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Reshaping Borders: A Glimpse to Imperial Interests on Sistan

Sınırları Yeniden Şekillendirmek: Sistan Üzerindeki Emperyal İlgiye Kısa Bir Bakış

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Abstract

The series of moves between Britain and Russia in the 19th century entered the literature as the Great Game, a political and military conflict likened to a chess match involving multiple strategic steps, with Central Asia and in some parts of the Middle East serving as the primary arenas of struggle. As part of this Russian foreign policy, aimed to extend from the Baltic to the Indian Ocean, positioning Central Asia as a critical gateway to India, Britain's most prized colonial asset. A pivotal aspect of this geopolitical contest was the dispute over the Sistan province, a long-standing area of contention between Iran and Afghanistan, the edge of Middle East. Considering its strategic interests along the route to India, Britain could not ignore this conflict. In 1870, the British government appointed a commission led by Frederic J. Goldsmid to settle claims from both Iran and Afghanistan, define the boundary, and resolve the dispute. The commission, which also included General Pollock and Dr. Henry Walter Bellew, played a significant role in shaping British imperial policy in the region. This study analyzes the arbitration's impact and significance through a review of firsthand reports and historical documents and aims to show that the British concerns rely on long-term imperial plans.

Keywords: Iran, Afghanistan, Sistan, Great Game, Frederic J. Goldsmid

Jel Codes: N9; N95

Öz

19'uncu yüzyılda İngiltere ve Rusya arasında izlenen hamleler serisi literatüre Büyük Oyun olarak geçmiş olup, Orta Asya ve Orta Doğu'nun bazı kesimleri birincil mücadele alanı olmak üzere birden fazla stratejik adım içermekte olan bir satranç müsabakasına benzetilen politik ve askeri bir çatışmaydı. Bununla alakalı olarak Baltık'tan Hint Okyanusu'na kadar uzanmayı hedefleyen Rus dış politikası, Orta Asya'yı İngiltere'nin en değerli sömürge varlığı olan Hindistan'a kritik bir geçit olarak konumlandırıyordu. Bu jeopolitik mücadelenin temel bir yönü, Orta Doğu'nun bir ucu sayılan İran ve Afganistan arasında uzun süredir çekişme konusu olan Sistan eyaleti üzerindeki anlaşmazlıktı. Hindistan'a giden yol üzerindeki stratejik çıkarlarını dikkate almak suretiyle İngiltere bu çatışmayı göz ardı edemezdi. İngiliz hükümeti hem İran'dan hem de Afganistan'dan gelen iddiaları karara bağlayıp sınırı belirlemek ve anlaşmazlığı çözmek için 1870'de Frederic J. Goldsmid liderliğinde bir heyet atadı. General Pollock ve Dr. Henry Walter Bellew'in de yer aldığı komisyon, bölgedeki İngiliz imparatorluk politikasını şekillendirmede önemli bir rol oynadı. Bu çalışma, tahkimin etkisini ve önemini birincil elden raporların ve tarihi belgelerin incelenmesi yoluyla analiz etmekte olup, İngilizlerin bölgeye dair hassasiyetlerinin uzun vadeli imparatorluk planlarına dayandığını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Keywords: İran, Afganistan, Sistan, Büyük Oyun, Frederic J. Goldsmid.

Jel Kodları: N9; N95

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many are unaware that Afghanistan, often perceived as a remote area, is like the heart of Central Asia (Güdül-Raof, 2020: 14). George P. Tate notes in his work (1910:1) that Central Asia, celebrated for its historically significant oases such as Samarkand, Herat, Khiva, and Balkh, is surrounded by remarkable cities. Among these, Sistan, nourished by the Helmand River, -given the periodic changes in their regional definitions (Davison, 1960:674-675)- can be considered to lie on the ambiguous boundary where the Middle East and Central Asia begin and end. Therefore, Sistan is actually relevant to both regions and was a focal point of conflict between Afghanistan and Iran during the second half of 19th century.

One of the main priorities of the British Empire during the strategic maneuvers of the Great Game was to secure its largest and most valuable possession, India, against any potential threat. Britain faced challenges from great powers, particularly Russia, which sought to exert pressure on its dominions in Central Asia. Sistan –located at the edge of the Middle East and serving as the gateway to Afghanistan– was just one point of dispute (Golden, 2011:1-8, Johnson, 2012:83, Mccauley, 2016, XV).

