ARTICLE

Anglo-Ottoman Relations in the Gulf during the Reign of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909)

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Abstract

This article sheds light on the relations between the Ottoman Empire and Britain with regard to the Gulf during the reign of Abdulhamid II (i.e. from 1876 to 1909). Anglo-Ottoman relations in the Gulf developed within the framework of the general deterioration of Anglo-Ottoman relations after the mid-1870s. Britain attached great importance to the Gulf due to the region's position on the route to India and did not want the presence of any third power there. Britain tried to achieve this goal through its special relations – particularly by signing protection agreements – with the local sheikhs. On the other hand, as indicated in the Ottoman state documents, the Ottomans regarded Britain not only as a third party, but also as a threat to their empire's presence in the region. Even though a number of factors limited the Ottomans' capacity to challenge Britain, Abdulhamid II followed a realist policy that avoided steps which would empower and increase British dominance in the Gulf.

Keywords

Anglo-Ottoman relations, Gulf, autonomous sheikhdoms, Ottoman Empire, Abdulhamid II

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Introduction

By the beginning of the 19th century, nationalist movements, internal insurgencies, foreign interventions, and a number of wars had weakened the Ottoman Empire to the point that its viability began to be questioned. The questioning survival of the Ottoman state became known to the Western great powers as the "Eastern Question," and the Ottoman state came to be referred to as the "Sick Man of Europe".[1]

Napoleon's occupation of Egypt (1798-1801) exposed the fact that the Ottoman Empire could not defend its distant territories on its own. The Wahhabi-Saudi Rebellion (1811-1818) in Arabia could only be suppressed with the help of the army of Mehmed Ali Pasha of Egypt. Meanwhile Russia encouraged the people of the Balkan territories to rise against the Ottomans and consequently, Ottomans faced a number of nationalist upheavals in the Balkans. The Ottomans had to call Mehmed Ali Pasha again for suppressing the Greek insurgency (1821-1829) which was openly supported by the great powers in the West. After all, Mehmed Ali Pasha himself raised against the Sublime Porte in 1829-1833 and again in 1839.

These developments revealed that the Ottoman Empire had to depend on one or more foreign supporter(s) in order to ensure its survival. Britain became a strong supporter of the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity because it saw the Empire as a useful barrier against Russian expansion toward the Middle East and India. Together with France, Britain intervened in the Crimean War (1853-1856) to avert Russia. However, this support came at a cost. The great powers began to interfere more and more in the Ottoman Empire's internal affairs, exerting strong economic and political influence throughout the empire.[2]

Under these conditions, Ottomans felt threatened from Basra and Yemen in the south to the westernmost cities of the Balkans. Throughout the 19th century, the most important concern for Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals was the elimination of these threats and ensuring the empire's continuity.[3] They were convinced that the territorial integrity and existence of the state were in danger. Furthermore, they believed that "the enemies were increasingly able to operate from within."[4] This indicated that foreign states encouraged several groups within the borders of the empire to seek independence and autonomy.[5] The change

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in British foreign policy towards the Ottoman state coincided with the beginning of Sultan Abdulhamid II's reign. Britain evolved from the guarantor of Ottoman territorial integrity to an enemy of the Ottoman state. In addition to the collapse of the Concert of Europe in the 1870s, Britain began to consider that it did not need a territorially integrated Ottoman Empire. In addition, anti-Ottoman public opinion drove Britain away from the Ottoman Empire following allegations of atrocities against Christians in Bulgaria on the eve of the 1877-1878 Russian-Turkish War.

Britain realized that "maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire" was inexpedient for Britain. For instance, Foreign Minister of Britain Lord Salisbury did not consider leaving Istanbul and the Dardanelles Straits to Russia inappropriate. Furthermore, he contended that since the Crimean War Britain had backed the wrong party; in other words, the Ottoman Empire was no more a barrier against Russian penetration in the Near East and British statesmen became convinced that Egypt would be enough to hold on to India.[6]

The tremendous shift in British foreign policy emerged in the Treaty of Berlin signed in 1878.[7] As a result of the treaty, the Ottoman state was forced to forego two-fifths of its territory and one-fifth of its population and was obliged to make reforms for Armenians in the Eastern provinces with Britain becoming the reforms' supervisor. Additionally, the Ottoman Empire was liable to pay heavy war compensation to Russia.[8] After the Treaty of Berlin, in 1878, the British occupation of Cyprus occurred and in 1881, the French occupied Tunisia. The British invasion of Egypt in 1882 abolished any remaining possibility for a recovery in Anglo-Ottoman relations.

