoman Empire. However, Kaiser William's debut in international politics marked a change in German policy towards Turkey. The Emperor shared the views of the Colonial Party in his country, which saw the Ottoman Empire a field for penetration by German industrial enterprise. He paid increasing attention to the cultivation of relations with Constantinople, witness his visit to the Turkish capital in 1889, in course of which he became a convert to Pressel's ideas.

The opening of a European line to Constantinople in 1888 combined with the shift in German policy to impart a new impulse to railway construction in Turkey. Towards the close of the year Abdul Hamid granted a concession to two German financiers, Herr Aula of the Wurttembergische Bank, and Dr. George Siemens, Director of the Deutsche Bank, for building a railway from

Constantinople to Angora. An Anatolian Railway Company was formed by the Germans, which immediately embarked upon the execution of the project. The line till Konia was completed by 1892. The effect of improved land communications between Germany and Asiatic Turkey is eloquently expressed in the figures of trade between the two countries. However, German policy had before it an even more ambitious design. It aimed at securing a monopoly over the Turkish hinterland as a field of exploitation for German industry. Articulate commercial interests, organised in bodies like the Pan-German League, were vociferous in their support for

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2. The following statistics present an interesting picture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Exports from Germany into Turkey</th>
<th>Imports into Germany from Turkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>5.9 million marks</td>
<td>1.2 million marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>11.7 -do-</td>
<td>2.3 -do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>29.8 -do-</td>
<td>7.0 -do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>43.0 -do-</td>
<td>30.6 -do-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

such an orientation, which would find realisation in the linking of the Bosphorus with the Persian Gulf.\(^1\)

The opening of the Constantinople-Konia line was followed by a lull in activity which lasted until Kaiser William's second pilgrimage to the Ottoman capital in 1898. The Emperor, as we know, was keenly interested in bringing the project of a railway from Constantinople to the Gulf to realisation. His visit did not have any direct bearing on the question, but soon after his departure Siemens, now President of the Anatolian Railway, revived the project with the Ottoman authorities.

The British reaction to the German initiative offered a contrast to the near panic which had gripped the Foreign Office at the granting of the Kapnist concession. From 1888 onwards Salisbury had welcomed German involvement in Turkey as a favourable factor in the losing battle which British diplomacy was fighting against growing Russian influence over Abdul Hamid.\(^2\) Besides, Russian predominance over Asiatic Turkey would have been disastrous for England, commercially as well as strategically. On the other hand, German involvement

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1. See Speech by T.T. Gibson-Howles on "The Baghdad Railway" delivered before The Central Asian Society on 24 April, 1903; Imperial And Asiatic Quarterly Review, July-October, 1903, pp. 385-541 Also see Z. Salih, "Mesopotamia: (1600-1914), (Baghdad 1957), pp. 213-25.

in the region could serve as a counter influence to Russia. Even if the exigencies of the Near Eastern scene are discounted, in the autumn of 1899 England had a special interest in keeping Germany in good humour, for she was then preparing to embark upon a war in South Africa. Towards the close of the year the Kaiser visited England, and was promised co-operation by Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, in the construction of the Baghdad Railway, though the encouragement given by the English statesman could not have been wholly innocent of a desire to drive a wedge between St. Petersburg and Berlin.

Through the support which Baron von Marschall, the German Ambassador at Constantinople, extended to the financial interests negotiating with the Porte an Iride was issued on 25 November, 1899, conceding the Anatolian Company the right, in principle, to construct a railway from Konis to Baghdad. The Iride was followed by an

2. J.L. Garvin, The Life of Joseph Chamberlain, (London 1934), iii, pp. 501-02. In 1903 H. P. Gibson-Bowles, an M.P., who took a leading part in preventing the British Government from co-operating with Germany in the construction of the railway, stated that co-operation had been promised as a measure of appeasement. However, there appears little foundation for the assumption. See speech by H. P. Gibson-Bowles on "The Baghdad Railway" delivered before the Central Asian Society on 24 April, 1903; Vide Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review, July-October, 1903, pp. 334-35.
agreement between Siemens and Zihni Pasha, the Ottoman Minister of Commerce. Thereby the Anatolian Company agreed to construct the extension to Baghdad in a maximum period of eight years on conditions to be determined by an agreement between the contracting parties. The necessary survey work was to be undertaken immediately, after which the Company would submit a draft Convention to the Ottoman Porte. Finally, it was stipulated that the question of a state guarantee on the capital employed in the project would be discussed in common with other conditions on completion of the preliminary surveys.

