

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BAGDAD RAILWAY AND ITS IMPACT ON ANGLO- TURKISH RELATIONS, 1902-1913

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ÖZET

Bu makalenin amacı, Mezopotamya (I. Dünya Savaşından sonraki ismiyle Iraq) bölgesinde bidayette ticari bir rekabet şeklinde başlayan ve daha sonra Bağdat Demiryolunun inşa edilmeye başlanmasıyla beraber büyük devletlerle Osmanlı Devleti (özellikle İngiltere ile Osmanlı Devleti ve Almanya) arasında siyasi rekabete ve çatışmaya dönen tarihi gelişmeleri orijinal belgeler eşliğinde incelemeye çalışmaktır. Bu makalenin, bugün de benzeri bir uluslararası siyasi ve ekonomik rekabetin yaşandığı bu coğrafyadaki hadiselerin daha iyi anlaşılmasına yardımcı olacağı umulmaktadır.

Bağdat Demiryolunun Almanya'nın destek ve himayesinde inşa edilmesi meselesi Ortadoğu ve Yakınoğu'nun yakın tarihindeki en önemli siyasi olaylardan birisidir. Bu meselenin Birinci dünya savaşına giden hadiseler içinde en önemlilerinden biri olması hususunda bir çok tarihçinin ittifak etmesi, onun önemini izah etmeye kafidir. Ancak, orijinal belgeler çerçevesinde yapılan bu inceleme, mevcut literatürde karanlıkta kalan bazı önemli noktaları aydınlatması açısından önemlidir. Bağdat Demiryolu meselesi, 1. Dünya Savaşının önemli sebeplerden biri

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olmasından daha ziyade Osmanlı Devleti'nin kaderini tayin etmesi açısından önemlidir. Bir başka ifadeyle Osmanlı Devleti'nin Cihan Harbine girmesinin arkasındaki sebeplerin anlaşılması bu konunun doğru bir şekilde bilinmesiyle çok yakından ilgilidir. Mevcut çalışmamız bu noktadaki eksikliği gidermeyi hedeflemiştir.

Bundan başka, Mezopotamya'nın eski çağlardan beri uluslararası ticaret merkezlerinden birisi olması, Asya ile Hint kıtası arasındaki önemli coğrafik ve Jeopolitik konumu ve özellikle de 20. asrın başlarında bölgede petrolün bulunması bu coğrafyanın önemli bir uluslararası rekabet alanı olmasına yetmiştir. Ayrıca, Bağdat Demiryolu projesinin dünyanın en büyük projelerinden biri olması ve Ortadoğu'da Süveyş Kanalı'ndan sonra en önemli ikinci büyük proje olması da dikkate alınması gereken mühim bir noktadır.

Demiryolu projesinin bu şekilde, özellikle de siyasi ve stratejik bakımlardan ehemmiyet kesbetmesi, sadece bölgede çok mühim ekonomik, siyasi ve stratejik menfaatleri bulunan İngiltere'yi harekete geçirmekle kalmamış diğer büyük güçlerden Rusya ve Fransa'yı ve hatta Japonya'yı da uluslararası bir rekabet ve çatışmanın içine sokmaya yetmiştir.

Özetle ifade etmek gerekirse Bağdat Demiryolu projesi Mezopotamya'daki tarihi Osmanlı-İngiliz rekabetinin son safhasını oluşturmuştur. 18. yüzyılın başlarından beri bu bölgeyi nüfuzu altına almak isteyen İngiltere, 1834 yılına kadar burada ticari menfaatleri noktasında önemli bir problemle karşılaşmamıştır. Ancak 1834 yılından itibaren Osmanlı Devletinin Mezopotamya'da merkezi idareyi kurmaya başlamasıyla bu bölgede bir Türk-İngiliz ekonomik ve ticari rekabeti baş göstermiştir. Bunun üzerine İngilizler bu bölgede bir taraftan kendi kontrollerini genişletmeye çalışırken diğer taraftan da çeşitli yollarla Osmanlı hakimiyetini zayıflatma yoluna gitmişlerdir. Osmanlı Devletinin buna cevabı ise Bağdat Demiryolunu inşa etmeye karar vermesi olmuştur.

Makalenin kalan bölümünde ise Bağdat Demiryolu projesinin nasıl uluslararası rekabeti hızlandırdığı ve Osmanlı-İngiliz ilişkilerini olumsuz etkilediği incelenmiştir.