Furthermore, the financial pressure by the West increased excessively at the beginning of Abdulhamid II's rule. The bankruptcy of the treasury was institutionalized with the establishment of the Ottoman Public

Debt Administration in 1881 which left the administration of Ottoman finance in the hands of foreign debtor states.[9]

At the same time, Abdulhamid II's rule began with increased suspicion from the Ottoman side towards Britain due to developments such as the British invasion of Cyprus and Egypt, and the pressure for reforms for Armenians. Additionally, Abdulhamid II suspected British involvement in the coup d'état against Sultan Abdulaziz in 1876 and the subsequent coup attempt (Çırağan Palace Raid) against him by Ali Suavi in 1878.[10]

In addition to the deteriorating Anglo-Ottoman relations, the emerging alliances between Russia and France in 1893 and Britain and France in 1904 on the eve of World War I made benefiting from the conflict of interests of the European great powers difficult for Abdulhamid II.[11] Unlike his predecessors, Abdulhamid II had to ensure the survival of the empire in a different context and with much more limited alliance options.

Consequently, a negative stance quickly developed in the minds of the Ottoman statesmen, intellectuals and, more specifically, Abdulhamid II against Britain. The sultan stated, "Britain is the state which has to be most avoided among [the] Great Powers."[12] Even the well-known Anglophile Ottoman Grand Vizier Kamil Pasha recognized that circumstances had changed since the Crimean War, and Britain might be interested in promoting Armenian and Arab alternatives in Asia.[13] Abdulhamid II and his statesmen believed that Britain would establish "zones of influence" and this would eventually lead to the partition of the Ottoman state.[14]

Under these circumstances, the Ottomans sought a new ally with the view of obtaining assistance for their survival and obstructing the British menace. Thus, a rapprochement began between Germany and the Ottomans since Germany considered the weak Ottoman Empire as a market for its emerging colonial policy that aimed to expand to the East, known as "Drang nach Osten" or "Drive to the East." Germany wanted to benefit from Ottoman resources by peaceful means.[15]

Germany considered that its aims would be better served by the economic, military, and political recovery of the Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, a strong Ottoman Empire might offer formidable resistance against the Russian and British expansion to the Middle East.

Furthermore, the Ottoman Caliphate might be useful in the Muslim-populated British colonies.[16]

All these factors led to a rapprochement between Germany and the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Abdulhamid II which witnessed continuous tensions in Anglo-Ottoman relations. This article aims to shed light on this period in Ottoman history which is also important to understand the background of the Ottoman-German alliance in World War I. The first section of the article focuses on the Anglo-Ottoman relations in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the Gulf region, while the second section seeks to understand the Ottoman perceptions of the Anglo-Ottoman relations in the Gulf during this time. The third and fourth sections elaborate on how the British and the Ottomans formulated their policies toward the Gulf region under these circumstances.

Anglo-Ottoman Relations in the Arab Provinces of the Ottoman Empire and the Gulf

Abdulhamid II wanted to increase the influence of the Ottoman state in the Arab provinces in order to compensate for the losses in the Balkans after the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War. While the Balkans had enjoyed a place of priority in the eyes of the Ottoman state for many years, the Asian and especially Arab parts of the empire came to the fore after this war. What is more, suspicions increased regarding British intentions over the Ottoman territories in Arabia after the occupation of Egypt which Britain pursued in order to protect the route to India after the opening of the Suez Canal. Following the occupation of Egypt, Anglo-Ottoman relations would never be repaired.[17]

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The Ottomans were convinced that Britain intended to free Arabs from Ottoman rule by encouraging Arab nationalism, and to establish a rival Arab Caliphate in Mecca or Cairo.[18] Abdulhamid II thought that Britain had designs on the caliphate due to its Muslim population

of approximately 150 million and its notable imperial objectives in the Middle East, such as conquering Arabia and Iraq and steering the Muslim world.

