Chapter V

Clash of Ottoman and British Interests in Qatar-Bahrain Area
The Arabian Peninsula may safely be described as an arena of international politics in the period under review. Within this region, a series of conflicts was simultaneously in progress, analogous to the role of the Peninsula in world affairs. However, there were three (Oman, Kuwait and Qatar-Bahrain) principal circles of activity on the Arabian littoral with which British and Ottoman diplomacy was intimately connected. In case of Oman, Ottomans were not in position to trouble the British. It was almost exclusively British sphere of influence. The Anglo-Ottoman clash in respect of Kuwait has already been examined in Chapter IV. We will examine in this chapter the middle ground of Qatar, Bahrain, and Trucial coast. Though this region was not as important factor as was the case with Kuwait, in European politics but hardly less for the history of the region.

Before the World War I no European power attempted to establish a base or construct a railway in this area. There was, however, a conflict of some importance to the participants. The issue was that of the expansion or consolidation of Ottoman sovereignty on this coast, opposed by British expansion (or defense) of Persian Gulf influence. The lack of a challenge by a major European power made little difference here, for Britain could not allow this middle
ground to go by default at the turn of the century any more than it could in the days of piracy or slave-trading. The result was that throughout Curzon's viceroyalty, substantial changes were made in the status of Bahrain and Qatar; the Trucial Coast remained a backwater, for the Ottoman Empire could not undertake a forward policy in this area unless and until its hold on Qatar, at least, was a firm one. In this way, the events occurring on this remote peninsula had greater importance than would appear at first glance.

**BRITISH MOVE IN QATAR**

The security inherent in Britain's treaty position on the Trucial Coast and at Bahrain has already been described in chapter I. With such a position, it was only natural that on occasion covetous eyes were cast toward the "gap" in the system. As Turkish interest in the peninsula expanded, a policy of "filling the gap" became more attractive. Turkish pressure could be most damaging to the British position to the south and on the islands, and there was no doubt as to the simplest method of warding off such pressure—the assumption of direct control over Qatar. But before such a step could be taken, it was necessary to have a clear picture
of the situation on Qatar, even assuming Home opposition to extension of responsibilities could be overcome. Curzon, therefore, had suggested in his 1899 dispatch the stationing of a British agent at Bahrain, an excellent center for obtaining information on the opposite coast.

ZOBRAH CRISIS OF 1895 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The status of Zobrah, which was in dispute even earlier in 1870s between Bahrain and Qatar, once again became the hub of the controversy that threatened to develop into an Anglo-Ottoman conflagration in 1895. Bahrain’s claim to Zobrah had been contested in 1870s by Qatar which arose out of Nasir Bin Mubarak’s ambition to the throne of Bahrain. The latest crisis started in March when the Al - bin - Ali tribe of Bahrain, under the leadership of Sultan bin Salawah, left the islands as a result of the dispute with the ruler and began preparations to settle at Zobrah with the blessings of Qasim and the Ottomans.¹ Despite the warnings to Qasim and Sultan by the Resident that on no account would the British Government permit such a settlement, plans continued for the building of homes. They were further emboldened when the

Ottoman authorities sent the Mutasarrif of Hasa there and who appointed a mudir for Zobarah to oversee the construction of the new settlement. The Turkish flag was hoisted and six Ottoman soldiers were appointed.² The British reacted quickly realizing the gravity of threat to Bahrain, particularly the Ottomans had at various times since 1817 made reference to their own sovereignty over the island themselves.³ An armed vessel, the sphinx, under the senior Naval Officer was sent to Zobrah to persuade the tribe to abandon the settlement but they did not relent.⁴ But what caused further concern to the British was that the mudir stated that Zobarah was Turkish and that the Al-bin-Ali had now become Turkish subjects. The situation was made even more critical by a report that an Ottoman gun Vessel, the Zuhaf, was at Zobarah and that the Ottomans were getting a force ready in Hasa to attack Bahrain. The Sphinx, together with another ship, consequently, crippled the Al-bin-Ali by

² Ibid.

³ Ravinder Kumar, India and the Persian Gulf Region, 1858-1907, A Study in Imperial Policy (Bombay, 1965), p.118.

⁴ I.O. to F.O., May 22, 1895, Home 553/95; S No to C in CEI, June 22, 1895, ADM 1/7250, SA 61/95.
destroying all of their 44 ships in the harbour. Soon afterward, the Turkish officials left, and Qasim had no option except to 'surrender.

The Resident was convinced to Qasim ibn Thani's complicity, for that Shaikh had seen in the Al Bin 'Ali a tool to be used against his old enemy, 'Isa of Bahrain. The Qaimaqam of Qatar, for such was Qasim's title, had to agree to the return of the Al Bu 'Ali to Bahrain after the British action, putting blame in turn on his nominal superior, the Mutasarrif of Najd. The Indian authorities were not convinced with the Shaikh's plea - and decided that Qasim, too, needed, a lesson—a fine of Rs. 30,000. If he paid, he would suffer financial loss; if he refused, some of his own boats held by the British would be destroyed, thereby causing financial loss as well as humiliation. Qasim answered the

5Viceroy telegram to SI, September 14, 1895, Home 956/95, Naval reports are in ADM 1/7250, SA73 and 78-9/95 and ADM 127/28; I.O. to F.O., September 3, 1895, Home 906/95; Hamilton Private to Elgin, September 19, and Elgin Private to Hamilton, August 27, September 18, and October 2, 1895, Hamilton MSS.

6Wilson to FSI, September 15, 1895, FI 136/96. The Mutasarrif in fact lost his post following this incident; Mockler (Baghdad) to Currie, June 13, 1896, Home 611/96.

