

“A British Lake”:
Kuwait and the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention

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Introduction

At around 2 a.m. on August 2nd, 1990, Iraqi forces lead by commandos crossed their southern border and invaded Kuwait. The ensuing Gulf War pitted Iraqi military forces against the US lead international coalition in support of Kuwait. Reasons for the Iraqi invasion are usually summed up in terms of oil or economic difficulties at the time.¹ However, Saddam Hussein's stated reason for invasion was much more involved. He claimed that Kuwait once formed part of Iraq during the Ottoman Empire, unlawfully separated from Iraq through treaties with Britain in 1899 and 1913. Saddam blamed the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention in particular for the separation of Kuwait from Iraq. Under this narrative, British imperial scheming at the turn of the century separated Kuwait from rightfully falling within Iraqi borders. Iraq, as a successor state to the Ottoman Empire, was roughly formed from the *Vilayets* of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. Following Saddam's claim, Kuwait was a part of the *Vilayet* of Basra prior to any British involvement, and as such was a legal part of Iraq. While Saddam's claims can naturally be debased as a distant legalistic excuse for an invasion, his use of the 1899 Anglo-Kuwaiti Bond and the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention is interesting and brought Britain's former relationship with Kuwait back into the forefront of international political discussion.

The 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention is remembered mostly for its direct political effects in Kuwait by solidifying Kuwaiti autonomy and the international rights of Britain in Kuwait. However, this agreement contains many provisions on trade, international boundaries, oil concessions, and the Baghdad Railway that solidify the wider British strategic interests at the time. British involvement in the Persian Gulf was not recent or limited to Kuwait. The British

¹ Hamdi A. Hassan, *Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait: Religion, Identity and Otherness in the Analysis of War and Conflict*, (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 5.

Persian Gulf Residency based in Bushire along the coast of modern day Iran was the hub of British activity in the Persian Gulf for most diplomatic, economic, and military affairs under the British Indian Government (hereafter referred to as the British Raj). From the 1700's onward, British naval presence in the Gulf continuously grew through the form of protecting trade and safeguarding the burgeoning East India Company's colonial holdings. However, Britain took no serious diplomatic or economic interest in the Persian Gulf until the mid-1800's, growing rapidly in the 1880's and 1890's into the turn of the century. This interest was formed by crafting various treaties with local rulers to establish certain rules for British economic activity and hold that these rules would be enforced. These treaties mostly took the form of controlling piracy and allowing port access with polities such as the Trucial States, Bahrain, and Muscat.²

I argue that the 1913 Convention, happening on the eve of the outbreak of war, was the culmination of British policy in the Gulf which centered on British economic and political gain by working to create a status quo which supported the British system of imperial management. Early commercial and political treaties within the Gulf dealt with access to and security of India. After the of succession of Mubarak al-Sabah as Sheikh of Kuwait in 1896, British actions within the Gulf centering on Kuwait were made to keep Kuwait autonomous within the Ottoman Empire. British support of Mubarak defended Kuwait from the Ottomans and the Ottoman-backed Emirate of Ha'il, eventually establishing autonomy. The British upheld imperial infrastructure as manifestations of political strategy in securing British strategic and economic interests in the Gulf while defending these interests against perceived threats from the Germans or Ottomans in the form of the Baghdad Railway. The 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention was the culmination of the British status quo and secured British interests. The formation of the Persian

² The British Library, IOR/R/20/a/102/21. This is an 1851 collection of all treaties made with the Persians, Ottomans, and various Arab tribes up until that time, held by the Aden files.

Gulf as a “British lake”³ within the Residency’s view came from negotiated imperial development coupled with the political patronage of Kuwait and other local powers.

The British, through the Persian Gulf Residency, formed several agreements with Kuwait throughout the turn of the twentieth century, each of which expanded British political, economic, and infrastructural presence within the Gulf. Infrastructure, in this sense, is a way to further governmental control within a region. The building of post-offices and telegraph offices, creating quarantine zones, and controlling gun smuggling must be understood as inherently political acts. These seemingly benign aspects of imperial order, themselves stemming from the relatively small Persian Gulf Residency in Bushire, offer a bottom-up establishment of British control within the region. When the British are allowed to build a post office in Kuwait while the Ottomans are barred from building a post office based on 1904 treaty,⁴ the British are given some control over information movement and access to goods within Kuwait. So, while these actions improve British imperial position in the region, other infrastructural advancements from the Ottomans or Germans were viewed by the British Raj as threatening to British stability in the region. In particular, the Hejaz Railway and the Baghdad Railway were viewed by the British as threats to their control over the Gulf and the wider Indian Ocean. The railways present a possibly adversarial government monopoly on movement and force within an area, and for the Baghdad Railway to possibly have a Persian Gulf port terminus in Kuwait was threatening to British activity in the region.

My thesis is structured into three chapters which cover my argument in chronological and thematic ways. The first chapter will cover British history in the Persian Gulf and contact with

³ The National Archives of the UK, FO 371/351/262. A 1902 letter from a French diplomat complaining about British actions within the Persian Gulf as treating it like a “British Lake”.

⁴ The British Library, IOR/R/15/1/739/4. Collection of treaties made between the British and the Sheikh of Kuwait between 1899 and 1913.

Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah in 1896 up to the end of the war between Mubarak al-Sabah and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rashid, Emir of Ha’il, in 1902. This cements British interaction with Mubarak and protects Kuwait as a city outside of direct Ottoman influence, which the Residency views as safeguarding British interests in the Gulf. The second chapter covers the buildup of infrastructure within and around the Gulf throughout the 1900’s as affecting who has access to the Gulf, and what this means for British interests in the Gulf and for Kuwait. The third chapter details the formation of the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention throughout the 1900’s and 1910’s as the culmination of British strategic policy within Kuwait and the Gulf.