In particular, the Arabian Peninsula was believed to be under British threat based on the premise that Britain attached importance to places from the perspective of the continuation and security of its existence and dominance in India. Therefore, the coasts in Arabia from Qatar to Aden were considered open to British intervention.[19]

Britain considered the entire Gulf as an indispensable part of its imperial ambitions, strategic view, and economic policy. The Gulf was important for Britain because of its colonial presence in India and its plans for Arabia. First and foremost, Britain was concerned about safeguarding the route to India. Lord Curzon, the viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905, pointed out that "British supremacy in India was unquestionably bound with British supremacy in the Gulf, if we lose control of the Gulf we shall not rule long in India."[20] In terms of its plans, Britain could use the Gulf as an entrance point to the Arabian Peninsula from the east.

Considering this imperialist viewpoint, Britain was convinced that it had to hinder any possible rival in the region. The most influential means to exclude other powers were several "protection" agreements signed with the sheikhdoms commencing in the 1820s. Britain never directly occupied any territory in the Gulf, but established special relations with the local autonomous sheikhs which served to control the region and keep away any third power.[21] Britain had been troubled by instances of piracy from the coasts of the Gulf, especially from the so-called Pirate Coast. In the 19th century, the Pirate Coast began to be known as the Trucial Coast as a result of a series of truces signed between Britain and local sheikhdoms in 19th century. . Along with the Pirate Coast, Oman, Muscat,[22] and Bahrain entered into "protection agreements" with Britain that stipulated not to yield any part of their territory to another power and not to enter in relations with a third party without the consent of Britain. Britain also signed protection agreements with Kuwait in 1899 and had very close relations with Qatar with which it signed a protection agreement in 1916.[23]

These agreements were based on the understanding that the sheikhdoms would not sign any agreement or be in relation with another state without British consent in return for the British protection against third parties, particularly against Ottoman rule.[24] In the context of the robust competition of the Western colonial powers in the 19th century, Russia, France, and, lastly, but in a most serious manner, Germany in the late 19th century and early 20th centuries tried to infiltrate the region. For instance, a Russian railway plan that would extend from Kuwait to the Mediterranean port of Tripoli (Kapnist Plan) in 1897-99 was taken very seriously by the British authorities.[25] As a result of the alliances established with France and Russia in 1904 and 1907, respectively, the two countries ceased to be threats for Britain. However, with its well-known Berlin-Baghdad railway project, Germany continued to threaten British interests in the Gulf until the beginning of World War I.[26]

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The Berlin-Baghdad railway brought together Germany and the Ottoman state, and served Germany's economic and strategic interests and ambitions in the Middle East. It could have also ensured a more active presence for the Ottomans in the Gulf. For instance, the new railway could have made the fast transportation of Ottoman troops to the region possible.[27] Britain was aware that the Berlin-Baghdad railway with a terminus in the Gulf would weaken British interests in Iraq, Persia, and, more importantly, India by bringing together Germany and the Ottoman Empire at a strategically important location.[28] For example, Lord Lansdowne, the British foreign minister, declared in the House of Lords that "[w]e [the British] should regard the establishment of a naval base or of a fortified port on the Gulf by any other Power as a very grave menace to British interests, and that we should certainly resist with all the means at our disposal."[29] This concern led to the protection agreement between Kuwait and Britain mentioned above.

While Britain was against any power establishing a presence in the Gulf, the Ottoman Empire did not view itself as an outside power in the region and, in fact, considered the British there as an outside power.