The issue of the trade was hailed as an event of outstanding importance in Berlin. The German press emphasised the commercial advantages which would accrue to the country from the execution of the project and spoke optimistically of the possibilities of co-operation of international finance in the venture. Nor was the German gain entirely distasteful to England. The Times set the tone by pointing out that there was "no

1. H.M's Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 27 December, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.207, October 1900.

2. Dispatch from Berlin Correspondent, London Times dated 30 November, 1899; Also see H.M's Ambassador, Berlin to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 12 January, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.221, October 1900.
Power in whose hands Englishman would more gladly see the enterprise fall ...."1 According to the journal it would be "gratifying" if a satisfactory arrangement was worked out between England and Germany concerning Asia Minor. O'Connor was also in favour of co-operation between the two countries in respect of the project, for such co-operation would be to the advantage of British trade and political influence.2 As he told Salisbury:

For my part I would like it (i.e., British participation) to be accorded as a result of a request from the German Government and combined with some understanding securing to British capitalists a right to co-operate on fair terms in the prolongation of the existing railways to Baghdad and Basra.3

Not surprisingly, it was at St. Petersburg that the granting of the concession to the Germans excited the most serious concern.4 Russian papers regarded it as a confirmation of their suspicion that between a secret agreement had been reached between the former to have a free hand in Africa and the latter in Asia Minor.5 It was also believed that the

1. The Times dated 30 November, 1899.
2. H.M. Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 9 November, 1899; P.P.P. No.175, October 1899.
3. Ibid.
5. The Times dated 1 December, 1899.
railway would be extended through south Persia to Beluchistan, thus placing a permanent obstacle in the way of Russian access to the Gulf. Most important of all, the conception presented an incipient threat to the programme of industrialisation upon which Russia had embarked in the 1890's under the direction of Count Witte. At the turn of the century, a preponderating share of Russian trade flowed through the Straits, which made dominance over the region a matter of life and death for St. Petersburg. In addition, it was apprehended that once the railway was completed Mesopotamia would be developed as the granary of Central Europe to the exclusion of the Ukraine, whose agricultural surplus went a long way towards paying for Russian import of capital goods.

Finally, the stabilisation of Asia Minor which would result from the construction of the line was basically opposed to the Russian policy of having


Germany was conscious of the vital Russian interests involved in Turkey and there is reason to believe that an attempt was made to assuage her feelings in respect of the question. Siemens confided to O'Connor that the Kaiser had broached the subject with the Czar during their Potsdam meeting. Finding that the idea did not meet an encouraging reception from Nicholas, the German Emperor had explained that the Baghdad Railway was a project that he was determined to execute. Perceiving the Kaiser to be in earnest, the Czar had yielded to the "stronger influence", and the matter had been settled there and then.\(^2\)

If German diplomacy was naive enough to believe that the Potsdam conversations had removed all points of friction between the two countries in Asia

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1. See Secret Despatch No.27 to Secretary of State for India dated 4 February, 1904; F.D.C.P.No.20, March 1904. Also see comments of Cologne Gazette given in The Times dated 30 November, 1899. Discussing the Railway, the Novoe Vremya frankly stated that when it was completed Turkey would be able to mobilise her troops with great speed, thus necessitating a new assessment of the strategic aspects of Russia's trans-Caucasus border. The Times dated 8 December, 1899.

2. H.M's Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 27 December, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.223, October 1900.
Minor, it was due for serious disillusionment. Immediately after the issue of the Irade the Russian Foreign Office approached Berlin with a proposal whereby its rights over the Straits would have been safeguarded. When the German Government did not respond in the affirmative to the overture, St. Petersburg immediately set upon securing its interests in Turkey itself. As "moral compensation" for the concession accorded to Berlin, Zinoviev, the Russian Ambassador at Constantinople, stipulated on behalf of his government that:

1. If the Ottoman authorities desired to construct a railway in the provinces adjacent to the Black sea, the Russian Government ought to be consulted beforehand and only Turkish capital employed in the project.

2. If the Railway was to be constructed by non-Turkish business interests, none but a Russian Company ought to be given the Concession.