The Persian Gulf, at this time, was an international waterway in the sights of many imperial powers, from the Ottomans and French to the Russians and Germans. My work focuses, of course, on British interests, but then the question rises as to which British interests? The British Empire, stemming from the Crown and bureaucracy of London, was naturally composed of many internal actors. The business of empire itself is sprawling and beyond direct control, with factions forming that at many times competed with each other for rule. While London may have said and done one thing, the Raj based in Calcutta (and later New Delhi) could do and say another thing. Most of my research and my argument rests upon the thoughts and actions of those based in the Persian Gulf Residency, staffed by Raj officials and under Raj control, but to a large degree independent from direct interference from the Raj. The function and history of the Residency will be described in further detail throughout my thesis, but I must state that my perspective is one shaped by the Persian Gulf Residency. My views on the actions of foreign powers, and British policies and counter policies, come through the offices of the Residency in Bushire. My argument is one that is determined in large part by interpretation of the Residency.

The history of British policy in the Persian Gulf has been studied and documented in

various time periods, based on wider contemporary political interests. In the 1960's and early 1970's many Gulf Arab states were becoming independent from British protectorate status, and as such a large field of research formed which discussed their legal basis and status. Another main period of historical interest comes after the Gulf War and the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Here again we see the history of the Gulf as shaped by larger geo-political contexts, with empires and global powers interpreting Gulf events to fit their agenda.

Briton Cooper Busch is perhaps one of the most famous of these imperial Persian Gulf scholars, publishing *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1894-1914* in 1967 and *Britain and the Persian Gulf: 1795-1880* the following year. In these texts, Busch uses painstakingly detailed studies of British archival documents from the period to catalogue a general outline of Persian Gulf history as it relates to British interests in the region. His main argument states that British growth of interest in the region is a direct reaction to the incursion of other powers, such as Germany. His work is large in scope, charting the history of British relations with several Gulf States over the course of decades. However, he focusses at least some attention to all Gulf State actors under British patronage, which is a very wide focus. Likewise, his work is dated in the sense that much has changed since he wrote his studies that can affect how Gulf history is viewed, from the rise of the oil to the Gulf Wars. Busch is still used by modern scholars and argued with by modern scholars, most notably Frederick F. Anscombe and Ahmad Feroz. Both Anscombe and Feroz shift away from the Anglo-centric archivalism of Busch when studying the Persian Gulf. Feroz reinterprets the meaning of British agreements within the Gulf as less binding and useful than Busch insists. Anscombe looks at the history of the Gulf as one shaped by Ottoman interaction with the British. He emphasizes the Ottoman role in the Gulf, which he argues has been sidelined by Busch and post-Busch scholarship focusing solely on British policies.

I also use texts related to British economic policy in India as a direct parallel to draw on, as I believe British Raj policy is not far removed from the Persian Gulf context. Likewise, I use texts on British infrastructure throughout India to frame my approach to the Baghdad Railway, telegraphs, firearm smuggling, and other infrastructural projects. In the past decade several books on the Baghdad Railway have been published. The most detailed account of the Baghdad Railway comes from Sean McMeekin's 2010 work *The Berlin-Baghdad Express* which outlines the history of the Baghdad Railway as a German grab for global expansion and influence within the Ottoman Empire. I use these, in combination with post-colonial studies of British infrastructure in India and archival research of British documents, to determine the British reaction to and fear of the Baghdad Railway as relayed mainly through the Persian Gulf Residency. The 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention, stemming from political fear caused by threats to British infrastructure in the Persian Gulf and a need to safeguard British policy, cemented Kuwait's autonomy and secured British political supremacy in the Gulf before World War I.

Lastly, I used British archival sources. The archives I used are located at the British National Archives, which contained most of my London and Persian Gulf Residency sources, as well as the British Library, which contained most of my British Raj sources. Most of my files were in the Foreign Office (FO in my citations) or the Indian Office Records (IOR). They are cited by including the department code (FO), followed by the series number, piece number, and item number if available. My Foreign Office records were mostly transcriptions of telegrams or letters sent by or between British Officials and translated letters from Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah, though almost all translated letters 'by' Mubarak were transcribed or paraphrased by Gulf Residency agents, naturally lending the Gulf Residency narrative precedence. I find it important

to emphasize that many of these telegrams, while collected by Foreign Office much later, were written or typed in the moment by officials on the ground floor of empire building within the Persian Gulf Residency. These archival sources are telling my story as much as they are a small part of my story, physical manifestations of the growing British strategic and infrastructural presence within the Persian Gulf centering upon Kuwait.

Chapter One: Forming the “Kuwait Question”

The British fear of a possible Ottoman intervention in Kuwait began in January of 1899, with the signing of a secret agreement between Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah and Britain’s Persian Gulf Resident Lt. Col. Meade (1897-1900). This so-called Anglo-Kuwaiti Bond held Britain responsible for approving the foreign relations between Kuwait and any other power. But the agreement was not legally binding, and the newly appointed Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, noted almost immediately after the agreement’s signing that Ottoman officials could simply ignore the agreement if they were so inclined.⁵ This seemed the case when, before the text of the agreement even reached London, news of Turkish troop movements in the region grew. Though, whether or not the movement of Turkish troops was in response to Kuwait was up to Gulf Residency’s interpretation. Meade noted that for the previous two months starting in December of 1898 the number of Turkish troops in Basra had increased. This news of possible preparations for an attack reached the Secretary of State who authorized the use of naval forces in the defense of Kuwait.⁶ However, above all, the Secretary and the Admiralty cautioned that the Ottomans should be warned of the British naval defense in order to minimize the possibility of war. The fear of war was quite real in the Gulf, from the point of view of Gulf Resident officials, and British officials did not desire conflict with the Ottomans over Kuwait.

British fears of direct Turkish intervention in Kuwait at this time formed what became known as the “Kuwait Question”⁷, the legal and diplomatic debate over the status of Kuwait. While Ottoman sovereignty over Kuwait was generally accepted among British officials from the

⁵ Briton Cooper Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914*, (Berkley, University of California Press, 1967), 109. I will further outline the responsibilities and duties of the Persian Gulf Residency later in this paper.

⁶ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/78.

⁷ Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914*, 94.