ABSTRACT

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BAGDAD RAILWAY AND ITS IMPACT ON ANGLO-TURKISH RELATIONS, 1902-1903

The article focuses on the political developments that led Anglo-Ottoman rivalry in Mesopotamia in the first decades of the 20th century. The construction of the Baghdad Railway under the auspices of Germany was the major political development in the area. The Great Britain strongly objected to this development. The railway issue, not only brought Anglo-Ottoman rivalry but also it directed the attention of the great powers in Europe to Mesopotamia. Thus, the issue of the construction of the Baghdad Railway became a major source of conflict among the great powers in the Middle East just before the First World War.

The paper which based on archival research is part of my PhD. dissertation, and the research was conducted in the Public Record Office in Kew. It examines the reasons behind the strong British reactions towards the construction of the Railway. The paper also shows how the issue strained the relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Great Britain. Moreover, it provides some historical background on the developments of the British interests in Mesopotamia.

INTRODUCTION

In the recent decades Iraq, (historically named as Mesopotamia), has become a place where international political games, conflicts and rivalries have never ceased to be existed. As it is today, Mesopotamia had been a place of international rivalry and discord at the turn of the 20th century. The reason was obvious. Because of its geographical position in the gulf region, linking Asia Minor to India, Mesopotamia had become one of the trade centres since the ancient times. Later the discovery of petroleum in Mesopotamia in early 20th century made this region even more attractive to the political and economic interests of the Great

India³. Britain attributed much importance to Kuwait because of its suitable position as an harbour for its trade.

The history of British position in Mesopotamia could be divided into three periods: In the era between 1638-1834 British merchants and ships enjoyed much more freedom and privileges in the area as the Ottoman Central authority had not yet been established there. Since its conquest by the Ottomans in 1534, the Mesopotamian area was governed by the Pashas of Baghdad and Basra who were appointed by the Ottoman Sultans from the ruling families of the Country until 1834.

During the period 1638-1834, the Ottoman Government was unable to establish an adequate system of administration in Mesopotamia due to the war with Persia, and the fights between Arab and Persian tribes. As a result of these problems cultivation and the commerce of the area had already been severely damaged. British contact with Mesopotamia began with the ships of the East India Company in the early part of the seventeenth century. The constant navigation by British vessels of Mesopotamian waters contributed to the development of British trade and influence. In 1639, the Company began to trade with Basra, and established a factory there. It also stationed an agent to protect commercial interests in Mesopotamia in the same year. The British ships navigated the Tigris and Euphrates throughout the eighteenth century. In 1798 a British Residency was permanently established at Baghdad and in 1802 it was formally recognised by the Ottoman Sultan. Even the Ottoman Government recognised the right of British merchant vessels to sail between Basra and Baghdad under the British flag. During this period other European powers such as French, Dutch, Portuguese were able to establish their commercial positions in the region as well.

The second period between 1834 and 1881 marked the beginning of formation a central Ottoman authority and the beginning of Anglo-Turkish frictions in the area. From 1834 onwards, the central government began to think about substituting direct control of the Porte for the semi-independent rule of the

³Foreign Office Handbook, April 1919, pp.15, 23, FO 373/4/26.

Pashas. The latter were no longer selected from local families, but were dispatched to the province from Constantinople. Midhat Pasha, who had reorganised the civil administration of the Empire in 1867, was sent to Baghdad in 1869 to introduce the vilayet system of government. He caused much concern to the British authorities by his endeavours to extend Ottoman sovereignty along the coast of the Persian Gulf. Thus, the economic and social system of the administration began to improve in the area.

This period was also significant for a great expansion of British interests in Mesopotamia together with increased difficulty in protecting them. The development of British and British-Indian trade in Mesopotamia, the increased navigation by British vessels, and the measures taken for the suppression of piracy and the protection of traffic on the Shatt el-Arab, all provided a chance for the British Government to obtain 'paramount local influence'. This was further enhanced by the establishment of a British mail service between Iraq and India, and the construction of telegraph lines from Baghdad to India, Constantinople, and Teheran by British agency in 1862.⁴