Iran, mostly a pawn in the Great Game, is also known for occasionally taking on the role of a player in certain matters. The British, always prioritizing their imperial interests, consistently refused to withdraw from Iran, aiming to reduce Russian influence in the region. The escalating Sistan boundary issue between Afghanistan and Iran from the second half of the 19th century can be considered a tool in this context. The British seized the opportunity presented by this dispute and added another show of power to their dominance in the region. The British appointed a boundary commission for the matter, placing Frederic J. Goldsmid at its head. Goldsmid received the official letter of his appointment in 1870 (Brobst, 1997: 207), and in 1872, after completing his investigations, he submitted his report. Iran based its claim to the region on historical grounds, considering its brief loss of control over the past century as merely an interruption. On the other hand, officials of the Afghan state, established after Nader Shah, attributed the recent power vacuum to internal issues and argued that it was only a temporary situation.

In his 1872 report, Goldsmid defined the “Goldsmid Line” and challenged Iran’s claim of “ancient rights” over the region. On the other hand, due to the ambiguity of Sistan’s ancient borders, he did not fully accept Afghanistan’s claim of “current ownership” either. As a result, the Helmand River divided the region into two parts: the lower part was given to Iran, while the upper part was assigned to Afghanistan. Regarding the sharing of the river’s water, the parties agreed not to engage in any activities that would disrupt the water supply necessary for irrigation. However, Goldsmid’s demarcation did not offer a long-term solution or mechanism and later led to new conflicts (Kocatepe, 2024: 317).

Although the Sistan boundary dispute has been addressed from various perspectives, no independent study has critically examined its failure to provide a lasting solution and connected this failure to British imperial policy. This situation can, in fact, be interpreted as a component of Britain’s broader imperial strategy, which prioritized maintaining influence rather than full withdrawal from any region. While it is evident that an outcome leaving both parties dissatisfied could not constitute a sustainable resolution, the matter was approached as a “fait accompli,” and the proposed agreement failed to provide genuine satisfaction to either side. This ineffective resolution further perpetuated regional tensions, with Britain’s presence continuing as a self-proclaimed arbiter in the ongoing disputes.

In this context, this study will first provide an overview of the Sistan dispute before analyzing Britain's arbitration through the perspectives of the mission's members, contemporary reports, and related writings. The reports of British officials, particularly Frederic John Goldsmid and Henry Walter Bellew, reveal Britain's sustained influence and strategic interest in Sistan. These documents not only serve as records of past interventions but also offer significant evidence of the British government's imperial ambitions and future plans in the region.

2. AN ARBITRATION CASE

The determination of a boundary involves a two-stage process: the definition of the boundary through an agreement and its subsequent physical demarcation on the ground. According to Sir Henry McMahon, boundary delimitation is not merely a matter of drawing lines in the field but should be based on detailed notes and map work prior to any field activities. McMahon's statements clearly suggest that boundaries must first be defined on paper before any physical demarcation is carried out. The boundaries established on paper are later clarified on the ground with physical markers. Similarly, Lord Curzon's observations on the subject indicate that local commissions were tasked with the sole responsibility of marking these pre-defined boundaries on-site. Curzon, perhaps to add a vivid dimension to his remarks, notes that boundary commissioners often recorded the final boundary lines "with champagne in hand." (Rushworth, 1997: 61-63)

Whether Frederic J. Goldsmid and his team finalized the Iran-Afghanistan boundary during similarly celebratory discussions remains uncertain. However, based on the accounts of McMahon and Curzon, it can reasonably be inferred that the conclusion of the 1873 process was not limited to fieldwork alone. The following section provides a step-by-step analysis of how the final boundary decision was reached, beginning with Goldsmid's role.

2.1. Sir Frederic J. Goldsmid (1818-1908)

The commissioner of the arbitration mission Frederic J. Goldsmid, was a notable authority on Middle East and Persia. He was born as the son of an army officer in 1818. During his early education he showed talent on learning foreign languages. After the matriculation at King's College in London, he had various tasks in the Indian Army and British Indian Government. He was qualified in Farsi and Arabic and had the opportunity of learning Turkish during the Crimean war. He retired from Indian service at the age of 57, turned back to England and applied himself mainly to research and publishing. Goldsmid later served also in Egypt by organising the Wolseley's intelligence department. (T.H.T, 1908: 627) He guided through advises George Curzon before and after his Persia travel, thus Curzon's renowned work in two volumes *Persia and the Persian Question* (1892) was formed. Goldsmid was the author of several works such as *Telegraph and Travel* or Lieutenant-General Sir James Outram's biography, many booklets, discourses, and reviews, in newspapers or journals. He knew Eastern Languages very well and this gave him an outstanding position among contemporary orientalist. Goldsmid was the vice president of the Royal Geographical and Asiatic Societies and President of Geographical Section of the British Association's Birmingham meeting in 1886 (Holdich, 1908:224-226).