1800's onward, later debates over Kuwait's status lead to great diplomatic stress and disagreement between the two empires, culminating in the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention. While framing the Kuwait Question as a disagreement between the British and the Ottomans seems to erase Kuwait and Mubarak's agency, the al-Sabah dynasty was willing to work with either outside power in order to achieve the best outcome for themselves and their rule.⁸ After Mubarak's succession of the throne in 1896, the outside power happened to be the British Empire.

This debate on and formation of Kuwait as an autonomous polity is intrinsically tied to British dominion within the Persian Gulf and the wider Indian Ocean area. In this chapter I will look at the history of Kuwaiti-British interaction to highlight the shift in British policy towards Kuwait which changed from recognizing the city as a part of the Ottoman Empire to viewing Kuwait as nominally autonomous or independent. This shift is related to the British need to create a political status-quo within the Gulf which safeguarded British interests against outside interference, which meant an autonomous Kuwait. Britain's focus on Kuwait in the 1890's and 1900's allowed the Persian Gulf Residency to safeguard against a possible Gulf terminus of the then hypothetical Baghdad Railway, because Kuwaiti independence from direct Ottoman rule or rule from the Ottoman vassal Ha'il created a space in which British interests could be secured. Mubarak's war with 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rashid, and the Gulf Residency's willingness to protect Kuwait from feared invasions, shows the role Kuwait had come to play as an integral part of Britain's Gulf strategy.

⁸ Richard Schofield, "Britain and Kuwait's Borders, 1902-23," in *Kuwait: The Growth of a Historic Identity*, ed. by B.J. Slot (London: Arabian, 2003), 63.

British India and the Persian Gulf

The British have been an active political player in the Persian Gulf for quite some time, and likewise had a significant diplomatic history with the Ottomans. In 1821 the Pasha of Baghdad supposedly unfairly taxed a factory belonging to the East India Company. This factory then promptly relocated itself outside of Kuwait until the situation was resolved by company agents.⁹ Throughout the 1820's and 1840's, many treaties were made by the East India Company and British Government with polities in the Persian Gulf prohibiting piracy and slavery. While the first treaty with the Sultan of Muscat was made in 1798, the treaties established in the 1820's started the large trend of treaty influx with local powers. Treaties then made with the Trucial States¹⁰ and later Bahrain,¹¹ specifically targeted piracy of British merchant shipping, slavery in the gulf, and arms trafficking in the region.

In the Persian Gulf, much of the diplomacy conducted by the British was based out of a fort on the western coast of Persia called Bushehr (Bushire by the British). The small peninsula had been besieged in the past during wars between the British and the Persians, and it became the center for British affairs in the Gulf after it was ceded to the British from Persia in 1763 along with guarantees of British legal sovereignty and protection of English trade throughout Persia, including British exemption from import and export customs and the denial of other Europeans from selling certain goods such as wool in Persia.¹² This small fortification and its legal ties were known as the Persian Gulf Residency. After 1858 and the dissolution of the East India Company following the 1857 Indian Rebellion, the Persian Gulf Residency became a part of the British

⁹ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/3.

¹⁰ The British Library, IOR/R/20/a/102/21. This is an 1851 collection of all treaties made with the Persians, Ottomans, and various Arab tribes up until that time, held by the Aden files.

¹¹ Ibid, 21.

¹² Ibid, 443.

Raj, but it carried out the same functions of diplomacy and relations with other powers in the region on behalf of the British Raj as a regional power and the British Empire as a global force. As Lord Curzon noted, the Persian Gulf Resident was “the Uncrowned King of the Persian Gulf”¹³ and had considerable sway over local politics given their access to British and British Raj resources. It is through this fort that most communication among British agents in the Gulf was conducted.

From this fort many of the affairs in the Gulf were managed. Originally, chief among these were trade and control of piracy, but the passage of pilgrims from India to Arabia, the control of the arms trade, and other secondary factors became important to British governance from Bushire. Bushire was a center for the legal arms trade in the 1880’s, and was the location of other European consulates in the late 1800’s.¹⁴ Of course, British influence did not stem solely from Bushire, and British agents were active in cities around the Gulf, but these officials were subservient to the Residence in Bushire. In this sense, almost all British officials in the Gulf were tied to Bushire, making it a fort of extreme importance. Custom free shipping made Bushire a center of British trade in Persia, although this exemption existed in other ports throughout Persia as well.¹⁵

An interesting aside in a Indian Office Record precis written by Bombay judge J. A. Saldanha on affairs with Bahrein between 1854 and 1904 notes that India, as defined by the General Clause Act (X of 1897), is any territory including both British India and the borders of native rulers who are under the suzerainty of Her Majesty as exercised through the Governor of India or any governor or officer underneath the Governor. While these territories are not British

¹³ George N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, (London: Logmans, Green, and Co., 1892), 451.

¹⁴ Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914*, 71.

¹⁵ The British Library, IOR/R/20/a/102/443. This is the introduction to the Bahrein Affairs Precis written by Jerome Antony Saldanha, who originally helped write a Gazetteer on the history of the Gulf and Britain up to 1853.

territories, nor their citizens British citizens, their sovereignty is split between the British government and the local government based on specific treaty arrangements. The precis goes on to postulate whether Bahrein, as a Persian Gulf polity in treaty relations with the British Raj through the Gulf Residency, was a part of British India.¹⁶ While this is a theoretical conjecture on the nature of India, and nearly semantic in nature of what is India, it gives an interesting insight into British intrigue in the Gulf in the early 1900's. If in British records of this time period officials are comparing the sovereignty Britain holds over Indian princes through the Raj to the relationship between the Residency and local rulers in the Persian Gulf, then it contextualizes the relationship the Gulf Residency displayed between itself and local rulers as bound by treaty. While the relationship between Indian princes and the Raj, and Gulf rulers and the Residency is not a perfect comparison for many legal reasons, British activity in the Gulf must be viewed as connected to and part of larger imperial ventures.