However, this British influence was not trouble-free. The British officials and merchants were faced with difficulties arising from the friction with the Turkish authorities who now were posted to their positions in the area by the central government. From 1842 onwards, the Turkish authorities wanted to remove the privileges which had previously been enjoyed by the British merchants and constant disputes arose between the Ottoman and British officials over the execution of transit duties. An agreement, thus, was concluded between the two governments in 1846 and the Porte formally recognised the right of British vessels to navigate Mesopotamian waters. In 1861 Lynch Brothers founded the Euphrates and Tigris Steam Navigation Company, whose first steamer was placed on the Tigris in the following year. However the Turkish Government did not wish to allow further expansion of British commercial navigation in Mesopotamia. During Midhat Pasha's administration in Baghdad, the Turkish authorities

⁴ *Ibid*, p.26.

constituted a line of steamers under the Turkish flag for commercial purposes.⁵ This marked the beginning of the Anglo-Ottoman commercial competition in Mesopotamia. These were all developments which formed a basis for Britain to pursue her political and strategic interests in the area in order to protect her commercial interests in the forthcoming decades.

The Beginning of Anglo-Ottoman Political Rivalry in Mesopotamia: The Issue of the Construction of the Baghdad Railway

In the late period between 1834 and 1913 increasing attention was directed towards Mesopotamia, both by the Porte and by the Great Powers of Europe. The main reasons behind this increasing interests can be grouped as follows: First, the changed attitude of the Porte towards the administration of the area; second, the eminence of the Ottoman-Persian boundary disputes; third, the development of British interests which incited other major powers to rivalry with Britain, and her efforts to control the area which resulted in conflict with the Ottomans.

As previously explained, the Ottoman policy of centralisation in Mesopotamia began in the first half of the 19th century. This policy was further followed by the Sultan Abdulhamid II, during whose reign the Turkish administration became more effective. During this period the area was to be paid attention by the major powers of Europe. Until 1881 the only European power represented at Baghdad besides Britain was France, who had no local interest but had a connection which dealt with religious matters. A Russian Consulate was opened at Baghdad in 1881 and this was followed by other countries such as Germany, Belgium, Spain, Sweden and the U.S. each acquired certain commercial interests in Mesopotamia, and opened their Consulates at Baghdad.⁶

In the last decades of the 19th century Mesopotamia was to be a place where the political and economic interests of Britain and the Ottoman Empire obviously would clash. This was due the changes

⁵ *Ibid*, p.30.

⁶ Foreign Office Handbook, February 1919, FO 373/5/2, p.26.

in British policy which aimed at pursuing not only commercial interests but also political aspirations to take effective control in these regions.⁷ Kuwait became the centre of conflict in the Gulf, when its Sheikh signed a secret agreement with Britain by which Kuwait was placed under a British protectorate in 1898. However, the Ottoman Foreign Minister, Tevfik Pasha denounced this secret agreement and declared it to be null and void.⁸ This resulted in open conflict between Britain and the Empire in Mesopotamia and in the Gulf. The conflict in these areas was further intensified between the two countries when the Ottoman Government granted a charter to Germany to build a railway which would connect Germany to Mesopotamia and the Gulf.

At this time after the Crimean war of 1878 in general the traditional British policy which was the preservation of the Ottoman Empire as a barrier to Russia's Mediterranean ambitions began to change. The British policy makers came to conclusion that The Ottoman Empire was not a viable state anymore and its effectiveness as a barrier to the Russian threat had lost its value and they expected that the Empire was sooner or later to collapse. The other reason was the emergence of a strong Germany in Europe and thereby this forced Britain to seek conciliation with Russia in order to enlist its support against Germany. Unlike the Crimean war of 1856 between Ottomans and Russia, during the war in 1877-78 Britain refused to provide any military assistance to the Ottomans while the Russians were on the verge of occupying the Sublime Porte. Britain intervened only after peace had been restored to mitigate the severity of the terms imposed by the Russia. In the end with some modifications which were proposed by the Western Powers the treaty of Berlin was signed. In return the British diplomatic assistance Britain asked the temporary possession of Cyprus Island under the pretext of sending military help to the Ottomans in case of any further Russian attack. The western occupation of Ottoman territories continued with the French seizure

⁷ Salih Sadawi, 'An Ottoman Report on the Kuwaiti Situation In 1918', *Studies On Turkish-Arab Relations*, Annual-4, p.121.

⁸ Sadawi, *Ibid*, p. 122.

of Tunisia in 1881 and this was followed the British occupation of Egypt in 1882.