The Ottomans realized even before Abdulhamid II's rule that British supremacy would be a threat to the Ottoman sovereignty over the Gulf and beyond. This outlook was in parallel with similar policies carried out in several peripheral regions such as Yemen, Transjordan, and Libya within the framework of the Tanzimat centralist reforms. One of the main objectives of these centralist regulations was to consolidate the empire against the challenges from within and abroad. Indeed, these peripheral regions turned into the frontiers and defense lines of the empire.[30]

As a manifestation of this centralist policy, the northern sheikhdoms in the Gulf, including Kuwait, Hasa, Qatar, and inner Najd, were reincorporated into the Ottoman state with the military campaign of 1871 in the time of the Baghdad governorship of Midhat Pasha (1869-1872) whose aim was to counter the British threats.[31]

On the one hand, Midhat Pasha attached importance to Anglo-Ottoman relations as did prominent figures of the Tanzimat such as Rashid, Ali, and Fuat Pashas. On the other hand, these figures calculated that the campaign overall would be more beneficial to the Ottoman state despite certain possible negative consequences.[32] Ali Pasha, the Ottoman grand vizier in 1871, tried to guarantee Britain that the Ottoman government had no intention of threatening British interests in the Gulf, but he failed.[33] Thus, Abdulhamid II continued to pursue the policy of consolidation in the Gulf.[34]

Ottoman Perspective of Anglo-Ottoman Relations in the Gulf

Considering the heavy British influence in the Gulf, Ottoman bureaucrats and the region's notables concluded that the British influence stemmed from the sheikhdoms that acted as British allies. Employing local actors in foreign interventions could be seen in other parts of the Ottoman Empire as well such as the Christian minorities which actively participated in riots across the empire.[35]

Bahrain greatly disturbed the Ottomans because of its independence under British protection. It was considered a base for Britain. It could provide weapons and ammunitions for coastal tribes through Bahrain.[36] After the 1899 protection treaty, Kuwait, as a northernmost sheikhdom, was considered by the Ottomans a considerable barrier separating Basra,

the center of the province, from the southern sheikhdoms.[37] Although the British opposed arms trafficking (in principle), they turned a blind eye to the arms trafficking of Mubarak al-Sabah, the ruler of Kuwait from 1896 to 1915, in order to undermine the Ottoman presence in the region.[38]

According to the report of the Ottoman Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Vükela*) in 1904, Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, the founder and first king of modern Saudi Arabia who seized Riyadh from the Rashidis in 1902 and then ruled Saudis until his death in 1953, was deemed an ally of Britain.[39] Ottomans occasionally even lost their trust in Ibn Rashid,[40] the tribal dynasty which was never under the protection of Britain but rather of the Ottomans. Suspicions aroused due to the accusations by rivals of Rashidis and certain Ottoman officials, as well as his suspicious relations with Britain.[41]

For the Ottomans, the Gulf was not an isolated and remote part of the empire, but a strategic and vulnerable point for the entire Ottoman Empire and Arabia. The proximity of the Gulf to Hejaz was a concern for the Ottoman statesmen. Like the British outlook on India, Hejaz had a prominent importance in the minds of the Ottomans. The Ottomans fought with Portugal in the 16th century primarily to protect Hejaz.[42] The significance of Hejaz increased during the era of Abdulhamid II as keeping it under Ottoman rule strengthened the legitimacy of the Ottoman Caliphate and Ottoman rule over Arabia.[43] The importance of the Gulf for Hejaz compared with other parts of the empire can be easily understood by the fact that the Ottomans considered even North and Central Africa as a "primary line of defense" for their rule over Hejaz and Arabia.[44] The rise of the Wahhabis from Najd in the early 19th century always remained in the minds of the Ottoman statesmen.[45]

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Keeping this outlook in mind, the rise of the local sheikhdoms and the clashes among them were considered to be a British policy for reaching Hejaz.[46] For instance, an order was directed to the Basra governor

(*Vali*) that any clash between Mubarak al-Sabah and Ibn Rashid must be prevented in order to pre-empt any British penetration.[47] Similar concerns were observed two years later, in 1904, with respect to a struggle between Ibn Saud and Ibn Rashid. The rise of Ibn Saud and his competition with Ibn Rashid intimidated Ottomans because the former could reach Medina following a possible victory over the latter.[48]

British Policies in the Gulf against the Ottomans

The Ottomans believed that Britain was using various means to control the sheikhdoms in the Gulf.[49] Britain pursued an "intelligent and cautious" policy in the region, using indirect instead of direct control. It provided weapons and money to local sheikhs, but refrained from interfering in their local affairs, positioning itself as a protector.[50]