One of the main British interests in the Middle East laid in securing a quick and reliable passage to India. From the Napoleonic Wars onwards, British fears over secure passage to its most important colonial possession were one of the highest priorities of British foreign affairs.¹⁷ Throughout the mid 1800's, a great amount of discussion was held within political and engineering circles on which route was best suited to connect the British to India. Two of the main competing ideas were the Suez Canal and what was dubbed the Euphrates Valley route. The Euphrates Valley route was a proposed land and sea route of a railway through Ottoman territories, terminating in the Euphrates valley and Persian Gulf that then continued on steamer in connection with India. This route was touted from a variety of viewpoints, from its shorter

¹⁶ The British Library, IOR/R/15/1/723.

¹⁷ Frederick F. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 3.

distance to the possible betterment of Ottoman lands a largescale modern railway construction project would create.¹⁸ Works such as *The Euphrates Valley Route to India, London to Lahore*, and other pamphlets and treatises published throughout the 1850's show both great interest and debate over the idea of a trans-Asiatic railroad. *The Euphrates Valley Route* in particular was published by an "Anonymous Traveler", but was in large part quoting and supporting a similar work, *Memoir of the Euphrates Valley Route to India* by W.P. Andrew, and it is suspected that he wrote this work as well. Works like these were a sort of argumentative prose targeted at the educated London elite and prospective investors in order to ignite the imagination of possible paths to the east for the empire through Ottoman held lands and then sailing through the Gulf towards India.

However, many other works refuted these ideas of an over ground railway in lieu of the Suez Canal. *Routes to the East* in particular, published in 1857, called for the very dire need of a Suez Canal.¹⁹ Published anonymously by "An Old Indian" during the Indian Rebellion 1857, the need for a direct route to the British domains in Asia was greatly emphasized. Eventually the Suez route won out, however this did not diminish the importance of the Gulf in the realm of transportation for the empire. The mouth of the Gulf still laid between Suez in the west and India in the east, and remained an important hub of trade for the British and for native Indian businesses and well as travel for pilgrimage. Far after this debate, from 1894 to 1900, goods from India made up an average of 47% of the total value of imports into Gulf ports, while exports from Britain averaged 19%, making the combined imperial trade in the region very

¹⁸ *The Euphrates valley route to India, By a Traveler*, (London, Edward Stanford, 1856), 50.

¹⁹ *Routes to the East, by an Old Indian*, (London, Spottiswoode and Co., 1857), 25. Likewise, this text was also published anonymously by "An Old Indian."

lucrative.²⁰

With the aforementioned context, one can better understand the British strategic view of the Persian Gulf. As stated above, British views of Kuwait as under Ottoman vassalage were well established, however these views were also based on simple claims of British observers, and do not reference specific legal or political obligations beyond some form of payment to the Ottoman government. After the 1870's however, with the Ottoman expansion into Hasa and the renewed political protection and patronage of Kuwait, British views of Kuwait began to change. As early as July of 1863, Col. Pelly stated that he would "still keep an eye on Koweit for future purpose", noting its location as a possible coaling station for British steamers and a terminus for British telegraphic communication in the Gulf.²¹ However, the British view of Kuwait would remain complex and ever shifting, with various aspects within the British government and British Raj having different views of Kuwait's place within the Persian Gulf.

Kuwait Before 1896

I find it important to briefly describe Kuwait's history in further detail before direct British involvement in the 1890's, in order to understand what both Ottoman and British officials were approaching. Kuwait was a city located on the edge of regional Ottoman influence stemming from the *Vilayet* of Basra. Home to the largest bay in the Gulf region, it stretches 25 miles east to west and 13 miles north to south, making it a natural area for shipping and trading.²² According to both Kuwaiti and Ottoman records made under Ali Pasha, the Pasha of Basra in the

²⁰ Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914*, 397. The numbers come from a listing of Gulf Trade of import value based on country of origin. The table attempts to account for native trade as well, however imports from India, Britain, Persia, and the Ottomans make up a very significant piece of the imports into this region regardless.

²¹ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/5. Part of a short treatise on Kuwait, its economy, and its climate written by Col. Pelly

²² Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914*, 32.

late 1600's and early 1700's, the ancestors of modern Kuwaitis came from the Utub tribe who migrated from the inner Nejd to Hasa and possibly Persia, then Basra. After leaving Basra in the early 1700's they are thought to have settled in Kuwait.²³ By leaving Basra to settle modern Kuwait, the area was formed explicitly outside of Ottoman influence from Basra.

Kuwait became a well-known trade city throughout the late 1700's and early 1800's, as many traders throughout the Persian Gulf and the wider Indian Ocean chose to bring goods to Kuwait in order to circumvent heavier Ottoman duties levied in nearby Basra.²⁴ Ali Pasha claimed that the Sheikh of Kuwait possessed 150 ships and some light artillery, however he may have been exaggerating their usefulness to the Porte as a potential ally in the region.²⁵ By the 1820's the al-Sabah family had fifteen large oceangoing dhows, twenty smaller dhows, and over 150 smaller vessels²⁶ as well as 5,000-7,000 armed men.²⁷ This is a sizable force for a Gulf city trading family, and is telling of their economic heft in the region. Either despite this economic and military footprint or because of it, by the 1820's the al-Sabah's could not stay far removed from the Ottoman political realm, and the al-Sabah's acknowledged Ottoman suzerainty and paid a small tribute to Baghdad every year.²⁸ However, there is no description of Kuwait's obedience to Ottoman rule beyond the 1840's within British records of Kuwait. This does not mean that it did not happen, but that if it did happen it went unnoticed by British officials.

By the 1870's the Ottomans were attempting to assert themselves as a power in the Hasa region, located south of Kuwait and north of Qatif. Several reasons are given by scholars for this

²³ B.J. Slot, *The Origins of Kuwait*, (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1991), 71.

²⁴ Briton Cooper Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1968), 33.

²⁵ Slot, 71.

²⁶ Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880*, 33.

²⁷ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/3. From the 1821 Bombay Political Department report when surveying the port in Kuwait.