These territorial losses however, made a profound negative impact on the mind the ottoman Sultan, Abdulhamit II and his administration. They lost their confidence in Britain's role as the only European great power anxious to ensure the survival of the Ottoman Empire. At this time the alternative policy was to collaborate with Germany which herself was looking for an opportunity to enter the Middle East market. Thus while the strong appearance of Germany constituted a threat to British interests it conversely provided a good deal of support the Ottoman Empire in which she would rely on in case of any threat.

Ottoman-German relations started with cultural activities in 1880. Many hundred Ottoman military officers were sent to Germany for training purposes. Then a German Military Mission arrived at Istanbul (Constantinople), in order to organise the Ottoman Army from 1883 to 1895. Moreover, the Germans financed loans for the Ottomans and the trade between the two countries grew rapidly. The visit of the German Kaiser to Istanbul marked the beginning of a close collaboration between Germany and the Ottoman Empire⁹. The former was very keen to enter the Eastern Market. This visit produced a trade agreement between them in 1880. This was the beginning of the German influence that would affect powerfully the course of Turkish history in the following decades to come.¹⁰

Germany further gained influence in the Sublime Port when a direct railway communication was established between Berlin and Istanbul in 1888 and later a German company secured valuable

⁹ Robert Rhodes James, *Gallipoli* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p.5-7; A. I. Macfie, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923* (London: Longman, 1989), pp.46-55.

¹⁰ In his memoirs Abdülhamid stated that Germany was less dangerous than Britain, France and Russia. This was because she only had commercial interests and not seeking political or territorial gains in the Near East. See Sultan Abdülhamid, *Siyasi Hatiratim* (Istanbul: DergahYay.,1987), pp.115,137,153. However, the Foreign Office contradicted with the Sultan's view. In their opinion Germany was seeking political expansion 'under the guise of economic development in Asiatic Turkey'. See Foreign Office Handbook, February 1919, FO 373/5/2, pp. 25,32,56.

railway concessions in Asia Minor and in the end Anatolian Railway Company was constituted. In 1899 a convention was signed conceding in principle rights subsequently defined by the Baghdad Railway Company as a concession for the prolongation to Baghdad and Basra of their existing line. The Company was to be allowed to work all minerals found within 20 kilometres on either side of the line, to establish ports on the Persian Gulf and to navigate the rivers in the service of the railway. The priority was the completion of the main line from Konia to Baghdad from which it appeared that its main aim was to link Istanbul (and thereby Berlin) with the Near East.¹¹

The Sultan finally awarded the Baghdad Railway concession to the Anatolian Railway Company on 18 March 1902. Later because the economic difficulties faced by the Anatolian Company, it incorporated into a new Company namely the Baghdad Railway Company under the auspices of Deutsche Bank and the Imperial Ottoman Bank under the Turkish Law of 5 March 1903 while Turco-German control was maintained in the new Company. As the news of the railway convention alarmed the European Powers such as France and particularly Russia, Britain initially did not oppose to the plan on the condition that British capital should be invited to participate in its consummation.¹²

The projected line starts from Konia to Cilician Gates and passes thorough Taurus hills to Aleppo then crosses Nisib to Mosul then Baghdad and ends in Basra in the Gulf. It was represented as the greatest project in the Middle East may be second to the Suez Canal. It had many purposes from the Ottoman's point of view. As the Ottoman Empire suffered severely during the Turco-Russian war of 1878 because of the problems of mobilisation of the troops, the projected railway would provide enormous strategic benefits for the defence of the area. It was also expected to contribute greatly to the Ottoman economy as the railway would stimulate the trade in the area. It also had political advantages.

¹¹ FO 373/5/2, pp.32-33.

¹² Edward Mead Earle, *Turkey, The Great Powers and the Bagdad Railway: A Study in Imperialism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), p.69.

As already been described, the Anglo-Turkish economic rivalry over Mesopotamia had already began to run high in the earlier period, the decision of the construction of the Railway turned this economic rivalry into the political rivalry in the recent years. In fact this not only posed a serious threat to British interests in the area, but also to the interests of France and Russia which they were very apprehensive against a strong Turco-German collaboration. Moreover, at this time, the Europe began to be divided into the two blocks between Triple Alliance and the Entente Powers.