O'Connor was willing to concede the legitimacy


2. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 1 March, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.239, October 1900.
of Russian sensitivity regarding alien domination over the Turkish provinces adjacent to the Black Sea. But Zinoviev's conditions were unwarrantably harsh. They amounted to the establishment of a "quasi-protectorate" over the region. However, Tewfik Pasha confessed to the British Ambassador that Abdul Hamid would be unable to resist the Russian demands, particularly in view of the attitude of neutrality which Germany had chosen to adopt regarding the question. The Black Sea concessions which Zinoviev forced a reluctant Sultan to concede to St. Petersburg were patterned on an undertaking obtained from Persia earlier in respect of her northern provinces, and aimed at creating a safety zone immediately to the south of Russia's frontier in Asia.

Since Russian opposition to the Baghdad Railway was demonstrated in so unmistakable a form, it was natural for the Germans to look for co-operation in other quarters for the execution of the scheme. Participation by other nations would not only help in raising the necessary capital, but it would also blunt the edge of Russian hostility. Siemens, in particular, was

1. H.M's Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 1 March, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.239, October 1900.

2. H.M's Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 14 February, and 22 March, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.235 and 247, October 1900.

acutely sensitive to the political implications of the issue, and wanted to make the project as international as possible. Immediately after securing the concession he tried to gain the co-operation of the British owned Smyrna-Aidin Railway Company. The English financiers rejected his overture on the plea that the terms offered to them did not involve "financial and administrative co-operation upon fair and equal terms ...."¹ Siemens was disappointed at the rebuff he earned at English hands, and was compelled to fall back upon the support of French interests. But he did not despair of coming to an understanding with the British and told O'Connor that he hoped to reopen negotiations at a later date with a fair prospect of success.

KUWAIT AND THE IRAQI OFFICE OF 1899

Immediately after the preliminary agreement between Siemens and Zihni Pasha had been signed, a survey Commission comprising Herr Stemrich, the Consul-General at Baghdad, and von Kapp, Chief Engineer of the Anatolian Railway Company, set out to examine the route of the proposed line. The Germans arrived

¹ H.M's Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 27 December, 1899; F.D.S.P. No.208, October 1900.
at Basra early in 1900. Railways learnt that they would proceed to Kuwait to look for a suitable site to serve as the terminus of the railway. Its preliminary investigations had somewhat disheartened the Commission. The project did not appear very sound commercially, and would prove impossible of execution unless guaranteed financially by the Ottoman Government. An outlet at Kuwait was equally essential. Stemrich admitted that

the line would not pay unless they got an outlet to the sea at Kuwait, and they meant to arrange for it with the Sultan without reference to the Sheikh, leaving His Imperial Majesty to settle with Mubarik as he best can.

The disclosures of the Consul-General alarmed the Indian authorities. Curzon told the Imperial Government that if the Germans succeeded in arranging for a lease at Kuwait directly with the Sultan over the head of Mubarik, then the British position in the Gulf would be fatally weakened. Would it not be proper

1. H.M.'s Consul, Basra to H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople dated 13 January, 1900; F.D.S.P. No. 203, October 1900.

2. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary, Foreign Department, GCI (demi-official) dated 15 January, 1900; F.D.S.F. No. 175/281, October 1901.

3. Ibid.

4. Tel. Viceroy to Secretary of State for India dated 7 January, and 18 January, 1900; F.D.S.P. No. 177 and 189, October 1900.
inform Berlin of the nature of English relations with the principality? The Germans could thus be given to understand that the lease of a terminus on the Gulf could be secured only through British good offices and as part of a wider understanding in relation to the entire project.

Salisbury communicated the Indian proposal to O'Connor. The Ambassador gave careful thought to the question. His verdict was that it would prove injurious to British interests to precipitate the Kuwait issue on two scores. Any acquisitive move by England in the Gulf would induce Russia to resort to counter-action on the plea of compensation. In addition, the warning contemplated by Curzon would be exploited by Germany to press matters to a conclusion at a moment when England was fully involved in the Transvaal War. A better course of action would be for him to inform Baron von Marschall of the nature of Anglo-Kuwait relations, and to express the hope that Berlin would not take any step as would "hinder the participation of British capitalists with those of

1. Tel. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople dated 19 January, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.213, October 1900.

2. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 22 January, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.219, October 1900.
Germany in the construction of the Railway." Salisbury agreed to the firm yet cautious course outlined by his representative at Constantinople.