7Elgin to Hamilton, March 11, 1896, FI 136/96.
demand by saying he had resigned from his office of Qaimaqam and would intrigue no more—but he would not pay. His dhows were destroyed, and the episode was ended.\textsuperscript{8}

The whole incident, in fact, in itself was apparently very insignificant in immediate context but pregnant with serious implications in the long run. The import of this can be understood keeping the fact in view that a precedent had been set and Britain had interfered directly and in a forceful manner in mainland affairs—even to the point of disciplining an Ottoman qaimaqam. Events such as the movement of the Al Bu ‘Ali were to call for increasingly closer observation and interference. With interference came the greater desire of Indian officials to assume some sort of control over the area. To do this, of course, it was necessary to dispute Turkish neither relinquished these claims nor recognized those of Britain even to Bahrain.

However, the defeat of Qasim, in a sense, proved a boon in disguise. The British Government realised how close they had come to an armed conflict with the Ottomans, and therefore wanted to make sure there would be no repetition of events. The Resident was consequently instructed to warn the

\textsuperscript{8}Elgin to Hamilton, June 30, 1896, FI 331/96.
ruler of Bahrain against interfering in the affairs of Qatar. This was, of course, an implicit recognition of the rights of the Al-Thani in Zobrah.\footnote{Elgin to Hamilton, March 11, 1896, FI 136/96.}

That the information received by the Porte on any incident in this far-removed area was delayed and inaccurate did not bring loss of interest - quite the contrary. Turkish concern was fed by the Russian Embassy in Constantinople, which never lost an opportunity, reported Micheal Herbert, British Charge, to point out British seizure of some part of Sultan's dominions, "whether it be Cyprus, Egypt, or in the Persian Gulf." The sultan himself, "prejudiced from the first against us," easily took offense when his claims over the local tribes were ignored by India.\footnote{Herbert to Salisbury, June 10, 1896, Home 528/96.} This atmosphere undoubtedly was one cause for various warnings from ambassadors in Constantinople against hasty action which might further complicate the situation.

Although the Porte in this instance made no concentrated attempt for another six years to develop its position at Qatar, it nevertheless instituted stricter enforcement of its
claims to jurisdiction over Bahrainis arriving in the Empire, and such other pin pricks as came to mind - for example, the attempt to establish Gulf quarantine stations in 1897.\textsuperscript{11} As a matter of form for the Turks, as well, a formal protest was made against the Zobara incident - but not until November of 1896, a long delay even for the Ottoman administration. However, the delay on the part of the Ottomans can be appreciated by considering the fact that they had to deal with the Bulgarian insurrection, the Cretan rising, and a Greco - Turkish war in 1896-1897).\textsuperscript{12} Moreover as has been seen, any serious attention available in this period for the Gulf was reserved for Kuwait.

But the same was not true in respect of Britain. The Turkish quarantine plan had involved Bahrain, and suggestions first made in 1897 were repeated in 1899.\textsuperscript{13} In order to forestall any determined attempt to establish Turkish

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{11}See, ibid, p.97. On Bahrainis in the Empire, FO 602/7; this file of Basra Archives includes all Wali -Consul exchanges, 1886-1900, with Turkish document in the original. Protection of Bahrainis was a constant source of complaint and counter-complaint.

\textsuperscript{12}F.O. to I.O., November 21, 1896, Home 887/96.

\textsuperscript{13}SSI telegram to Viceroy, July 27, 1899, FI 626/99.
\end{footnotesize}
stations in the area - particularly on the islands- 'Isa was pressed to establish his own sanitary controls. It is important to note that 'Isa refused, for reasons which have to do mainly with the general situation in Bahrain. He might have also not liked the idea of more British involvement in the affairs of Bahrain lest it should curtail his freedom of action.

CONTROVERSY OVER BRITISH AGENT FOR BAHRAIN

The Zobara incident involved primarily Britain, Turkey, and Qasim ibn Thani. 'Isa was affected only indirectly in his relations with the Al Bin ' Ali. In the meantime, there had been no coincident change of any importance in internal affairs of Bahrain. However, there was perceptible change in British attitude toward Bahrain. The change had come in British intentions. As a natural corollary to the increasing involvement of Britain in defense of Bahrain's status, she began to pay increasing attention to internal affairs. Now, the British were seriously thinking of the devices to put the administration on a more secure footing.

In order to make administration sound and efficient, the British felt that financial control is imperative. The main income of the Shaikh was from the customs farm, and the best
way to regularize customs was to place them under British administration, either directly or under officials seconded to the Shaikh's service. Unlike the situation in Oman, direct administration although it might be challenged by Turks and Persians, would not bring any international agreement or guarantee into effect. The closer control of income and expenditures which would follow from customs regularization would also strengthen the British position. By better trade supervision, there might even be some surplus to contribute to the suppression of the slave and arms trade.

The normal procedure for instituting these changes was in connection with the succession of a new ruler by extracting concessions in lieu of his recognition. But unfortunately for the British, 'Isa proved extremely long-lived. Thus the desired objectives would have to be achieved through the influence of an able officer in daily contact with the ruler. This was one of the important reasons for India's request time and again for such an appointment. Moreover, 'Isa was a true Gulf Shaikh in the grand manner, enjoying the benefits of the pax but not particularly interested in sharing its responsibilities—at least this was the Indian Government view. He had many enemies, but he also had a determined protector. It was the irony of the British
position that as ‘Isa’s security increased his relations with
his mentors worsened in a direct ratio.