From the British perspective, the problem with the Baghdad Railway was its probable future terminus on the shore of the Gulf. Article/I of the Convention dated 21st January 1902, provided that the projected railway should run from Zobeir to a point on the Persian Gulf to be determined by mutual agreement between the Porte and the Company. In their report to Foreign Office, in February 1904, the Indian Government stated that the German engineers found the shores of the Gulf such as Khor Abdullah and the Island of Bubiyan (a few miles distant from Kuwait) as to be most suitable terminus on the Gulf. For this reason, the Ottomans had occupied these areas in early 1902 and they stationed a force of some twenty men in there in February of the same year.¹³

As seeing this as dangerous to the British interests and including the complaints made by Kuwait's Sheikh on the line that the Ottomans had occupied his territories, the Viceroy proposed to His Majesty's Government (HMG) that the Turks should be strongly told to evacuate those places. On 26 March 1902, Lord George Hamilton, Secretary of State for India, sent a telegram to the Viceroy in which he stated that it was inadvisable to raise irritating discussions about the movements of Turkish troops to places to which the Kuwait Sheikh's claim would be difficult to prove. Hamilton continued to explain that HMG did not wish to obstruct the prolongation of the Baghdad Railway to the Gulf, whether at Kuwait or elsewhere. However, this attitude would be

¹³Government of India, Fort William, to Secretary, Broderick, 4 February, 1904, FO 881/9055X: Collection of papers respecting the attitude of HMG in regard to the Baghdad Railway and the purchase of Land at Kuwait; Sadawi, *ibid*, p.123.

conditional upon British interests receiving, in respect of construction, materials, and management, at least equal shares with any other power.¹⁴

In its memorandum communicated to French and Russian Ambassadors in 1907, Foreign Office expressed the future views of HMG in regard to the Baghdad Railway question: First, It explained that HMG did not accept any radical disturbance of the status quo in the Persian Gulf. This had clearly been enunciated in a declaration made by Lord Lansdowne on 5 May 1903. Second, if the railway was completed this would form the most direct route to India and the interests of Great Britain would be so great as to require 'no need of explanation'. Third, apart from the political aspects of the question, Great Britain had an exceptional commercial position in the Mesopotamian delta. It had factories, the Navigation Company, trade interests (the rate of British shipping trade was 96 percent) in this region. Fourth, if HMG took part in the construction of the railway, the predominant position of British trade would justify the concession to British contractors of such harbour works as might be required at Baghdad, Basra, and Kuwait. It finally, stated that, the promoters of the undertaking should not disregard both on political and commercial grounds, HMG's views towards the railway. Its attitude could not be actively favourable unless British participation in the scheme were assured and rendered on equitable terms. Britain could only participate in the railway scheme if it secured the construction and control of the railway from a point north of Baghdad to the Persian Gulf. In addition to these points British Government maintained that the control of the railway line should be brought under the control of international system.¹⁵

In fact, the Ottoman Empire under the rule of the Sultan Abdülhamit II and Germany made many attempts to come to terms with Britain. However they were unable to conclude an agreement. The main point of friction was the issue of the internationalisation

¹⁴William, to Broderick, 4 February 1904, FO 881/9055X.

¹⁵Memorandum communicated to French and Russian Ambassadors, 4 June 1907, FO 881/9055X: Collection of papers respecting the attitude of HMG in regard to the Baghdad Railway and the purchase of Land at Kuwait.

of the line. The British Government insisted on this point while the others did not accept it. Thus, the issue became a major source of conflict in Mesopotamia and continued to direct the attention of the Great Powers in Europe to the area.¹⁶

The British Government tried to maintain the status quo in the area and to prevent possible German domination in there. They were also careful, not to incite the Sultan who had the power of Caliphate and thereby had a considerable influence over the Muslim population, with millions of them were under its rule¹⁷. However, the question of the construction of the Baghdad Railway provoked Britain to take more rigid steps towards the Ottoman Government. London warned the Sublime Porte that if they do not come to an agreement with them they would provoke trouble against Turkey and the political problems had already been increased in Kuwait, Yemen, and other areas in the Gulf of Basra.¹⁸

Meanwhile in August 1907 Britain came to an agreement with Russia over the issues related to Middle East. Thus, with the agreement, the Entente block which consisted of Britain, France and Russia was completed. According to agreement while Russia recognised the British sphere of interests in the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia Britain acknowledge the Russian claims over the Turkish straits. Thus, the only two powers with which Britain had conflicted were Germany and the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, it appeared that peace in the Near East would depend on the possible compromise between Germany and Great Britain. This was closely related the conciliation of both countries on the railway issue. In short, the fate of the Near East was dependent on the fate of the railway compromise between the two countries and on the skills of Turkish diplomacy.