Britain encouraged local tribal leaders to rebel against the Ottoman state, as this would serve its interests by destabilizing the region and providing a pretext for British intervention. The insurrections became possible through new arms and equipment provided to the local tribes by the British.[51]

British ships sailing in the Gulf were accused of participating in the smuggling of weapons in the region, using Bahrain as a hub. The Ottoman naval presence in the Gulf coasts from Qatar to Aden was acknowledged as inadequate or non-existent, making gun smuggling possible for Britain.[52] The rebellion of Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani in 1893, who ruled Qatar from December 1878 to July 1913 and is regarded as the founder of the state of Qatar, could not be suppressed by the Ottomans and was considered a direct result of British-led gun smuggling.[53]

Despite the well-known British nominal opposition to gun smuggling, they ignored this principle in the case of tribes that were allied to them against the Ottomans. Troeller asserts that Lord Curzon believed that preventing the flow of arms to Ibn Saud would likely increase the possibilities of Ottoman dominance in the Gulf's hinterland. He believed that this would, obviously, damage British influence in Kuwait and along the coast, and stated that "once again principle bowed to expediency."[54]

According to the Ottoman sources, the coercion against local leaders and population was another British tool: Britain, if needed, coerced locals to act in line with its policies and objectives. Britain intimidated sheikhs when its interests required, and forced local people to obey the interests of sheikhs under its protection. For example, Britain forced locals who escaped the oppression of the Bahraini Sheikh by moving Zibare (Qatar) to return to Bahrain.[55]

Ottomans believed that the dominance of Britain in the Gulf was possible thanks to British ships. Using the aforementioned tools such as provocation, arms smuggling, and coercion was only possible because of the existence of British ships. In addition, British ships performed symbolic functions by saluting the sheikhs which implicitly implied their autonomy and the supremacy of Britain over the region.[56]

With an aim of showing British pre-eminence in the Gulf, Viceroy Lord Curzon made a journey, escorted by several ships, towards the region in 1903. The British Minister of Foreign Affairs Lord Lansdowne described Lord Curzon's journey as a British declaration to retain its paramount position in the Gulf. The journey served as a subtle warning to Russia, France, Germany and, obviously, the Ottoman state.[57]

The Ottoman Positioning in the Gulf

Ottomans thought hard on how to keep the region under their rule. They tried to apply certain policies in parallel with the priorities of the era of Abdulhamid II and the policies that followed after the Tanzimat. Abdulhamid II's Islamist policies were not useful in the region; the heads of the tribes did not care about religion as an imperative to bind them to the Ottoman state. In fact, pragmatic considerations rather than imperatives of religion played a significant role in understanding the politics in the Gulf. If the local leaders acknowledged their submission to the Caliph, i.e., Abdulhamid II, this was not because of their

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belief in the religious authority of the sultan, but because of temporary pragmatic interests.[58]

The lack of Christian missionary activities in the region, unlike in the other parts of the Ottoman Empire such as Jordan, was also partly responsible for the lesser influence of religion as a motivation for attracting people to the Ottoman state against British intervention. In fact, missionaries were a "catalyst of change" in the Ottoman society which led to a demand for a "defensive reaction from the government".[59] Yapp argues that the European powers avoided missionary activities in the Gulf, and states that "they [European powers] preferred that the Gulf should remain in cocooned seclusion."[60] Consequently, the people of the Gulf did not need to take refuge in the Ottoman state as a shelter against Christian influence.