The British got the opportunity in 1898 they were looking
for to tighten their hold. Towards the close of 1897, one of
‘Isa’s four sons, Hamad, revealed to the Resident, Meade,
that his father wished to designate him as successor, a
report that proved true. Meade supported Hamad’s
recognition, although this was contrary to the general policy
of "no recognition before accession". In this situation, the
concession might have a favorable effect, particularly since
the population of the islands favored Hamad.14 The Viceroy,
looking ahead, supported the suggestion on the grounds that
otherwise a struggle for succession might follow upon ‘Isa’s
death. More important was the chance to act on the customs
and, in addition, station a British officer at Bahrain. A
British officer would be much preferable to the local Native
Agent, an important merchant named Muhammad Rahim, who did
little for his Rs.100 per month and was much complained

14Meade to FSI, December 5, 1897, and June 1898, FI 1044/98.
On the population’s view, Jayakar (Muscat) to Fagan, May 17,
1898, FES November 1898, pp.524-35.
against by the other traders. 15 We can very well notice the fact that the British have no moral scruple once things were likely to suit their interests. They put on back burner their loudly professed principle such as 'non-intervention' in internal affairs of the emirates and found the pretense to justify their changed stand. We see that they, somehow mysteriously, able to judge that population of Bahrain favoured Hamad so we should also support him, though main reason was altogether different.

The India Office approved the recognition; Lee-Warner particularly remarked that it would be most buffeting occasion to "tighten our hold on the place." Britain was in a treaty position with independent Bahrain, but, "We must however mean independent of all Governments except our own," for all the agreements since 1861 were "of a protectorate character." 16 The Foreign Department in India had similar views: "Politically we virtually have a 'Protectorate' already. Different nations give different meanings to the word. But all meanings have one element in common, viz.,

15 Elgin to Hamilton, October 17, 1898, FI 1044/98. On Fahgim, see FES November 1898, pp.524-35.

16 Minute of Elgin to Hamilton, October 27, 1898, FI 1044/98.
that a protected State has no freedom of action in foreign affairs, except through or by the remission of the protecting State." 17 The India Office, with Foreign Office approval, granted the recognition, with the most definite hope that 'Isa, would prove equally accommodating about accepting British direction. 18

'Isa refused, to concede the British demands several times—each time with a different reason. He mainly argued that the population opposed the idea of British customs administration. He added further that he himself intended to take over direct control from the customs farmers, but for able Bahraini 19 'Isa, of course, saw British control of the customs as the beginning of the end of his independence, at

17 Minute by J. Lang, Foreign Department, August 19, 1898, FES November 1898, pp. 524-35.

18 F.O. to I.O., December 9, 1988, Home 2463/98. It is interesting to note that the Porte got wind of the project immediately, for in early 1898 they informed Currie that the Vice-Consul to be appointed to the island must have his exequatur from the Empire. The Turks were told that no such appointment was contemplated— but in any case the British government could not allow this claim on their part. Currie to Salisbury, January 19, 1898, Home 1740/98.

19 Curzon to Hamilton, January 2, 1902, FI 170/02. This letter reports a later refusal and encloses all correspondence on past attempts.
least financially. Worse than the refusals was a report that a Frenchman, Goguyer (who will be met again in Oman), had offered four lakhs (Rs.4,00,000) to 'Isa for the farm. That he was refused in 1899 was no guarantee that a future offer would also be turned down.20

The situation was not so easy, particularly as 'Isa made the same excuses on arrangements for the quarantine, which eventually he declared to be under his own administration. The Resident interpreted both refusals and 'Isa's stubbornness as largely due to the influence of the principal Turkish merchant resident on the island, Mahmud 'Abd al-Wahab, who was close to both 'Isa and Goguyer. A little coercion, of course, would easily change 'Isa's views, but this policy was not—and could not be—adopted for excellent reasons: it would naturally raise suspicions among all dependent and independent Gulf rulers; it might well have an adverse effect with the powers and Turkey at a delicate time; and, finally, no such persuasion could be contemplated until Home approval had been received for stationing an agent at Bahrain, for only by such an appointment could the successful

20 Memorandum by Meade, December 6, 1989, FI 1154/99. Rupees are normally stated in "lakhs" of one hundred thousand, written 1,00,000.
implementation of newly won concessions be insured.  

The British Indian Government sent a civilian employee J.C. Gaskin, to Bahrain in 1900 temporarily to act as an Agent. The next year he was made permanent. Although apparently able, he had neither the rank nor the establishment-in the sense of Agency buildings, guards, and the like-with which to command 'Isa's respect and cooperation.  

In spite of these handicap, Gaskin appeared to have made a gain shortly after his arrival, for in May of 1900 'Isa issued a proclamation prohibiting the import of arms into his territory; but while this closed a gap in British efforts to control the arms trade, 'Isa had not been motivated by generosity. Acting under his own decrees, promptly seized 12,000 worth of arms from the local representative of a British firm, Fracis, Times & Co. It so happened that the representative was Muhammad Rahim, the much-disliked British Native Agent.

21 Meade telegram to FSI, July 16, 1899, FI 788/99.

22 Curzon to Hamilton, June 13, 1901, FI 751/01.

23 Based on FI 737, 839, and 880/00, and FES July 1898, 432-469, on background of arms trade in Bahrain.
OTTOMAN SOVEREIGNTY AND QATAR AND BAHRAIN

By 1900 British could not make much headway regarding plan to strengthen their position in Bahrain and Qatar since none of the desired reforms had been accomplished. The British were now feeling that our protege Shaikh Isa was gradually assuming the pretence of independence.24 However this feeling was mutual, and an event of December of that year which once again linked the affairs of Bahrain and Qatar did nothing to ease the tension. A party of Bahrainis had traveled to the mainland to hunt, as was their custom. The group was set upon by members of a rival mainland tribe, the Al Murra, and a number of them were killed, including a nephew of Shaikh 'Isa.25

Now the British statesman were faced with the dilemma regarding the ways to punish the murderers. As O'Connor drew attention of the Home authorities from Constantinople, if the Porte were asked to act it would imply British recognition of Ottoman sovereignty. He said that if any complaint were lodged, extreme caution would be required to

24Minute on Conor to Salisbury, April 15, 1900, Home 2064/00.