In the meantime, Sultan Abdülhamit's absolute rule came to an end on 23 July 1908 when the Young Turks forced him to restore

¹⁶Foreign Office Handbook, February 1919, p.23, FO 373/5/2; Memorandum communicated to French, and Russian Ambassadors, 4 June 1907, FO 881/9055X.

¹⁷From Government of India to Brodrick, 4 February 1904, FO 881/9055X; Sultan Abdulhamit, *Siyasi Hatiratı*, p.155.

¹⁸ Memorandum communicated to French and Russian Ambassadors, FO 881/9055X; Sultan Abdulhamid, *Siyasi Hatiratı*, pp.144-45, 150.

the constitution of 1876 which was abrogated because of the Russian war. According to the British documents, as the Sultan was one of the great experts on the art of politics, he managed to keep the Empire out of major conflicts. His policy was mainly based on the pursuance of a balanced policy among the Great Powers. While establishing a close relations with Germany he did not pushed the Empire into the hands of the Germans. However his political and economic measures were not enough to cure the country from its internal defections.

With the advent to Power of the Young Turks, the construction of the Baghdad Railway which had already reached in the Tourous Mountains was temporarily ceased. Finally, the Young Turks deposed the Sultan on 27 April 1909 and took the power in their hands. They were a group of reformers who demanded to build a constitutional system and to transform the Empire into a modern state. Initially the British Foreign Office welcomed to the new regime as seeing it liberal and progressive. They sent various experts to Istanbul to organise Ottoman administrative system. Despite these improvements between the two countries, Britain refused to sign the Young Turks' proposal for a treaty of Alliance.

In the Summer of 1910 Javid Bey the Minister of Finance went first to Paris to raise loans for the finance of the Railway and some other projects. However, upon the excessive French demands to obtain additional concessions the negotiations were breakdown. Then Javid Bey paid a visit to London in July 1910 for the same purpose. However, the British Foreign Office informed him that the existing railway concessions posed a serious menace to the British trade in Mesopotamia and demanded modification on it to Britain's favour asking 55 per cent of share in the gulf sections of the railway line. Another main point of disagreement between the two parties was the position of Kuwait. Though Istanbul was very sensitive to regain its position over Kuwait. London had never wished to recognise it. Britain continued to persist on retaining its domination over this country. Upon these excessive demands Javid

Bey ended his talks. In the end the Ottoman Government was able to obtain the necessary loans only from the German Government.¹⁹

According to Sir G. Lowther, the British Ambassador in Istanbul, Anglo-Turkish rift in Mesopotamia continued to further intensify because of the Jewish activities inside the machinery of the Young Turk's administration. Opposition to the British trade and firms was commenced and conducted by a group of Jewish people led by Sassoon Efendi, a Jewish deputy for Baghdad. Lowther even claimed that the Jews established a firm control over the ruling Turkish Party, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) by forming a dual alliance; 'the Turks supplying a splendid military material and the Jews the brain, enterprise, and money (e.g. Djavid Bey's loan in Paris)...'. The reason for these activities was to weaken British position in the Mesopotamia and thereby to set up an autonomous Jewish state there.²⁰

Despite the failures in reaching an agreement on Anglo, Franco, Turkish negotiations the Ottoman Government continued to work hard to reach a deal with Britain and France over the railway matter. In March 1911 Ottoman Ambassadors in London and Paris presented a new proposal that the Baghdad-Basra section of the Baghdad Railway should be constructed by an Ottoman Company to the capital of which the Turkish Gov should subscribe 40%, and German, French and British shares should be 20% each. However Britain asked to receive at least 55 per cent of its share. The outcome of all these attempts brought no result but a deep disappointment to the Turks.

The issue of the Baghdad Railway was mainly seen by Britain from the point of safeguarding its economic and political interest in the Persian Gulf and in Mesopotamia. As the officials at the British Foreign Office concurred on:

¹⁹ Foreign Office to India Office, 21 January 1911. FO 371/1232; Memorandum communicated to Tevfik Pasha, 20 July 1911, FO 371/1234, quoted from G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperly, *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914*, (Hereafter used as Gooch and Temperly), vol.x. (London: HM Stationary Office, 1938), pp.16-17,45.