2.2. What the Mission Held

Another efficient member of the arbitration commission was Henry Walter Bellew. Bellew, also a versatile orientalist of the 19th century, has several reports and valuable notes of his travels and research, focused on Afghanistan and its surroundings. One of his travel notes *March of the Mission to Seistan* (1873) was put down on paper on the purpose of his presence on the Sistan mission. Bellew's observations not only shed light on Sistan, located

between Afghanistan and Iran, but also draw our attention to the importance of this route in British foreign policy.

During 19th and 20th century Iran was one of the buffer states that Britain wanted to maintain its independence to keep Russia out of Indian borders. But Iran as a buffer state had two main problems. As first, Iran was overwhelmed by the British policies during the Napoleonic wars, the 1907 and 1941 proceedings. Secondly, as Frederic Goldsmid pointed out either, Iran was not able to govern all the territory it was taxing in a secure and recognized way. The Shahs possessed numerous irredenta territories, historically and ethnically expected to be under its rule but in fact not truly dominated. This was especially for the Qajars of 19th century the case and was more related with the Sistan boundary problem.

Although, there were territories Iran was not able to govern properly, Iran was ambitious to expand its borders. According to Goldsmid, Iran would like to push for Baghdad and Kerbela if Turkey would not be a powerful and effective rival to her. Besides, Iran was enclosed by Russia on the North and by sea on the South. Thereby, to Goldsmid, Iran had just one direction for further expansion, which were the Afghani and Balochi territories. However, this was the same direction aimed by Russia (Brobst, 1997:197).

3. SISTAN AT THE CORNER OF THE GREAT GAME

As a well-known historical fact, Russia's main target was to reach India which was under British hegemony. Thereby as a gate holder of India, Iran's strategic value and attraction increased extremely for Russia. With considering all this, Britain's aim was to lock Iran's expansion. Although launching it as strengthening Iran's position as a buffer state, with this consideration, British counted for enhancing its Indian dominion (Brobst, 1997:197). Even though Britain's main competitor in this case was Russia, this manoeuvre should be read as a general measure and British interest as to the Sistan issue should be perceived in view of this circumstances.

As the other addressee of the Sistan issue, Afghanistan had previously received a heavy blow by the British Indian Government with the first Afghan invasion which was called the First Anglo-Afghan War. With the defeat, Britain's aim to annex this country and put a puppet sovereign on the throne failed. After all, the British Government could just observe everything by wishing not to receive any further negative reflection. But the security of the West and North-west bank of British India was still an important question. Same as the critical havens, Sistan and Balochistan, Iran's southern part on the route to India were vital in terms of the defence towards western (Morgan, 1981:76).

In time, the probability of an alliance with Iran became more of an issue for the Great Game. As above mentioned, Iran as an independent power would be more effective to hinder any trouble coming from the old rival Russia. Especially Sistan as a controversial area between Iran and Afghanistan with its possible contribution to India's security was taking attention since the Napoleonic era. On the other hand, Iran was an important junction of Afghanistan and Balochistan (Greaves, 1959:18). Because of all these reasons the British Government in India started to send several missions at the beginning of the 19th century to know the region better (Greaves, 1986:90).

As is known, Russia's expansionist policy started in 16th century and gained speed in 19th century with the occupation of Tashkent in 1865 and Samarkand in 1868, which distressed the British seriously. This policy of Russia brought also various activities along and all of them proved the British right by their concerns. For example, in 1857 Alexander II sent three expeditions to Central Asia (Çapraz, 2011:59-69). One of them was N. Khanikoff (1861,1866),

an orientalist attached to the Asian Department of the ministry of foreign affairs of Russia, the other one, N. P. Ignatiyev (Evans, 1984), a former attaché of London who was defending passionately the forward policy in Central Asia. Khanikoff's destinations were Khorasan and Afghanistan, where Ignatiyev's were Khiva and Bukhara. The third expedition was Ch. Sh. Valikhanov's mission sent to East Turkestan (Fielding 2020:102-123).