25Kembal (Resident, 1900-1904) to FSI, December 24, and Gaskin to Kembal, December 12, 1900, Home 1801/01. On the Al Murra, see S.A.Memorial, I, 53-58.
avoid this larger issue. The Turks probably would be unable to catch the culprits in any case. On the other hand, it would be dangerous to allow 'Isa to extract his own revenge without first warning the Porte. 26 At Home, Lee-Warner saw no reason to protect "Bahrenise sportsmen shooting in a Turkish province," but still Britain could not tell 'Isa that he was under British protection and could not extract vengeance himself, and then not press the Porte to take action. 27

At last, the British decided to demand reparation and punishment, but locally with the Wali of Basra. The Wali said that all was being done to track down the guilty—but of course Britain had no locus standi to represent Bahrain in this business. A.C. Wratislaw, British Consul in Basra (1898-1903), predicted failure at the start for the Turks were unable to do the job and probably unwilling as well, so that 'Isa could be shown what he had lost by choosing the

26 O’Connor to Landsdowne, February 27, 1901, Home 1861/01.

27 Minute on Viceroy telegram to SSI, January 10, 1901, Political and Secret Department (IOL), Subject Files, vol.3, of 1966, proceeding 154 to 1901 (SF 3/06, 154/01).
British, rather than the Ottoman, cause.\textsuperscript{28} Wratislaw was, in fact, quite correct, for the AL Murra were powerful and, moreover, had moved deeper into the interior (in search of fresh pasturage, as was customary). It was later on learnt that the affair was result of a vendetta. The leader of this particular section of the tribe had taken revenge for the killing of his son by Bahrainis in 1899. 'Isa was therefore advised to put in a claim for reparation in cash, but the old Shaikh demanded not only Rs. 23,520 for the murdered servants and stolen property but the blood of three AL Murra leaders for the three important Bahrainis killed, on the principle of blood for blood.\textsuperscript{29} There was no easy solution insight to this intricate problem. In fact, reparation of money from the tribe was as difficult as catching it - if not more so. Anyway, this issue was allowed to languish until 1906, by which time Britain and Bahrain had arrived at a new relationship altogether.\textsuperscript{30}

The importance of the affair came from the issues it

\textsuperscript{28} Wratislaw to O'Connor, February 16, 1901, Home 1907/01.

\textsuperscript{29} Kembal to FSI, June 6, 1902, SF 3/06, 1021/02.

\textsuperscript{30} SF 3/06 contains all correspondence on the case.
raised. In the first place, a policy which failed to gain compensation for the murder yet restrained the Shaikh from obtaining his own satisfaction was unlikely to ease the relationship between 'Isa and his mentors. Secondly, Qatar again was the center of attention: the murder brought into focus the fact that the status of that peninsula was most uncertain at least in the British eyes. But Britain did not wish to raise the issue by forcing settlement of the murder, for the possible repercussions would hardly be commensurate with the minor importance of the situation.

Consideration of Protectorate over Qatar

British, particularly Indian authorities, felt that resolution of this intricacies lied in some kind of protectorate agreement with Qasim. By mid-1901, this possibility was being mooted. Consequently the inquiries were made regarding Qasim's precise position on Qatar in the light of past events. It was found that Qasim, although retired, still wielded considerable clout. To add further confusion to this already complicated problem, Qasim's brother as well as his nominal successor, Ahmad overture to

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31 Hamilton to Curzon, September 5, 1901, Home 2717/02.

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the British early in 1902 for British protection. The Resident, Colonel C.A. Kembal, favoured such an agreement with the brother; the Home authorities were less certain. British interests were already in conflict with those of Turkey in many areas, and there was always the problem of Qasim. India was therefore asked for the moment only to collect more information. This was the situation when, at the end of 1902, the Ottoman authorities once again forced the issue by renewed interests and activities in the area. 

CONSOLIDATION MOVE BY THE OTTOMANS

Ironically, the British learnt first about the revival of the Turkish interests and consequent measures from the Turkish Press. In December, Ikdam, the same official reported the Turkish government’s intention to establish various posts on the Gulf sea-board, including Zobara (deserted since the AI Bu ‘Ali return to Bahrain). Confirmation was delayed,

32 Kembal’s support: Kembal to FSI, April 26, 1902, SF 1/03, 160/03. Home view: minute by Lee-Warner, July 29, SF 1/03, 977/02, and minutes by Sanderson and Lansdowne on I.O. to F.O., August 11, 1902, FO 78/5250.

33 SSI telegram to Viceroy, December 22, 1902, SF 1/03, 2981/02.
but in India there was no doubt of the danger. British authorities were particularly concerned over ‘Udayd, considered by the British to be under the jurisdiction of Abu Dhabi but claimed by the Porte. A garrison here and at Zobara, Curzon telegraphed, "would deal a serious blow to our whole position in the Gulf, and gravely compromise status of Bahrein." The India Office agreed that something should be done to forestall the move and again suggested to the Foreign Office that a treaty with Ahmad might be the answer if the Turks did not cooperate.