²⁸ Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880*, 33.

sudden expansion, but the most compelling is a sense among Ottoman officials in Basra and Baghdad that the Empire was not secure in several of its borders due to decades of territorial loss in Europe, and so an establishment of force was necessary in long neglected areas of influence to dissuade a similar fate of piecemeal expansion from bordering empires occurring.²⁹ The reformist Midhat Pasha launched expeditions from Baghdad into Hasa throughout the early 1870's. The first stop of this military expedition was Kuwait, which was brought under reinvigorated Ottoman influence through Basra withholding several date crops the al-Sabah's owned in Basra. Sheikh 'Abdallah al-Sabah protested and decreed that he was a proud subject of the Empire, but simply feared high Ottoman duties such as customs. To bring him into the fold, Midhat Pasha stated that the Porte wished to spread patronage and protection over Kuwait. 'Abdullah was named *Kaymakam* of Kuwait (a title of Ottoman sub-governor) and flew the Sultan's flags over his residence.³⁰ Likewise, 100 *zaptie* (Ottoman governmental police) were supposed to be stationed in Kuwait but they never arrived. Col. Lewis Pelly (Persian Gulf Resident, 1862-1872) stated that the Kuwaitis had frequently flown their own flags, but had also flown Ottoman flags in order to receive favorable customs when trading in Bombay by being mistaken for Ottoman traders³¹ While the exact scale to which this was practiced is not listed, its mention by the Persian Gulf Residence shows that it must have been present to some degree. The Kuwaitis, as described at the time, tended to follow Turkish suzerainty as it was useful to them. The rest of the Hasa territory was likewise subdued, with Sheikh 'Abdullah militarily supporting the expedition after they left Kuwait.

After subduing the Hasa territory and bringing it within the Ottoman sphere of influence,

²⁹ Anscombe, 18.

³⁰ Anscombe, 22.

³¹ Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880*, 721.

attention was again paid to the status of Kuwait and other territories in question. Through conquest of the Hasa territory, the Ottomans reestablished Kuwait as a dependency of their empire. However, as also shown with Ottoman dealings in Kuwait, the al-Sabah's had viewed themselves as part of the empire as it suited them. Kuwait existed as a port that did not collect the normal taxes and duties that Basra charged, and as such the al-Sabah's made significant fortune steering trade away from Basra and towards Kuwait. Basra, as the focal point of Ottoman trade and power in lower Mesopotamia and the Gulf, was viewed by Ottoman officials as naturally extending its reach to Kuwait. But, as shown with the historical development of the city of Kuwait, the Utub tribe originally left Basra in order to escape Ottoman influence according to their own historical custom.³²

While Kuwaitis would have incentive to historically separate their city from Ottoman influence, my research has not supported or debunked Kuwait's status as part of the Ottoman realm between the 1820's and the 1871 Hasa expedition, leaving it in historical limbo up for interpretation or further research. That being said, the British had long viewed Kuwait as politically bound to the Ottoman Empire. East India Company records state that in 1829 and in 1847, the Sheikh declared himself a vassal of Kuwait.³³ Such a statement could have been made for the purpose of receiving favorable trade customs in India, but then this begs the larger question if the British had been in communication with Kuwait as an entity and trading partner viewed as part of the Ottoman sphere for quite some time, what led to the increase in interests towards the end of the 19th century? Simply put, it was the result of a British uneasiness over the Ottoman state of affairs in the 1870's.³⁴ This so called "Eastern Question" concerned the

³² Slot, 71.

³³ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/4. In 1829, Major General B. Brucks stated that Kuwait acknowledges the authority of the Turks and pay tribute annually.

³⁴ Roger Adleson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East*, (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1995), 8.

fracturing of the Ottoman Empire by neighboring polities, and was a manifestation of the balance of power mindset that besieged Europe throughout the 1800's.

Questioning Kuwait's Status

In April of 1893, the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Sir Clare Ford (1891-1893), stated that Britain recognized Ottoman sovereignty from Basra to Qatif.³⁵ This would include Kuwait as under the sovereignty of the Porte. However in March of 1897 the former consul in Basra, Captain Whyte (1895-1897), discussed the status of Kuwait with the new British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Sir. Phillip Currie (1894-1898). Captain Whyte pointed to a recent British study of Kuwait that proclaimed Kuwait was *de facto* independent. Captain Whyte disagreed and pointed to the title of *Kaymakam* held by the Sheikh of Kuwait as proof of Kuwait's fealty to the Ottomans.³⁶ Later, after Whyte's replacement A.C. Wratislaw took office in Basra, Currie had to answer this supposed discrepancy from the British Government, stating: "Her Majesty's Government has never admitted that Koweit is under the protection of the Turkish Government. But since it is under Turkish influence, it is doubtful, whether we could deny the latter."³⁷

While Kuwait's status as independent or a vassal state seemed to vary depending on the colonial official, certain recent events can also be used to explain this shift in definition. Mubarak al-Sabah, Sheikh of Kuwait, gained the throne through the murder of his half-brothers Muhammad al-Sabah and Jarrah al-Sabah.³⁸ In the immediate aftermath, Hamdi Pasha of Basra repeatedly urged the Porte to occupy Kuwait militarily, however his warning were largely

³⁵ Adleson, 17.

³⁶ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/27.

³⁷ Ibid, 19.

³⁸ S. Al-Sabah, *Mubarak Al-Sabah: The Foundation of Kuwait*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 7. Eventually, Hamdi Pasha was reassigned to Basra in 1899.

obscured or ignored and he was replaced five months later.³⁹ The Ottoman state eventually reacted, with the Minister of Interior and the Council of State and Council of Ministers in favor of a forceful measure against Mubarak. However, it was over a year since the start of the crisis and the formation of an Ottoman response, and within that time Mubarak had pled for protectorate status from Britain. While this was denied, the creation of discussion on Kuwait's status as possibly independent from the Porte helped shift the British international thought process away from views of Ottoman sovereignty extending along Basra to Hasa. Instead, the aforementioned 1897 view of Kuwait in a liminal space between Ottoman influence and *de facto* independence took hold. Kuwait, as a polity independent from the Ottoman Empire to a degree, could better serve as a hub for British activity in the northern Persian Gulf, securing the Gulf from end to end under British access. And, later British views on Kuwait as independent would be important for challenging the Baghdad Railway.