In the meanwhile, the Survey Commission had reached Kuwait. Mubarik's dealings with the Germans were scrupulously correct if we are to credit the account he afterwards gave to the British Resident. The Commission tried to break through his reserve by dwelling upon the prosperity which his principality would enjoy as the terminus of the Baghdad Railway. But the astute Sheikh refused to be inveigled by the Germans. Significantly hinting that he did not "acknowledge Turkish sovereignty over Kuwait territory", he maintained that his subjects would not permit their lands to be leased to foreigners. Mubarik's attitude must have given the Commission food for thought.

1. Ibid.
2. Tel. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to H.M's Ambassador, Constantinople dated 23 January, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.229, October 1900.
3. Resident, Persian Gulf to Secretary of State for Foreign Department, GDU dated 5 February, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.211, October 1900.
4. Memorandum on Interview between Resident, Persian Gulf and Sheikh Mubarik dated 5 February, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.211, October 1900. According to German sources the Sheikh had promised assistance in the construction of the railway. The conflicting versions are in accordance with Mubarik's character! See H.M's Ambassador, Berlin to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 23 January, 1900; F.D.S.P. No.298, October 1900.
5. Ibid.
Soon after the Survey Commission had visited Kuwait, O'Connor clarified the British position before the Ottoman authorities. Referring to the commission's activities, he told Tewfik Pasha that although England was disinclined to disturb the status quo along the Arab littoral, she would not acquiesce in any arrangement which gave another European power special rights and privileges in Kuwait. The Ottoman Minister did not react beyond taking note of the Ambassador's observations. However, shortly afterwards Baron von Marschall called at the British Embassy. With him O'Connor was more forthright. He bluntly stated that England had a non-alienation agreement with Kuwait. Mubarak could not, therefore, lease his territory to another power without British permission. Needless to say, Her Majesty's Government was in favour of co-operation with Germany on "fair terms" in the construction of the Baghdad Railway. But for this very reason it was essential for Berlin to be acquainted with the position in which Kuwait stood as regards England.

O'Connor's assertion must have made it plain to

1. H.M.'s Ambassador, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 10 April, 1900; F.O.S.F. No.252, October 1900.
Harschall that an outlet for the Railway on the Gulf could only be secured after British co-operation had been gained on what were referred to as "fair terms". The truth was that in Kuwait England had a strong bargaining position, a fact of which O'Connor was cognisant, witness his assertion that with good management it ought not to be very difficult to come to an arrangement between the Anatolian Railway Company and Dr. Siemens on the one hand, and the British Navigation Companies on the other, which would remove all likelihood of asperity if any subsequent negotiations between Her Majesty’s Government and that of Germany, but to this end I venture to think that it is of supreme importance that we should hold the Sheikh of Kuwait well in hand ...." ¹

The position was fully appreciated at Berlin, and Count Bilow, the German Chancellor, gave a categoric assurance to Sir Frank Lascelles, the British Ambassador at Berlin, that England would be taken into confidence whenever a decision was made to extend the Anatolian Railway to the Gulf. ²

Bilow’s assurance to Lascelles set the pattern for the diplomacy of the Baghdad Railway. The question of dominance over the routes to India was a basic motivation of British policy in the Persian Gulf and

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¹. Ibid.
². H.M.’s Ambassador, Berlin to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 15 June, 1900; F.D.S.P. No. 275, October 1900.
was responsible for the conversion of Kuwait from an obscure principality into a point of friction between the various European powers. In the period under review it was Russia which presented the most serious threat to British imperial interests. Hence the alacrity with which the Foreign Office reacted to the Kuphist project. German ambitions, of course, constituted a totally different problem. Antagonisms between Berlin and London were more subtle and British diplomacy believed that in the Middle Eastern theatre, at any rate, the interests of the two countries were not fundamentally irreconcilable. Apart from its bearing on British imperial policy, the Iride of 1899 stands out as an important landmark in the history of the Middle East. More than anything else it marked the assumption of an active Turkish orientation by Germany, a process which had been incipiently set in motion as early as 1888. The concession precipitated a deep antagonism between Germany and Russia, an antagonism which led the latter country to display a sudden spurt of activity in south Persia, the brunt of which had to be borne exclusively by England. In its larger repercussions the Baghdad Railway thus influenced the alignments which were gradually assuming shape in European and international politics.

1. See infra p.