In March of 1903, The British received more specific information that the posts were to be established under mudirs at ‘Udayd, Wakra Island, and Zobara. O’Connor was therefore asked to warn the Porte on the possible repercussions of the plan. But he suggested that it would be wiser to avoid raising the question of Turkish sovereignty in this area, at least until the current negotiations on Anglo-Turkish disputes in Aden were concluded. As O’Connor examined the situation, if Britain again stated its

34 Viceroy telegram to SSI, January 19, 1903, SF 1/03, 175/03.

35 I.O. to F.O., February 4, 1903, ibid.
unwillingness to recognize Turkish sovereignty in that portion of the Gulf, the Porte would simply repeat its claim. In that case, Britain must choose between a contradiction—verbal or written—which would only weaken its position, or some definite action might lead much further than intended. Above all, O’Connor cautioned that it was necessary to keep the higher issues in mind—higher issues in view. To quote him:

It may safely be said that at the present moment Ottoman sovereignty over the whole of Arabia is at the best a very tenuous one, and that, in the gradual process of disintegration, which is progressing pretty rapidly, it will become less and less. Is it, under these circumstances, in accordance with British interests to hasten this disruption, or even to overweaken Turkish rule until we have some other to put in its place?... by overtly pursuing a policy which rightly or wrongly is considered as directed against the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, we encourage another Power to some act of rank aggression, which will precipitate developments and possibly place us before very long in a serious and grave predicament.36

O’Connor also suggested that a boat be stationed to observe developments; for once, the Ambassador was in agreement with Gulf officials, for this was also their

36O’Connor to Lansdowne, March 14, 1903, FO/5323.
view. With all in agreement, the Home government gave approval to the idea—but no free hand to interfere unless (1) the mudirs arrived, (2) Britain formally protested, (3) the Turks refused to withdraw: a chain of events that would require time for completion. For the moment, the Ottoman Government was only asked about the report and as usual it denied any such information. Early in April, the Turks repeated their assurances, but O'Connor, waving these remarks away, informed the Ottoman Foreign Minister that the appointed officials would not be allowed to land, let alone take up their posts. The Porte promised to send order to Hasa to cancel the nonexistent appointments.

Nevertheless, the Mudir-designate of Wakra, a man named Yusuf, arrived at Bahrain by ship on his way to take up his post. The Resident, and through him Gaskin on Bahrain, was ordered to hold him there under "but in an honourable manner pending arrival of orders from the Porte cancelling the

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37 O'Connor telegram to Lansdowne, March 18, 1903, SF 1/03, 2308/03; Viceroy telegram to SSI, March 25, 1903, SF1/03, 425/03.

38 SSI telegram to Viceroy, March 26, 1903, SF 1/03, 425/03.

39 O'Connor to Lansdowne, April 14, 1903, FO 78/5323.
As Yusuf could not be arrested, this was a difficult assignment-too difficult, in fact, for he escaped and made his way to Wakra, only to be driven away by the local residents. Then he ultimately reached Doha, where he secured help in establishing his post from Qasim, who probably feared further trouble with the Turks.

The British, now more than ever were convinced that a strong protest with the Porte was utmost needed and even Balfour, the Prime Minister, concurred with this view. O’Connor spoke with the Grand Vizier, only to be told, "no information," but the Vizier did add that if the incident occurred as reported the guilty party was probably Sayyid Talib Pasha, the Mutasarrif of Najd. Two weeks later, O’Connor could report that the Porte had promised to recall

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40 Viceroy telegram to SSI, April 25, and May 1, 1903, SF 1/03, 552 and 561/03.

41 Viceroy telegrams to SSI, May 8 and 10, 1903, SF 1/03, 606/03.

42 Lansdowne; FO 78/5323, in F.O., May 11, 1903.

43 O’Connor to Lansdowne, May 12, 1903, Home 2701/03. On Talib, see below, p.196 n.
Yusuf. By June, in fact, the Wali of Basra had ordered the recall of the mudirs; all that was needed was for the Mutasarrif to follow his instructions.

In August, Consul Crow in Basra was still writing to ask the Wali to compel the Mutasarrif’s compliance. While the latter had withdrawn one mudir, it was only to appoint Qasim’s son ‘Abd ar-Rahman in his place. The Grand Vizier told O’Connor in September that ‘Abd ar-Rahman would be relieved of his title. But Qasim’s son was still at Wakra (apparently his home in any case) at the end of the year, and Resident Kembal reported that no orders had been received there.

DEBATE OVER CURZON’S PROPOSAL

The entire incident, intrinsically, was insignificant, but it gave fresh impetus for revival protectorate idea, for it was clear that there would be a repetition of such incidents at the Porte’s pleasure. Lord Curzon planned a

44 SSI telegram to Viceroy, May 29, 1903, SF 1/03, 2563/03.

45 Crow to O’Connor, June 9, 1903, Home 2987/03; Crow to Wali, August 7, and 17, 1903, FO 602/15.

46 O’Connor to Lansdowne, September 8, 1903, SF 1/03, 3046/03, Kembal demi-official to Crow, December 28, 1903, FO 602/15.

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personal visit to the Gulf at the end of 1903, which would require a prior decision on Qatar, as the Viceroy might well be approached by Ahmad or another of the Thani family. 47

At Home, Hamilton was not favourably inclined to the proposal, particularly in the face of the Turkish retreat. This was also in consonance with O'Connor’s opinion. O'Connor pointed out that a protectorate treaty would not only be a breach of the status quo but might inspire other powers to use Turkish weakness for their own ends. All Curzon was allowed was freedom to give assurances of friendship, particularly if Ahmad should pledge not to conclude engagements with other powers. 48 As it happened, neither Ahmad nor any other emissary from Qatar approached the Viceroy while he was at Bahrain, but from the India standpoint what mattered was that once again a policy of "closing the gap" had been vetoed at Home. It was not to be the last try by Gulf and Indian officials; they turned only temporarily to other affairs while Bahrain and Qatar were quiet in the first months of 1904.