The directly related expedition with Afghanistan and Iran was Khanikoff's travel. Besides getting military information; Khanikoff was also instructed to visit Afghani centres Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat. He also was ordered to convince Dost Mohammad Khan that the Tzar cares about Afghanistan's sovereignty as a powerful state against any potential British occupation. Another task of Khanikoff was to attach the turbulent and rebellious tribes southeast of the Caspian Sea, Khorasan and Sistan to Iran. These unstable eastern provinces with the ambiguous borders and disloyal tribes were open to Russian and British intrigues and the former one wanted to keep the latter ineffective in that region (Gilliard, 1977:106).

As is seen, Iran was in between two powers. For sometimes it was maintaining its existence with a particular importance as a third supporting force for the Great Game, while for sometimes being just a pawn. Although its desire to seize Herat, an Afghani province, was hindered due to India's security concerns, Persian hopes for an expansion towards east were still alive. Concordantly the very first goals on these directions were Sistan and Balochistan which were not found out recently, both saw several times Iranian domination on history. Although the problem finally was solved by the arbitration, the British Government prevented Iran to expand its authority on these directions between the years 1863-1873 (Brobst, 1997:197-198).

At the beginning of the 18th century, Sistan was under Persian authority but was seized back by Nadir Shah when he came to power in 1736 (Ateş, 2001:82). After his assassination, Ahmad Shah Durrani established the new Afghan state and Iran lost Sistan again. When Ahmed Shah Durrani died in 1773, his rule extended from Oxus River to the Arabian Sea, from the Sutlaj river to Khorasan and Kerman. But after his dead, the Durrani Empire lost power, and its size reduced. While the empire was losing one by one its provinces, a dark period for Sistan showed its face. During that period, Sistan was almost independent, taking no notice from either Iranian or the Afghani sides. Both sides, preoccupied with their domestic affairs, overlooked Sistan. However, after the turbulent period ended, both Iran and Afghanistan turned their attention back to this region. Another reason Iran turned its face to Sistan was its desperate and unsuccessful attempts to seize Herat, it needed a new direction (Burne, 1872:1-2). Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet claims that after the Herat defeat, Iran started to sink in very silent and secretly to Sistan (2000:33).

Although Turbat Hydari is located in Khorasan, not exactly within the Sistan region, it serves as a pertinent example of the complexities involved in the governance of these lands during the period in question. The narrative of Bellew provides an account of the Carai family of Tartar origin who resided in Turbat Hydari. This family collaborated with the Durrani rulers following the assassination of Nadir Shah. Despite the decline of Durrani power, the Carai family continued to inhabit the area, extending from Khas in Sistan to Bejestan. During the reign of Abbas Mirza, the family's fortunes waned, but they remained influential until the region came under more direct Iranian administrative control, as detailed in Bellew's writings from 1873 (Bellew, 1873:95-96).

Mojtahed-Zadeh states that after Ahmad Shah Durrani, Iran still has not completed the recovery process and get over the instability and the conflict between the Zand and Qajar

families was continuing. Besides, he indicates the leading family of Sistan as Kayani and claims them to be the descendants of the Kayanian dynasty of Persia (Kurtuluş, 2022: 345-346, Yuvalı, 2017: 1-13). Although this family came lately under the rule of Timur Shah, the fight for the throne in Afghanistan served Iran's aims for this region.

Again, according to Mojtahed-Zadeh, in between 1810 and 1840 Fath Ali Shah Qajar recovered all Sistan, Khorasan and Baluchistan and took the whole area under Iranian domination. During the 1857 Paris Treaty negotiations which was the conclusion of the Anglo-Iranian war, the Sistan issue became current again (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2006:213-214).

In the Dictionary of Iran, D. L. Bradley states the demand of the Shah of Iran from the Indian government to arbitrate the issue but also marks the hesitant approach of the British due to prioritization of their own interests on this area. The British government in India wanted to disable Iran's schemes on Afghan territories and acted slow and sure, by refusing the authority of Shah over here (Bradley, 2016:600-601).