²⁰ Lowther to Grey, 22 August 1910, FO 371/1004, quoted from Gooch and Temperly, p.2.

‘It was because we considered those interests threatened by the Germans monopolistic railway scheme {the Baghdad Railway} that we have declined to assist Turkey, or German financiers, in carrying out that scheme. Our attitude has resulted in impressing Turkey with the necessity of obtaining from Germany a freer hand in regard to the Baghdad-Gulf section of the railway, so that Turkey has now something to offer to us, in return for which we are expected to consent to increase of customs and to allow British money to be made available for the railway. It is the customs and our hold over Kuwait, which have been the lever by which we are beginning to secure some success’²¹,

On 28 March 1911 Sir Edward Grey, in his memorandum, approving his officials’ ideas, emphasised on two major points with regard to the railway issue to the British Ambassador in Paris. The first thing was to secure the continuity of British trade supremacy by gaining control of the Baghdad-Gulf section of the railway. The second one was that Britain had to be sure of maintaining its paramount strategic position in the Persian Gulf.²² As these matters escalated tension between Britain and the Ottoman Empire the former, without firm evidence, even began to suspect of Turkey’s expansionist designs aimed at to dominate in Bahrain and El Katar (Katar) and other parts of the Gulf. The officials of the British Foreign Office made it clear in their minute that the main objective of British policy was to keep the Turks, ‘as far as possible, out of the Gulf’²³. The officials further stated that the main line of British Policy in the Mesopotamia and the Gulf was based on Lord Lansdowne’s statement made on 5 May 1903 in the House of Lords. The Lord stated at the time that

We should regard the establishment of a naval base, or of a fortified port, in the Persian Gulf, by any other power

²¹ Minute signed by various officials at the Foreign Office, 27 March 1911, FO 371/1233, Gooch and Temperly, p. 36.

²² Grey to Bertie, 28 March 1911, FO 371/1233, Gooch and Temperly, p.37.

²³ Joint minute by Hirtzel and Parker, 24 April 1912, FO 371/1484, Gooch and Temperly, p.72.

as a very grave menace to British interests, and we should certainly resist it with all the means at our disposal'.²⁴

As no progress had been recorded on the question of the railway scheme, this issue became a source of friction, suspicion, and rivalry among the Great Powers. On 16 May 1911 the French Foreign Minister expressed to the British Ambassador his great concerns on the increasing German-Ottoman collaboration and growing German influence over the matters related to Turkey. He pointed out that the Young Turk's administration in Turkey showed no qualities on internal and external matters and it was a complete failure. He proposed an immediate Franco-British joint action against Turco-German collaboration which threatened the former's interests in the Middle East. The French Government had even suggested approaching Russia to include it to their planned action. A few days later Grey responded that he fully contended with the French approach towards Turkish affairs.²⁵

Eventually Britain on 29 July 1911, in response to recent Turkey's communication, made a formal approach to the Ottoman Government in order to explain its great concerns over the railway issue. Three main issues were raised in the British memorandum: The first one was on the Baghdad Railway question; the second one was on the settlement of Anglo-Turkish differences in the Persian Gulf, and the third one was the issue of raising the custom duties from 11 per cent to 15 demanded by the Turkish Government.

On the first issue the Ottoman Government offered 20 per cent of share in the railway project to each of the governments of Britain, France, Germany, claiming 40 per cent of share for itself. Britain however continued to insist on at least 55 percent of share to establish its control on the project. On the second issue, the Ottoman Government on the one hand wished to establish its full control over Kuwait, and some control over the independent tribes on the cost of the Persian Gulf. Britain on the other hand strongly

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Grey to Bertie, 6 February 1911, FO 371/1232; Bertie to Grey, 14 May 1911, FO 371/1240; Grey to Bertie, 25 May 1911, FO 371/1240, Gooch and Temperly, pp.20, 40-43.

rejected it by wishing to preserve its supremacy all over the gulf region. Britain, at the same time, was ready to give some concessions to the Ottomans over Kuwait if the latter was willing to render a good rate of share to Britain in the railway line. For Britain, the solution of the third issue would be depended on the solution of the second question which meant the Ottomans should accept the British demands on the railway issue. The Turkish Government however continued to insist on an increase on the custom dues in order to raise revenue for the railway project.²⁶