47 Viceroy telegram to SSI, November 1, 1903, SF 1/03, 1543/03.

48 I.O. to F.O., November 12; O'Connor telegram to Lansdowne, November 14; and SSI telegram to Viceroy, November 18, 1903; SF 1/03, 1543 and 3218/03.
Lord Curzon had returned from his trip with definite suggestions for each area. In some cases, these ideas had been carried to the Gulf but had not been received warmly by the local rulers. 'Isa, for example, had shown "chilly antagonism" to suggestions the Viceroy made "for his material benefit." In Curzon's view, it was therefore necessary to stiffen British policy, and the best way to do that was to replace Gaskin with an officer of higher rank from the regular service who might be able to exercise more influence.49 In addition, Curzon suggested that it would be most desirable to station a native agent at Qatif, for the Indian community in Bahrain had complained bitterly of Turkish exactions and obstacles there.50

Both proposals received the blessing from the India Office, but from Constantinople O'Connor opposed a forward move at Qatif, at least until the Porte had answered a British complaint on the matter. Curzon thus was successful

49 Curzon private to A. Hardinge (minister at Teheran, 1900-1906), March 24, 1904, Curzon Mss. In an interview with 'Isa Curzon pressed the Shaikh hard on customs. 'Isa, however, persisted in calling this a "private matter", and there the issue remained. Note by L.W. Dane (FSI 1903-1908), November 27, 1903, on the conversion; appendix iv to FES February 1904, 33-127.

50 Curzon to Brodrick (SSI, 1903-1905), March 31, 1904, SF 8/80, 741/04.
for the moment only in Bahrain, where the officer was now appointed and was to be provided with both a small consular guard and a boat for his personal use—neither of which was immediately forthcoming. The Porte promised to stop the abuses at Qatif, and this was regarded as sufficient—at least for the time being—to prevent the stationing of an agent there, despite an offer from the Bahrain Indian community to provide Rs.2,000 for his salary.

Curzon received the question of a comprehensive settlement with Qatar. In late 1903, Home authorities had vetoed the plans as a violation of the status quo, particularly considering the Turkish withdrawal in the mudir business; but in the Viceroy's view, the problem was one of the preservation of the status quo, that is, such questions as the maritime truce, the protection of the pearl fishing industry, and the limitation of slave and arms trading. One these grounds, the India Office now gave tentative

51 Brodrick to Curzon, August 5, 1904, SF 8/88, 2924/04.

52 Viceroy telegram to SSI, August 6, and I.O. to F.O., December 20, 1904, SF 8/08, 1383 and 3474/04.

53 Curzon to Brodrick, March 31, 1904, SF 1/03, 751/04.
approval to the conclusion of such a treaty.\textsuperscript{54}

As usual, O'Connor again urged for being cautious when the Foreign Office asked his view. Although on the whole opposed to extending Britain's responsibilities and to exerting pressure on the Turks, he nevertheless saw that the treaty could perhaps be defended as "not necessarily inconsistent with the maintenance of the status quo if it were directed solely to the exclusion of foreign interference," a point originally raised by Curzon. In any case, if concluded, it should be done as quietly and secretly as possible.\textsuperscript{55} This we can see that the British were, in principle, averse to machinations should it suited to their interest.

The hesitation was passed on to India. It was clear that the Wakra mudirate issue was not in itself sufficient excuse for the treaty. The question was thus whether the achievement of the more general objects put forward in its justification outweighed the "suspicion and ill-will" with which it would be received by the Turks, and, if so, how

\textsuperscript{54}I.O./to F.O., May 18, 1904, SF 1/03, 2558/04.

\textsuperscript{55}Lansdowne to O'Connor, June 7, O'Connor to lansdowne, June 28, 1904, SF 1/03, 3049/04; quotation from F.O. to I.O., July 18, 1904, SF 1/03, 2918/04.
urgent was the necessity for the achievement of those objects? These questions called for consultation in India and the Gulf. It was some time before the officials involved were able to return to the charge, for in the last months of 1904 an issue of some importance arose concerning the British position in Bahrain.\[57\]

**BRITISH SHOW OF STRENGTH IN BAHRAIN**

On September 29, Shaikh 'Ali Ahmad, another of 'Isa's nephews, was involved in the beating of one Herr Bohnson, German clerk in the employ of Robert Woockhaus, a German import export firm with a branch in Bahrain. Bohnson had been assaulted by 'Ali's men for his attempt to interfere in 'Ali's application of "sukhra" or corvee to a Wonckhaus coolie. 'Ali was regarded as a leading trouble-maker on the island, always surrounded by a gang of toughs whose wild activities were unchecked by his uncle.

Gaskin soon arrived on the scene to investigate the incident. He presented demand to 'Isa that the culprits be

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\[56\] SSI to Viceroy, September 9, 1904, SF 1/03, 3049/04; see 2918/04 for original draft giving I.O. approval, but amended in the light to O'Connor's views.

\[57\] Curzon himself was in England working on these-and-other-issues.

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flogged and Rs.1,000 be given Bohnson as compensation. ‘Isa refused to redress the grievances. and Wonckhaus, who was already in Bahrain, wrote to the German Consul in Bushire, who in turn wrote directly to ‘Isa demanding reparation and punishment. At this point the gazetted officer, Captain F.B.Prideaux, arrived to replace Gaskin. Although he disagreed with Gaskin’s demands (for flogging was not the local custom, Britain would be brought into the case for making the demand, and ‘Isa, not ‘Ali, would pay the fine if anyone did), he had little choice now.58

In November, the relation between ‘Isa and local British authorities further deteriorated by a riot in the local bazaar in which two Arabs from the Persian coast (Shiite, as opposed to the general Sunni persuasion of Bahrain) were severely wounded. British authorities, once again, held ‘Ali and his gang responsible for the incident.59 Again ‘Isa was approached, but he was adamant. British felt that he was getting out of hand. On November 30 the new Resident, Percy

58 based on SF 19/05, especially Wonckhaus to Gaskin, September 29, 1904. See also ADM 1/7843, and Graves, Cos., pp.98-99 On Prideaux, later Resident, Belgrave, Personal Column, p.9.