The sons of Mubarak's half-brothers went abroad to Basra and Ha'il to gain support against Mubarak.⁴⁰⁴¹ They found help, in large part, by Yusuf al-Ibrahim, a wealthy pearl merchant related to the al-Sabah's via marriage. Yusuf al-Ibrahim worked in Basra and Ha'il to try and gather support against Mubarak from both the Ottomans and 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rashid. While the Ottomans eventually refused to challenge Mubarak, possibly due to the fact that his claim on the throne was relatively calm after a year, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rashid was more willing to challenge Mubarak.⁴² Ha'il had ruled much of the Nejd after their victory over the house of al-Saud in 1891, and became rivals of Kuwait after suspected raiding of merchants by both families. The al-Sabah's also gave refuge to the house of al-Saud in Kuwait. While Ottomans

³⁹ Anscombe, 96.

⁴⁰ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/87.

⁴¹ Anscombe, 114.

⁴² Al-Sabah, 10.

forces from Basra never marched against Mubarak despite Residency fears, intervention from Ha'il constituted a more immediate threat.⁴³ In June of 1897, Yusuf al-Ibrahim launched an unsuccessful naval attack on Kuwait with fourteen ships and around 1,500 men after failing to court Ottoman support from Basra, yet he retreated without firing a single shot.⁴⁴ Upon reporting the incident on July 27, Persian Gulf Resident Meade initially suggested to the Foreign Secretary in Simla that the Ottomans may use the aftermath of this incident to extend their influence into Kuwait and that the British should send in a gunboat, but the Viceroy of India suggested that no action be taken.⁴⁵ No Ottoman advance manifested, and the succession of Mubarak to the throne was in actuality secured. The failed attack on Kuwait by Yusuf al-Ibrahim is important as it shows the unwillingness of the Ottomans to press a military claim over Kuwait when they were most able to.

Mubarak al-Sabah sought British Protection, and on January 23rd 1899 after much debate within the ranks of the British officers stationed within the Persian Gulf, Meade and Mubarak signed the Anglo-Kuwaiti Bond.⁴⁶ This agreement was met with immediate reprisal from the Porte. The British feared another possible Ottoman invasion of Kuwait, and likewise Mubarak was still challenged by Yusuf al-Ibrahim and 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rashid. However, the Anglo-Kuwaiti Bond is very important for laying the foundation of Kuwait's autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, as secured later in the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention. It was the Anglo-Kuwaiti Bond which gave Mubarak the British the pretense of international backing to stave off Ottoman interaction in Mubarak's war with 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rashid.

⁴³ Anscombe, 118.

⁴⁴ Al-Sabah, 9.

⁴⁵ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/94. Part of a long telegram conversation between the Viceroy of India, the Secretary of State in London, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in India, and the Persian Gulf Resident.

⁴⁶ The British Library, IOR/R/15/1/739/2. A collection of the treaties signed by Sheikh of Kuwait and the British Government between 1841 and 1913.

Mubarak continued to fight with ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rashid in skirmishes outside of Kuwaiti territory within the Nejd throughout the fall of 1900 while Turkish troops were moved around from Baghdad to Basra, seemingly preparing for any needed intervention as interpreted by the Residency.⁴⁷ While the internal politics of the Nejd at this time are complicated, understanding Mubarak’s war with ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rashid is important towards viewing how Kuwait as a polity changed within the Persian Gulf. In four years of claiming the throne, Mubarak had amassed a political role for Kuwait that it previously did not hold, and was acting largely outside of the sphere of British and Turkish influence in order to fight ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rashid, although the Residency often sent contact to Mubarak to try and quell his war preparations against ‘Abd al-‘Aziz. By February 9th of 1901, Mubarak had invaded the Nejd and had prepared camp within half a day’s journey of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz army. Sheikh Mubarak, supported by eight other tribes, had amassed an army of 64,000 men to fight ‘Abd al-‘Aziz.⁴⁸ The British warily watched Ottoman troops reinforce their garrisons in Hasa and Qatif with 800 new soldiers in January and February, fearing another Turkish intervention in Kuwaiti affairs that never happened.⁴⁹ However, the Residency’s fear of Ottoman intervention in the conflict was based upon Ha’il’s vassal relationship with the Ottoman Empire. By February 27th Sheikh Mubarak attacked and captured Riyadh, naming a friendly chief as its governor. His ranks swelled to around 70,000 before slimming back down to around 5,400 men as he marched north towards Ha’il to capture ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rashid.⁵⁰ On March 17th, Mubarak fought ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rashid’s army of 7,000 men to a near stalemate. Injured, he returned to Kuwait on the

⁴⁷ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/123.

⁴⁸ The National Archives of the UK, FO 602/16/158.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 163.

⁵⁰ The National Archives of the UK, FO 602/16/177.

31st of March.⁵¹

In mid-April, Ottoman troops left Baghdad towards the Nejd to meet with ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and discuss the battle, which the British feared could be the beginning of an Ottoman intervention in the war.⁵² However, like other past British fears, and Ottoman invasion never manifested. Throughout the early period of Mubarak consolidating his rule in Kuwait, he had been weakened and open to attack from the Turks in the eyes of the British multiple times, yet the Ottomans never invaded. Of course, some officials such as Hamdi Pasha viewed an Ottoman invasion as a preferred option in order to restore Ottoman presence in Kuwait like in the 1870’s. But the Porte was overall unwilling to fight Kuwait, as shown by its near constant troops preparations yet a complete lack of deployment against Kuwait throughout this period. P. J. Melvill, British resident in Baghdad (1899-1902) reported Ottoman troops around Iraq throughout the summer of 1901. In the fall of 1901 the Gulf Resident Lt. Col. Kemball (1900-1904) sent telegrams to British Raj officers in Simla about another feared invasion of Kuwait by Ottoman forces. The Ottoman gunboat *Zuhaf* departed from Basra on August 22nd heading southward towards Qatar, and it intended to land at Kuwait during the trip.⁵³ The British ship *Perseus* was instructed to forbid the Ottomans from landing troops in Kuwait, with the Foreign Secretary in Simla allowing the use force if necessary.⁵⁴

On August 24th, the *Zuhaf* arrived at Kuwait and was met by the *Perseus*, with the British commander telling the captain of the *Zuhaf* that Ottoman troops could not be allowed in Kuwait. The Ottoman Captain left him and met with Mubarak al-Sabah to try and convince Mubarak to

⁵¹ The National Archives of the UK, FO 602/16/199-205.