The British claims on the railway project were also rejected by Germany. Although the Turkish administration, for the sake of having an agreement with Britain, succeeded in gaining the renunciation by Germany of the agreement of 1903 so far as it affected the Baghdad-Gulf line, Germany tied its renunciation to one particular condition. The condition was that no third power should participate to a greater degree in the capital required than Germany. In the meantime, the British curious attempt to involve Russia in the project came out as another serious blow to Turkish good intentions towards unravelling the railway question. The Ottoman Government without any hesitation refused to render its consent with the British attempt.²⁷

All these negative attitudes of Britain and France towards the Ottomans pushed the latter completely into the hands of Germany. The German diplomatic and economic success brought its military penetration in the Turkish Army. In 1913 the Ottoman government appointed a German General von der Goltz to undertake in organising the Turkish Army and another German general was appointed to the effective command of the Turkish forces in the capital and at the Dardanelles.

Eventually an agreement over the Baghdad Railway issue was reached between Britain and the Ottoman Government in 1913 in

²⁶ Memorandum communicated to Tefvik Pasha, 29 July 1911, FO 371/1234; Lowther to Grey, 18 August 1911, FO 371/1234. Joint minute by Mr Hirtzel and Mr Parker on the Turkish Government's memorandum communicated on 15 April 1912, FO 371/1484, Gooch and Temperly, pp.45-51, 67-73.

²⁷ Grey to Lowther, 14 February 1912, FO 371/1530; Buchanan to Grey, 27 March 1912, FO 371/1484.

the following terms: first, there should be no differential treatment on any railway in Asiatic Turkey; second, two British representatives approved by HMG should be admitted to the Board of the Baghdad Railway Company; third, the terminus of the railway should be at Basra; last, no railway should be constructed from Basra to the Gulf without the sanction of HMG. This was followed by an Anglo-German agreement on the similar lines in London on 15 June 1914. However these agreements, at the last eleventh hour, just prior to the outbreak of the Great War, were not turned into practical actions, but remained to be unreal.²⁸

CONCLUSION

To sum up it can be concluded that the railway issue was the last phase of the long Anglo-Ottoman rivalry in Mesopotamia. Britain had long been interested in controlling of the region since the 17th century when East India Company established trading posts along its shores. Until 1834 Ottoman Government had not established effective influence in Mesopotamia. However, after that date, the situation began to change when Istanbul decided to establish direct influence there. This resulted in a deep friction between the Ottomans and Britain over the economic and commercial matters in Mesopotamia and the Gulf. The period from 1834 to the beginning of 20th century marked a great expansion for British interests in Mesopotamia and in the Gulf region. Hence, it can safely be claimed that today's conflict and instability in those regions has taken its deep roots from the past. To put it another words, history is repeating itself in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf, because the Great Power's, without taking into account the damages caused by their actions, have always been keen to maintain their control in these regions for the same reasons. The only difference from the past is that the current actors are different from the old players with their new methods and tactics.

The Ottoman administration countered to the British economic and political expansion by taking a drastic step with the construction of the Baghdad Railway in order to strengthen its economic, political and strategic position in the Near and Middle

²⁸FO 373/5/2, p.33.

East. Ottoman policy under Abdülhamit II was to follow a balanced policy among the Great Powers. Though the Sultan established close relations with Germany he did not disregard to conciliate with other powers.

But this policy was to change with the advent to power of the Young Turks Party. Though initially the CUP worked hard for reconciliation with Britain and France, later it surrendered the country to the German hands. Thus, the agreement of 1914, just before the outbreak of the Great War, among the Great Powers over the railway problem was not adequate for the preservation of peace in the Near East. As the author Earle put it; 'had this agreement been reached ten years earlier it might have avoided estrangement between Germany and Britain. Had it come at almost any other time than on the eve of the Great War it would have been a powerful stimulus to an Anglo-German rapprochement'.²⁹ To modify this focal point with different words it can be claimed that, had the Ottoman Government reached an agreement with Britain over the construction of the Baghdad Railway at its early stage then the Ottoman administration might have reconciled their differences with Britain and thereby it would have entered into the war, not on the side of Triple Alliance, but on the side of Entente powers or, at least, it would have managed to remain as neutral.

²⁹ Earle, *Turkey, The Great Powers*, p.264.