59 SF 19/04, especially Cox to FSI, December 17, 1904, 239/05, and FES March 1905, 369-422.
Cox arrived. 'Ali was away "hunting," but Cox was not to be put off by this manoeuver.

After some argument, 'Isa agreed at least to the original terms of glogging and monetary compensation, and when 'Ali returned on December 4 four of his men (but not 'Ali himself) were publicly flogged by a British sailor—the local officials had all either refused or made a farce of the job. This punishment, Cox reported, seemed to have had a salutary effect. Still there remained the questions of reparation and punishment for the bazaar riot and the expulsion of 'Ali, which Cox had demanded after the second incident. Here 'Isa remained firm—on the defensive, Cox felt, because he saw the recent appointment of a regular officer (Prideaux) as a devious prelude to loss of control over customs. It was time for strong measures. 'Isa owed his position to his ties with Britain but felt no responsibilities. To Cox, Britain had a "virtual Protectorate" over Bahrain and as a result had to protect foreigners. If that was to be done in this case, coercion would be necessary. 60

Coercion would require Home approval. Curzon, hardly an admirer to 'Isa, fully supported Cox; action was essential to show the Shaikh, "whom our continued forbearance only

60 SF 19/05.
confirms in his obstinacy", where the power was.61 As the Viceroy wrote in India: "The Customs question must be settled in supplement to this. There was never a better opportunity to enforce our protectorate or to punish the Sheikh and I would take it."62 The Home authorities agreed on the use of persuasion - but not the extreme measures suggested. On February 25, with H.M.S. Sphinx, Fox, and Redbreast on hand to lend support, 'Isa was told to expel 'Ali' (who was to be on board by 9 a.m. of the 26th) for five years, to pay Rs. 2,000 compensation to the Persians, and to prohibit, publicly, the application of "sukhra" to employees of Europeans.63

'Ali was nowhere to be found, having fled, or been warned off, to Qatar, Cox now ordered that 'Isa's heir, Ha'eed, be held on one of the warships until 'Ali's return, and, further, that all of 'Ali's property be handed over. 'Isa agreed, but only after Cox threatened to fire on the forts of Manama town (and tried the psychological effect of a round or two of blank charge). Eventually 'Isa appeared with two bags

61Viceroy telegram to SSI, January 21, 1905, SF 19/05, 267/05.

62Minute, January 5, 1905 FES March 1905, 369-422.

63SF 19/05, especially Capt. J.B.Eustace (SNO) to Cin CEI, March 2, 1905, 2813/05.
of rupees, 'Ali materialized, Hamad was returned, and 'Ali found himself incarcerated in India with several of his mates, his property confiscated, his boats burned. 'Isa, Cox reported, now had a changed attitude, "rather that of a naughty child coming repentant before his parents".\textsuperscript{64}

The incident was a demonstration of British strength in Bahrain and of British determination to preserve that strength. The Wönckhaus incident and the bazaar riot both involved foreign powers, and in this connection, particularly, Britain was obliged to demonstrate the effectiveness of its protection and the needlessness for any interference by these powers. Such interference was yet possible, however, for although Bahrain was clearly in the British sphere of interest it was not a formal protectorate.\textsuperscript{65} Cox, for one, would remedy this situation:

\textsuperscript{64} Cox to FSI, March 4, 1905, SF 19/05, 770/05. 'Ali came in on his own, Cox reported, for "He is a man who has lived all his life on the fleshpots of Egypt and it is not surprising to find him soon getting weary of jungle life in Katar." Cox demi-official to S.M.Fraser (Foreign Department), July 23, 1905, FES October 1905, 508-511.

\textsuperscript{65} In August 1904, France attempted to place Bahrain in the district of its Bushire Consul - which would have given support to Persian claims; this was the sort of thing which kept British fears alive See F.O. to I.O. August 4, 1904, Home 2965/04, and I.O. to F.O., September 8, 1904, FI 1545/04.
"I venture to express the opinion that on public grounds it cannot be regarded otherwise than as a matter for considerable regret that the exigencies of imperial politics do not admit of our making our moral protectorate over Bahrein into an open and effective one at the present juncture. Certain it is that we are extremely unlikely, in the present generation, to be provided with such manifest and cogent grounds for so doing as we now have".

Other officers before him, he continued, had seen the possibilities of Bahrain for a centre of British influence in the Gulf, and eventually some step as he now suggested would have to be taken. More problems would arise, and in each case Britain would have all the responsibilities and none of the advantages of a formal protectorate.66

In answer, Cox received a "rocket". It was, the Indian government noted, "superfluous to discuss, or even to contemplate, a contingency calling for any manoeuver so distasteful to the views of His Majesty's Government, and so foreign to the policy which they are pursuing in the Persian Gulf." Cox was annoyed - even in his official correspondence. He did not realize, he answered, that the suggestion of turning a partial into an effective

66Cox to FSI, March 11, 1905, SF 19/05, 1508/05.
protectorate "was in itself distasteful". Citing statements that had been made to Persia in reply to its claims to the islands, statements that had been most forceful, Cox added, "...I did not adequately appreciate the width of the Gulf (sic) which diplomacy places between the interpretation of the expression 'under the protection of' and 'under the protectorate of the expression of'."\(^67\) In any case, there was to be no formal protectorate over Bahrain; the policy was to be merely the steady, but unobtrusive, increase of British influence, and such it remained during Curzon's viceroyalty.