⁵² Ibid, 217.

⁵³ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/251. This is a collection of Indian office Records (IOR) on the history of relations with Kuwait as gathered by the British Raj. These records are transcriptions of telegrams from various officials, but usually related to the Persian Gulf Residency.

⁵⁴ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/255.

acknowledge Ottoman authority over Kuwait. Mubarak refused, and the *Zuhaf* returned to Basra through Fao to lodge protest against Mubarak with the *wali* in Basra.⁵⁵ After news of this incident spread in Istanbul, the British ambassador Sir Nicholas O'Connor was asked by the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs as to whether the British had any designs on occupying Kuwait. O'Connor responded that the British had no such intentions, "provided that Turkey did not force their hands by interfering with [the] Sheikh, with whom, as he knew, we had a special arrangement."⁵⁶ By September, Melvill was reporting that troop movements had slowed dramatically and Mubarak had "tendered their submission to the Sultan."⁵⁷ By November, Britain had stationed men-of-war in Kuwait, and viewed them as necessary for the safety of Kuwait.⁵⁸

After the *Zuhaf* incident, the British reached out to the Ottomans to create the 1901 Status Quo agreement. This agreement cemented the current status quo of Kuwait, which was nominally part of the Ottoman Empire but under British influence and treaty relations. The agreement stated that both the Ottomans and the British agreed not to occupy Kuwait with troops.⁵⁹ Through safeguarding Kuwait from Ottoman occupation, the Status Quo agreement also legitimized the 1899 Anglo-Kuwaiti Bond by having the Ottomans legally recognize British influence in Kuwait yet distancing Mubarak from the Porte. The Status Quo agreement was the last major agreement between the Ottomans and the British before the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention, and created a space for the British and Mubarak to further their relationship without

⁵⁵ The National Archives of the UK, FO 602/16/274. A large folio of Foreign Office (FO) correspondences on Kuwait from 1899 to 1905. These correspondences come in the form of letters, telegrams, etc. sent between various British officials in Kuwait and outline a large swatch of British relations in the region centered both on London, the Persian Gulf Residency, and India (specifically the Bombay government).

⁵⁶ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/262.

⁵⁷ The National Archives of the UK, FO 602/16/279.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 315.

⁵⁹ Ansecombe, 122.

fear of Ottoman intervention. This secured *de facto* Kuwaiti autonomy from most Ottoman affairs.

British interests within the Gulf were controlled, initially, by trade and a desire to secure treaties with various polities along the Trucial Coast and Muscat. By the time of the signing of the 1899 Bond, Britain held some form of political vassalage over many other polities within the Gulf. The turbulent succession of Mubarak paved the way to the establishment of Kuwait as an autonomous entity within the Gulf with the 1901 Status Quo agreement. The near constant reports of possible invasions coming from the Gulf Residency at this time are a testament to British fears over the Ottoman role in Kuwait. However, again it is important to note that these fears never manifested and the Ottomans based in Basra never directly threatened Kuwait or British interests in Kuwait. The city was free from direct Ottoman influence and threat after the war with ‘Abd al-Aziz al-Rashid. Kuwait’s situation as between both British and Ottoman influence, combined with the incursion of the Baghdad Railroad, would lead to the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention.

Chapter Two: Britain and Imperial Infrastructure in the Persian Gulf

In the immediate aftermath of the war between Mubarak al-Sabah, sheikh of Kuwait, and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rashid, Emir of Ha’il, Kuwait stood in a seemingly vulnerable state. While the British and to a smaller degree Mubarak feared outside influence from the Ottomans or another war with ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rashid, no such conflict erupted. Kuwait was under no direct threat from Ottoman military aggression, despite fears to the contrary from the Persian Gulf Residency.

In January of 1911, a Mr. Charles M. Marling’s letter to Secretary of Foreign Affairs Edward Grey (1905-1916) noted that the Germans and Ottomans may finally press for Kuwait as the terminus of the Baghdad Railway, a planned railway stretching from Berlin through the Ottoman Empire to Baghdad, financed in large part by the Deutsche Bank. He states that the main British objective when “eleven years ago, we entered into relations with Sheikh Mubarak was to prevent the Baghdad Railway from reaching the shores of the Gulf except under conditions consonant with our interests ...”⁶⁰ While Marling is but one person with a certain perspective, this perspective should not be ignored. Kuwait, as a potential terminus for the Baghdad Railway, became a city upon which British strategic interests were actualized. The British upheld imperial infrastructure as physical manifestations of political strategy in securing British interests in the Gulf, while attempting to curtail perceived rival strategy from the Germans or Ottomans in the Baghdad and Hejaz Railways. British protection of their strategic interests within the Persian Gulf, culminating in Kuwait, would eventually lead to the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention. In this chapter I will explain how the British actualized their

⁶⁰ The National Archives of the UK, FO 371/1232/19/2 This Folio contains in its first half vast amounts of communication from the first third of 1911 as to how the British can deal with the Baghdad railway and what agreements can be made with the ottomans to give the British some control while also protecting their interests in Kuwait.

strategic interests through policies such as the control of international arms dealing, the expansion of telegram systems, and opposition to the Baghdad Railway.