The Ottoman Empire claimed sovereignty over the Gulf based on historical, legal, and geographical arguments. For instance, in the official instruction sent by the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ottoman Ambassador in London, it was reiterated that the Ottoman Empire could not accept an agreement between Britain and Mubarak al-Sabah given that Kuwait was not a sovereign, independent state and Mubarak was a subject of the Ottoman Empire. The ambassador was ordered to share with his counterparts that Sheikh Mubarak acknowledged his loyalty to the sultan in his ordinary official communications with the governor (*mutasarrıf*) of Najd, and that his official relations with the Ottoman state could not be ignored by any state. It was emphasized that if an agreement were to be signed regarding the security of commercial ships on the coasts of Najd, it could only be done with the Ottoman state, not with a local sheikh. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also referred to the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, which was guaranteed by the international agreements to which Britain was part. In this regard, Kuwait was part of the Ottoman Empire so the intervention of foreign powers could not be accepted.[61]

Tahsin Pasha, the highest-ranking official at Yıldız Palace, forwarded the Palace's feedback on the treaty/protocol between Mubarak al-Sabah and Britain to the grand vizier. Therein, it was stated that the treaty/protocol would only hold Mubarak al-Sabah accountable - not the

people nor the land of Kuwait.[62] At the same time, the Ottomans were unable to defend their sovereignty claims through military means and confront Britain directly. In fact, Abdulhamid II and his administration did not take risks in defense of a nominal rule.[63] This Ottoman policy was based on the belief that any conflict with the British would have more serious negative consequences for the Ottoman presence in the region and would lead to increased British intervention. Therefore, the Ottomans sought to maintain the status quo and did not want to provide the British with a reason to transform their de facto dominance in the Gulf into a de jure presence.

What is more, the Ottomans even requested from the local sheikhs who were close to them not to confront Britain or the sheikhs under British protection. The Ottomans were convinced that any disorder, regardless of who initiated it, might give Britain a pretext for further intervention into the region, which would ultimately allow for the consolidation of British supremacy.[64]

By the 1850s, the Tanzimat reforms and, before them, Mahmud II's centralist reforms had succeeded in eliminating the autonomy of the local leaders (ayans) in the provincial centers of the Ottoman Empire such as Basra. Nevertheless, Ottoman authority did not reach beyond certain provincial centers such as south of Basra.

Ottoman officials occasionally acknowledged and discussed the de-facto situation in the Gulf. The governor (*vali*) of Basra in 1893 underlined that Kuwait was not under the direct administration of the Ottoman state: it was ruled by the al-Sabah family and they received a particular symbolic quantity of dates (*hurma*) from the state as a salary. The governor indicated the nominal status of the Ottoman sovereignty over Kuwait. The yearbooks (*salnames*) also pointed to the status of the district governor (*kaymakam*) of Kuwait as "honorary" (*fahri*), which indicated the nominal character of the title.[65] For instance, when an Ottoman corvette was sent to Kuwait to interfere in an internal dispute, it was blocked by a British ship.[66]

As already discussed, the main factor that made the influence of Britain over the Gulf possible was the autonomy of the tribes. Ottoman sovereignty would have been more influential if a stronger authority had been established whereby the state could directly enter into relations with individuals by bypassing the local leaders. Although these tribes were under nominal Ottoman rule, they could enter into direct relations with Britain whenever they thought it would maximize their interests. In other words, the tribes could manipulate both the Ottoman state and Britain.

By the 1850s, the Tanzimat reforms and, before them, Mahmud II's centralist reforms had succeeded in eliminating the autonomy of the local leaders (*ayans*) in the provincial centers of the Ottoman Empire such as Basra. Nevertheless, Ottoman authority did not reach beyond certain provincial centers such as south of Basra. Autonomous tribal authority in the peripheral regions of the Arabian Peninsula retained significant autonomy, including the ability to collect taxes and administer justice within communities. In these regions, the tribes shared sovereignty with the state, according to Rogan.[67] Midhat Pasha's military mission in 1871 tried to bring the Gulf under a centralist rule, but it was too late for establishing a powerful centralist administration that could have both abolished the autonomy of the tribes and inhibited British intervention in the context of the changed Anglo-Ottoman relations.