Curzon himself had been responsible for this parting shot to Cox. The Gulf officials, he declared on August 16, were bogging down in a sea of technicalities. "...Major Cox, unable to grasp the varying forms and degrees of political protection and protectorate, halts between two opinions, and gives forth a most uncertain sound".\(^68\) The air was only cleared when Cox apologized, demi-officially, for any offense he might have given in his letter of June. Fraser of the Foreign Department then explained what had been meant: "There is no wish at present to alter the status of Bahrain, and to

\(^67\) FSI to Cox, May 17, and Cox to FSI, June 4, 1905, ibid.

\(^68\) Note dated August 16, 1905, FES October 1905, 508-11.
try and flatten it out into a poor Arab copy of an Indian Native State or to take upon our shoulders the burden of administering these islands."69

REVIVAL OF PROTECTORATE IDEA FOR QATAR

What came to be regarded as the question of Qatar was yet to be resolved, while similar treaty idea was being considered during the Bahrain crisis. Cox had noted in his despatch that such an agreement would strengthen the British position; however, it would be worse than no treaty to conclude one and then retract in the face of Turkish pressure. Certainly the agreement would require publicity in the Gulf to have any effect, and this was precisely O'Connor's objection. The Resident suggested a trick that perhaps Ahmad might be persuaded to write a letter signifying that he regarded the Anglo-Qatar agreement of 1868 as binding upon himself.70 Opinion at Home was divided, although in general the India Office was not against the treaty idea as such Brodrick, now Secretary for India (1903-1905), favoured

69 Cox demi-official to Fraser, July 23, and Fraser demi-official to Cox, September 16, 1905, ibid.

70 Cox to FSI, December 12, 1904, FES February 1905, 110-132.
that the Trucial treaties might be a more useful model, although the foreign-representation clause might prove objectionable to the Porte.\textsuperscript{71} As the Foreign Office pointed out, the 1868 agreement had the disadvantage of being textually insufficient to bear the interpretation desired. In any case, it was undesirable to raise the question of Qatar's status when "a general sense of insecurity and suspicion prevails in the neighbourhood of the Persian Gulf."\textsuperscript{72} The decision was once again unfavourable to the treaty, Indian authorities once again raised the issue but ultimately nothing concrete could emerge out of this and proposal was shelved for some years.

From the above discussion, we can say that Curzon's viceroyalty was marked, inter alia, by many important development in respect of British's position in Qatar and Bahrain. Though Curzon could not accomplish all of his schemes to strengthen British position, nevertheless, his persistent prodings of Home authorities pushed British

\textsuperscript{71}I.O. to F.O. January 28, 1905 FE 1/03, 2283a/04. See Political and Secret Memorandum B 151 (R.Ritchie, January 30, 1905), favouring the treaty and Lee-Warner note, January 17, 1905, SF 1/03 2283a/04; "an alteration of the status quo that is not justified by any act of the Turkish Government".

\textsuperscript{72}SSI telegram to Viceroy, February 28, 1905, SF 1/03, 2650/05.
certainly in this area deeper. Admittedly, 'Isa still controlled local customs and, although chastised, remained essentially unreformed. On the other hand, there was now a permanent agent at Bahrain. In addition, Britain had shown several occasions shown its determination to block Turkish expansion in Qatar and neighbouring areas, even if Home authorities were reluctant to add more responsibilities by entering into formal agreements with the mainland Shaikhs.

To sum up, it cannot be said that the British position was weaker in Bahrain and Qatar in 1905 than in 1899; it is difficult, in fact, to argue that it was not considerably stronger. However, this particular area cannot be treated in isolation; as the Foreign Office pointed out, a tense situation prevailed, not only in Bahrain but also in Oman and Kuwait.

From 1905 onward, there were no significant event for about a decade, which can be recapitulated here. We can perhaps better explain this by considering the situation of the Ottoman Empire as a whole. With the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 there was confusion and chaos all around in fact the Ottoman Empire was passing through one of its critical phase in the history. Early hopes of reforms and democratisation of governance system soon evaporated. Revolutionaries could not get time to settle and tackle the
many pressing problems that they had to divert their limited precious resources as well as time to safeguard the integrity of the Ottoman Empire owing to unrest of Christian nationalities. The decaying and already battered empire was involved in many disastrous war: Balkan wars, war in Tripoli with Libya. During this tumultuous phase, minor incidents in the far flung area were not taken much note of. We may add one more reason here that there was no viceroy, like Curzon, in India imperialist to the core of the heart, who could imagininify the perceived threat and forced the pace of events.

But it does not mean that the tussle between the Ottomans and British, which very often threatened to assume the form of open confrontation, had vanished altogether. This was not the case. The uncertainty about the status of Qatar was still there. However, realising the weakness and gravity of the situation due to wars on many fronts, the Ottomans signed the agreement with the British known as Anglo-Turkish Convention of 19 July 1913 whereby the Ottoman Empire renounced all rights to Qatar, thus formally ending their occupation of the peninsula. Thus, the decaying Ottoman Empire surrendered before the onslaught of the British imperialism. Two days after the conclusion of the Anglo-Turkish Convention, the Shaikh of Bahrain tried to
revive his right to levy tribute from Qatar according to the terms of 1868 treaty. But Article 10 of the contention protected Qatar from having to pay the money and so the ruler of Bahrain was duly informed by the British. 73

73 R/15/2/30: No 1704 EA Confidential, July 31, 1913.