As above mentioned, it is clear that the Indian government did not display a firm attitude regarding this boundary issue and that this made Iran's work in 1863 easier. British reoriented their policy in time and first recommended both sides 'to make good their possession by force of arms' and encouraged the Iranian and Afghani governments to settle accounts mutually. Although the Iranian scholar Mojtahed-Zadeh (2004:180) claims that Iran did not take an immediate action after this call, which may be considered rather as an allowance. It actually could be counted as a victory for them. In fact, soon after that, Iran sent its troops to the region (Curzon, 1892: 230).

As it is understood from Bellew's statements, from Afghan front, no one paid attention to Sistan for a length of time. Mojtahed-Zadeh's above stated telling is also in that vein (1873:126-127).

After all the struggle staged subsequently to Dost Mohammad's death, Amir Sher Ali Khan ascended the throne, took the control of the country, and as soon as secured his position he remonstrated against Iran's annexation of Sistan. Thereon Iran got alarmed and Sistan, a vital piece of land, an important operation base regarding attack and defence, not just for Iran and Afghanistan, but also for British interests, became a political and diplomatic matter.

Mojtahed-Zadeh claims that after understanding how determined Iran about its historical justifications on possessing the land is, the British used common sense in decision making, backed out of protecting Afghan rights and acknowledged Iran's demands over Sistan (2004:177).

4. ARBITRATING A PARTITION

The British government was aware of, that possessing the whole land of Sistan would transmit Iran directly to Afghanistan. Thereby, they appointed a mission to arbitrate the question and hold it on an acceptable point for themselves. After much thought and consideration, Major-General Sir Frederic Goldsmid, who knew much more than any of his contemporaries, was selected as the head of the mission to settle a dispute between the two parts (Tate, 1910:171). In other words, he was the empowered judge of the mission consisting of other members, his personal assistant Major (later Colonel) Euan Smith, General Pollock as the representative of the General Governor of British India Lord Mayo, and well-known orientalist Dr. Henry Walter Bellew, to give the absolute order (Curzon, 1892: 231; Sykes, 2004:262-263).

As understood from the documents, the Iranian officers gave the impression as if the absolute result were already definite and the British must decide in favour of them. In extant notes British also indicate their feelings about how the Iranian officers give the image to discredit them (Burne, 1872:7).

The relevant arguments of the Iranian side were based rather on the historical right of property. Hereunder, they claimed that Sistan belongs to them from ancient times on, this should have a continuation, and it is such a clear fact that there is no need to be proven. On the other side, the Afghans defend themselves with reminding that Sistan was under possession since the Ahmad Shah era and the recent uncertainty was just because of the internal turbulence (Burne, 1872:8; Curzon, 1892: 231; Kashani-Sabet, 2000:34).

For this period when the Afghan government was advocating itself with getting through a temporal uncertainty, we also can get information from the reports of Henry Walter Bellew. Accordingly, the negligence of Sistan dated back to the fights for the throne on the last years of the Sadozais. Mahmud Shah who took the throne after Zaman Shah, failed during the dynastic transition, and fled to Herat. Within that period disorder was seen also in Sistan, but the local rulers gave preference to defend Herat for the benefit of Afghanistan against the Iranian threat. During the British occupation period that encountered soon after the Herat siege the local rulers of Sistan become almost independent. Bellew also informs us about the ruler of Sistan Kohndil Khan and his actions in detail. Kohndil Khan's efforts to get support from Iran against the Afghan government remained inconclusively with his death in 1855. With this ending, Bellew reports that Dost Mohammad Khan captured Kandahar and in the same time Ali Khan, the son of Kohndil Khan was ruling Sistan. In 1856 Iran occupied Herat and with the British intervention the issue concluded with the Treaty of Paris in 1857 (Bellew, 1873:141-144; Curzon, 1892; 230).

The leading personalities of Sistan executed Ali Khan in response to his ruling under the influence of Iran. Thereon Iran tried to take revenge but had to accept Taj Muhammed's accession after Ali Khan, following the British warning that such an attempt would be a violation of the Treaty of Paris (Curzon, 1892; 230).

Taj Muhammed reigned until 1862 independently but after Dost Muhammed's approach to Herat, he chose to declare his allegiance to Iran (Ainsworth, 1879:107). However, Iran was not content with that and reported its concerns to the British Indian Government. Thereon the Iranian government was informed by Lord John Russel on November 5, 1863, that the Iranian annexation of Sistan was recognized (Bellew, 1873:145-146).