To understand the level of independence enjoyed by the sheikhdoms better, it is helpful to compare their status with that of the Hejaz region under Ottoman rule. Despite the long-standing autonomy and privileges of the sharifs of Mecca, Abdulhamid II had the power to depose and exile them, as happened with Sharif Hussein, who was sent to Istanbul - similar actions were not possible in the Gulf. For example, the Ottomans were unable to exile Mubarak al-Sabah to Istanbul despite their wishes.[68]

There is also another aspect of the British penetration of the Gulf region that should be kept in mind: the Ottoman struggle with the local Gulf leaders did not stem from Arabist-separatist inspirations that existed in other parts of the Ottoman Empire, including several areas of Arabia such as Syria and Lebanon.[69] In those regions, the Ottomans had to deal with the autonomy, "fierce independence," and belligerence of the

desert tribesmen rather than the ethnic ideological objectives of the people in the Gulf.[70] It should be also kept in mind that the autonomy of the local leaders was strong due to the fact that they were backed by Britain. In this context, the Ottomans could not even trust the sheikhs close to them who were always assumed to be playing a double game.

Conclusion

The Ottoman Empire conquered the Gulf region, covering today's Kuwait, Qatar, Hasa, Najd, and Bahrain, in the era of Süleyman I (1520-1566), but Ottoman direct control of the region was very short-lived. By the end of the 17th century, the Ottoman Empire had lost its direct control over the area. In 1871, the Ottoman government attempted to re-establish its central authority in this region.

The Ottoman reconsolidation policy in the Gulf coincided with the great shift in the British foreign policy towards the Ottoman Empire in the mid-1870s. Britain turned away from being a defender of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire to becoming the most fervent supporter of its disintegration. Britain changed its strategic view of the Middle East and South East Asia after the opening of the Suez Canal, and adopted a negative stance before and after the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War. After the Treaty of Berlin, in addition to its negative stance on the issue of minorities and Ottoman debts, Britain occupied Cyprus in 1878 and Egypt in 1882 in order to protect the Suez Canal.

As a result, Britain began to be deemed as the most hostile state in the eyes of Ottoman elites and especially Sultan Abdulhamid II who suspected British involvement in the coup d'état against Sultan Abdulaziz and himself. The Ottoman Empire searched for a new ally and found a potential one in Germany that saw the Ottoman Empire as a likely partner in its own imperial ambitions. The Ottomans, on their part, saw Germany as a prospective supporter against Britain and the other Western great powers.

The Berlin-Baghdad railway was an ambitious project that connected Germany and the Ottoman state, serving Germany's economic and strategic interests in the Middle East while potentially strengthening the Ottoman presence in the Gulf. Conversely, the British considered the

railway a threat to their interests in the region and its presence a manifestation of a third power in the Gulf.

Abdulhamid II sought to increase Ottoman influence in Arab provinces after losing territory in the Balkans during the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878. However, there were heightened Ottoman suspicions about the British intentions towards Ottoman territories in Arabia. The Ottomans believed that Britain was encouraging Arab nationalism in order to establish a rival Arab Caliphate in the Middle East, and saw the Arabian Peninsula as under threat from British intervention. The coasts of Arabia from Qatar to Aden were seen as vulnerable to British intervention due to their strategic importance to British dominance in India.

The Gulf was especially important for Britain because of its colonial empire in India and its plans for Arabia. Britain's main concern was safeguarding the route to India and it did not consent to a possible rival in the Gulf region.

The Gulf was especially important for Britain because of its colonial empire in India and its plans for Arabia. Britain's main concern was safeguarding the route to India and it did not consent to a possible rival in the Gulf region. With these considerations in mind, it signed several "protection" agreements with the local sheikhdoms.

The Ottoman Empire, however, did not view itself as an outside power to the region. On the contrary, it considered Britain as an outside power which was weakening its rule in the region. According to the Ottomans, the British influence resulted from the fact that a number of sheikhdoms had developed close relations with Britain which encouraged local tribal leaders to rebel against the Ottoman state. British ships were accused of smuggling arms to the tribes, and using coercion against local leaders and people. All these tools were possible by means of British ships, and consequently, while the Ottomans strived with various means, they could not overcome the autonomous sheikhs' relations with Britain. Ultimately, this enabled British dominance in the region.

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35 1 Muharrem 1309: BOA, Y. PRK.AZJ 20/2; Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*, p. 134.

36 11 July 1309: BOA, DH.MKT 84/21.

37 8 May 1905: BOA, HR.SYS 104/10.