While considering Bellew's notes, as it will be put into words below, one can understand that the assurance of Iran was not for nothing. The British already promised the control of the area to Iran and their manner was not irrelevant.

Dost Muhammed, who took lately in his life control on Herat, passed away on June 9, 1863. His successor Sher Ali Khan fought against his brothers for the throne in the first years of his reign, but Iran increased its intrigues for Sistan within that period. Although the notable personalities of Sistan declared their loyalty to Kandahar and asked for support, the central government was preoccupied with its own troubles and neglected the issue because Sher Ali Khan was engrossed in fighting with his brothers. In 1866 Iran occupied Sistan and built a fort in Nasirabad to secure its domination there but was not content with all that. The tribe they gave work, kept annoying the contiguous Baluchi and Afghans (Bellew, 1873:146).

As a side note it can be useful to clarify which part of Sistan was under Iranian domination. Sistan consisted of two parts, Main Sistan the straighter part, and Outer Sistan, the further and more disorderly part. Iran was ruling over Main Sistan (Goldsmid, 1872:88).

Clarifying Iran's confidence just with their awareness of being the prevailing party would not be enough to see the whole picture. It is likely that Iran realized the aim of the British to give them countenance on their recent advances as nation, army, and government. In an effort of establishing better relations with Iran, the British government wanted to hinder the country's rapprochement with Russia for the sake of maintaining its independence (Greaves, 1959:20).

Britain's concerns against Russian influence were not for nothing. It was possible to encounter with Russian even in rural areas. We can see this also in Bellew's narrations. Bellew and his crew who occasionally were resting for some days to explore the surrounding area took a break in Shahrud between 19th and 23rd of May. After giving detailed information about this place, Bellew tells us that Shahrud was in cable communication with Teheran and Astarabad. After informing of the existence of two palaces in good condition and a post office he informs us of two Russians and one Russian Armenian managing a company in this settlement. According to Bellew they were operating this company here for twelve years (Bellew, 1873:115).

Whether Iran approached to Russia or not, as Lord Russel's abovementioned statement, in fact they get an acknowledgement over Sistan's dominance from British who were an important authority of the region. Thereby Sher Ali Khan, who got the wind or not, was beating the air for Sistan after ensuring the throne. Yet before the boundary case become an issue, in 1870, when Sher Ali Khan was planning a campaign over Sistan, we can witness that Iran was very decisive to preserve its existence in this region. It was obvious that Iran was considering this area as Shah's land like Khorasan and Kerman and was prepared to fightback against any attack. Any attempt of Afghans would be casus belli between the two sides, and this was apparent (Kashani-Sabet, 1997:219). Most likely Sher Ali Khan could not get any open support from the British and bear the consequences of getting to a battle alone.

4.1. Dividing Sistan

The head of the mission Frederic Goldsmid was disagreeing with the Iranian and disclaiming them with the fact that they were not reigning over this region for about an age. Besides, he indicated that the local rulers and the people of the area did not give him the impression of having a yearn for the Iranian rule. Although he was not skipping the laxation of the Afghan dominance over Sistan. Goldsmid's suggestion was to divide the region between the two countries. Hereunder to him the Helmand River should be a geographical border where the right bank of it is part of Afghanistan and the left bank part of Iran (Goldsmid, 1876: 410-414; Burne, 1872: 9). In this way, the more fertile area was left to Iran. Louis Dupree claims that both sides were not pleased with this arbitrament (Vladimirovich & Barthold, 1984:404).

Ludwig Adamec states in the Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan that Iran occupied some parts of Sistan and neither Iran nor Afghanistan was pleased with the result of this arbitration of 1872 stating the river Helmand as a borderline. The conflict for the use of the Helmand waters remained unclear and the Helmand Water Treaty of 1873 was confirmed by Afghanistan only in 1877 (Adamec, 2006:141, Trapper, 2011:34).

During the travels for the Sistan Arbitration issue, Henry Walter Bellew took remarkable notes along their voyage starting from Yaqubabad to Tehran which lasted almost five months, from January 8 to June 5, 1872 (Duka, 1892: 880-884). He measured in every stop the

temperature and through the barometric pressure the elevations. He also described the routes in a remarkable detailed way. At the end of the notes about their route, Bellew gives us extensive information of the geographical limits, physical features, climate, soil and productions, animals, antiquities and ruins of the country, ancient and modern history, inhabitants and language, religion and mode of life, agriculture, and industry of Sistan. Although in an interesting way he gives us not any clear comment, whether the borderline should proceed from what route, or which tribes should be on Afghani sides and which on Iranian side. However, from his praising, that the land under Iranian administration for the last seven years has indicated significant improvement in material prosperity, it is not hard to get his view (Bellew, 1873: 146). His explanations could be commented as if he takes the Iranian side for eligible to rule over the region.