38 Mohammed Almana, *Arabia Unified: A Portrait of Ibn Saud*, London: Hutchinson Benham, 1980, p. 30; Philby, *Arabia*, p. 186; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p. 20.

39 21 March 1320: BOA, MV 109/15.

40 Ibn Rashid refers to the different persons who became the heads of the Shammar tribes successively and applied similar policies toward the Ottomans and Britain. In this study, which covers the era of

Abdulhamid II, there were five successive heads of the Shammar tribes: Muhammed Ibn Abdullah (1872-1897), Abdulaziz Ibn Mut'ib (1897-1906), Mut'ib Ibn Abdulaziz (1906-1907), Sultan Ibn Hamud (1907), and Sa'ud Ibn Abdulaziz (1907-1909). See Almana, *Arabia Unified*, pp. 269-270; Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, p. 175.

41 14 May 1299: BOA; Y.PRK.UM 5/100; Philby, *Arabia*, pp. 157-158. One of the well-known travelers visiting Ibn Rashid was Palgrave who came to Ibn Rashid as a doctor in the name of Napoleon in 1862. See Zahra Freeth & H.V.F. Winstone, *Explorers of Arabia, From the Renaissance to the End of the Victorian Era*, New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978, p. 158.

42 Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*, p. 66; Kuhn, "Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism," p. 319; Peck, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 89; Hatice Uğur, *Osmanlı Afrikası'nda Bir Sultanlık: Zengibar*, Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2005, p. 22.

43 Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*, p. 126; Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*, pp. 28 & 241; Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*, pp. 26 & 46.

44 Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*, p. 258.

45 See Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*, p. 171.

46 8 May 1905: BOA, HR.SYS 104/10.

47 19 Kanun-u Evvel 1318: BOA, İ. DUİT 137/51.

48 21 March 1320: BOA, MV 109/15; Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*, p. 171.

49 22 Teşrin-i Sani 1303: BOA, A. MKT. MHM. 496/10.

50 14 May 1299: BOA, Y.PRK.UM 5/100; 20 Cemaziyelahir 1305: BOA, Y. PRK. TKM 11/62.

51 5 Teşrin-i Evvel 1311: BOA, Y.PRK.ASK 107/45; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p. 8.

52 25.L.1309: BOA, DH. MKT 1952/23.

53 13 September 1309: BOA, Y. PRK. EŞA 18/63.

54 Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p. 21.

55 17 February 1303: BOA, DH. MKT. 1490/79; 17 Muharrem 1323: BOA, HR. SYS 104/10; 5 August 1311: BOA, Y.PRK.ASK 106/11; İdris Bostan, "Basra Körfezi'nin Güney Kesimi ve Osmanlılar 1876-1908," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, No. 9 (1989), p. 313; Rosemaire Said Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979, p. 50.

56 29 Kanun-u Evvel 1314: BOA, DH.MKT 2158/49; 6 Mayıs 1309: BOA, Y.PRK. SRN 3/89; 19 Eylül 1309: BOA, DH. MKT 168/14; 14 Kanun-u Sani 1305: BOA, Y. PRK. UM 15/134.

57 Howarth, *The Desert King*, p. 55; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 11-12.

58 İdris Bostan, "The 1893 Uprising in Qatar and Sheikh Al Sani's Letter to Abdulhamid II," *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations*, No. 2 (1987), p. 87; Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, p. 49; Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*, p. 25; Howarth, *The Desert King*, pp. 31 & 64.

59 Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*, p. 19.

60 Yapp, "The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the Persian Gulf," p. 42.

61 23 August 1317: BOA, Y. PRK. BŞK 65/21.

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64 19 Kanun-u Evvel 1318: BOA, İ. DUİT 137/51.

65 25 May 1309: BOA, Y. MTV 78/178; Murat Babuçoğlu et al., *Osmanlı Vilayet Salnamelerinde Basra*, Ankara: Global Strateji Enstitüsü, 2005, p. 96; Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West*, p. 169.

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67 Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*, p. 5; Rogan, "Aşiret Mektebi," p. 84.

68 H. R. P. Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1956, p. 139.

69 For separatist movements in other Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire, see Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*.

70 Almana, *Arabia Unified*, p. 55.