Apart from that, his approach to the matter is mostly as informing about the area, its routes, and inhabitants. This kind of informing is another type of evidence, that proves Britain has further plans related to Sistan and even if this boundary issue is solved, she will not relinquish completely from this region. Curzon's telling is also another proof for this, as he states that before the despatch of the British Commission, the number of Western travellers who had travelled through Sistan and left records of their explorations were exceedingly small, but the numbers increased distinctively (1982; 234-235).

As Curzon admits that British interest on the region was not just due to an old boundary issue, or Persian-Afghani rivalry claims, but Sistan was playing a capable role in both Central Asian and Middle Eastern politics and had significance value for Russian and Great British diplomatic and military strategy. Its location was like an advanced outpost of Khorosan and for those powers ambitious for an outlet upon Indian Ocean, it was a vital land. There was also a commercial warfare waged between Russian and Anglo-Indian merchandise in Khorasan. The bazaars of Meshed were the battlefield of such a commercial competition of the above mentioned two powers and getting hold on Sistan was like a key to prevail (Curzon 1892: 235-236).

The course of the events is confirming that western interests were not just for the sake of the people of that land. Lord Salisbury, who was following the Froward Policy in a tranquil and calm way, wanted to carry the military borders to stages, where buffer states could be supported in an easier way and unstable tribes could be controlled effectively. In this direction, he gave support to Sir Robert Sandman for his campaign marching toward Khalat with the success of the occupation of Baluchistan. He also put pressure on the British Indian authorities for building a railroad to Sistan along the Iranian-Afghani and Baluchi line where the independent tribes were living and to hinder a possible attack on India with military assistance to Iran (Gillard, 1977:154-155). In 1884 Russia's occupation of Merv and the conflict with Afghans in the following year, encouraged Britain to extend their railway system to Quetta. On the other hand, to discourage any Russian advantage to Kandahar, the idea of extending the railway furthermore to Sistan as a part of a valuable adjunct to India was also considered significantly. Nevertheless, British India could put any railway project into practice just at the beginning of the 20th century (Greaves, 1986: 96). Beside this, the resuscitation of the irrigation system of Sistan as a counterattack against Russia was a discussed subject.

5. CONCLUSION

19th Century was an era full of action for Central Asia and Middle East. Russia was expanding rapidly and Britain calculating any possibility for India's security. Since Afghanistan was enormously important in this sense, Britain was interested in any issue related to this country. Britain had to save Afghanistan's unity as a buffer state but also keep

the small player of the Great Game Iran close to herself and so keep Russia overby. In this regard a boundary problem between the two couldn't be considered apart from Indian's defence plan. The first requirement to include Sistan to this plan was collecting any kind of local and precise information related to the region. But the number of European who were able to see this area were very few. Thereby journeys to Sistan and reports about that area were highly important for the British. Goldsmid boundary commission was one of the first several noteworthy surveys about the knowledge of the region and we know that with the solution of this issue, the amount of the western travellers increased.

From notes and reports about Sistan, Iran and Afghanistan, we can see that British were not involved in this area randomly or out of an appeal of one of the related sides. Sistan and its surrounding were vital as a gate to Central Asian where Russia was proceeding aggressively, thereupon particularly important for the Great Game as position. Afghanistan after everlasting turbulence was already under British influence, so she had no other opportunity but to accept the result. It was Iran whom Britain had to keep closer against Russian influence and so did they do. Although neither side looked pleased with the result of the arbitration, the more fertile area of Sistan was left to Iran and this could be read as the goodwill of the British, the supreme power of its time.

In spite of the fact that none of the sides became satisfied with the result, British reaped the fruits of their attention to the region and were influential on numerous circumstances such as the Trans-Persian Railway project and were aware of Sistan's strategic importance as a halt. Another incident was the Indian communication with Sistan during the World War I. So British would have always an eye on this piece of land as one of the numerous important stations in a colonial schizophrenic manner to keep its imperial power in full strength and this arbitration issue was just a glimpse of it.

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