To clarify, by imperial infrastructure I mean the mixture of physical and political mechanisms through which British imperialism was implemented across Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Very clear examples of this are railways, telegraph stations, post offices, coaling stations, free shipping agreements, etc. These are economic and political spaces which tie together the empire on a material level, and also represent the expansion of state power across vast tracts of land. In the North American context, this can be understood by using an aspect of Canadian historian Harold Innis' theory of the hinterland and metropole, in which a hinterland is connected to a metropole through transportation and infrastructure to expedite economic and political relationship between the two.⁶¹ Imperial infrastructure acted materially to support the nation and allow the easy access of governmental control in the form of federal troops, regional law enforcement, tax collection, etc. as well as 'taming' or conquering of the 'frontier' regions beyond effective control of the center. Railways in British India facilitated this function, acting as economic transport for raw materials from the hinterland and creating a network of state enforcement.⁶² Of course, the experience of railways in Canada, India, and Britain are different, but they follow a grand pattern of resource extraction, population movement, and governmental influence. Places in the hinterland are less connected to the center of governmental control in a region, while rails and infrastructure act to expand influence on a political and commercial level.

British political involvement in the Persian Gulf, as detailed earlier, has always been based on such agreements. The earliest political treaties with Gulf rulers were anti-piracy laws

⁶¹ Charles R. Acland and William Buxton J. Harold, *Innis in the New Century: Reflections and Refrlections* (Montreal: MQUP, 1999), 94.

⁶² Marian Aguiar, *Tracking Modernity: India's Railway and the Culture of Mobility*, 7.

and the establishment of trading factories (centers for storing goods intended for trade), enacted to secure British traffic to and from India. While it appears the British either did not have the desire or ability to expand their protection of shipping in the Gulf, they instead made deals with local rulers to circumvent loss and secure their imperial economy near the region.

Imam Nasir bin Mushrid of Oman offered the trading facilities in Sohar to the British East India Company in 1645⁶³, and British presence in Oman and Muscat grew steadily over the centuries. Treaties with the Trucial Sheikdoms, starting in 1820, specifically outlined the protection of British trading in the region, and their immunity from piracy.⁶⁴ Also, as previously mentioned, in 1821 an East India Company trade factory moved from Basra to territory near Kuwait when they were supposedly extorted by the *Wali* in Basra.⁶⁵ Britain has had a long history of trade as tied to imperial infrastructure in the region.

By the end of the 19th century, British trade was a well-established fact in the Gulf, with Muscat alone importing an average of 162,083 pounds sterling worth of goods annually from 1894 to 1900 from India alone, while India and Britain combined made up 85% of the trade into the city by 1900.⁶⁶ In the 1880's and 1890's, the Persian Gulf was full of other European colonial powers. Russian and German ships in particular were worrisome to the British, but French activity in the Persian Gulf also caused anxiety in the Gulf Residency. While letters between German officials seem to indicate some complication of British and Russian relations over the Persian Gulf, many other powers were sailing within the Gulf in the late 1890's from Japan to

⁶³ Terence Clark, Hugh Arbuthnott, and Richard Muir, *British Embassies Around the Gulf, 1575-2005*, (Kent, Global Oriental LTD, 2008), 229.

⁶⁴ The British Library, IOR/R/20/a/102/21. Treaties with Arab leaders, from the Aden files.

⁶⁵ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/3. The same scenario was described briefly in chapter one, when EIC trade was supposedly extorted in Basra and the trade factory moved towards Kuwait, but most likely to an island near Basra but also near Kuwait.

⁶⁶ Briton Cooper Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914*, (Berkley, University of California Press, 1967), 401. A table showing trade imports split among many nations in Muscat between 1894 and 1914.

Austria Hungary, and from the British perspective their domination of Gulf politics appeared to be in danger of multipolar political involvement.⁶⁷

Firearms and the Persian Gulf in a Global Perspective

This competition of influence can also be traced by looking at the history of British agreements on banning the importation of arms in the Gulf. The control of the arms trade was very important for the British in the region, because it meant control over which groups could act in defense or offense. Historically, arms have been traded throughout the Gulf and the wider Indian Ocean area for hundreds of years between trading powers from Egypt to Malaysia. In particular, Muscat became one of the centers of arms trade in the region by the 1780's.⁶⁸ Between 1900 and 1901, the arms trade in Muscat was worth £89,800⁶⁹, while over 25,000 guns and 2.25 million rounds of ammunition entered the Persian Gulf overall in this same year.⁷⁰ This is a vast amount of fire arms entering the region. As European and American armies modernized their firearms and switched to using cartridge based repeating rifles, large amounts of older breech loading guns⁷¹ began to flood the global market.

It is crucial to stress the importance of arms trading in the imperial context. Zanzibar (politically and historically linked to Muscat and traders in Oman) was one of the main trading centers connecting the eastern coast of Africa to the Indian Ocean. Through this and other port cities in East Africa, between 80,000 and 100,000 firearms entered Eastern Africa every year in the 1890's.⁷² This influx of European firearms, traded primarily through Persian Gulf and Indian

⁶⁷ Efim Rezvan, *Russian Ships in the Gulf*, (Reading, Ithaca Press, 1993), 4. Rezvan uses Russian diplomatic and naval documents to tell many stories of Russian boats active in the Persian Gulf in the late 1890's and early 1900's.

⁶⁸ Emrys Chew, *Arming the Periphery*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 38.

⁶⁹ Busch, 404.

⁷⁰ Chew, 100.

⁷¹ Breech loading firearms are firearms in which the shell or cartridge is loaded through the rear of the barrel.

⁷² Chew, 99.

ports, created a fear of better-armed resistance against European expansion among European consuls, colonists, and traders in Africa.⁷³ Indigenous polities, exposed to an influx of arms, could become much more resistant to European encroachment and intra-African wars could become more deadly. A similar pattern can be seen in Western Africa during the 1600's and 1700's in which Europeans traded guns with coastal African cities, creating a large armed trading class which came to dominate local politics and resistance against any attempted European expansion. To challenge the colonial adage, while Europeans may have been armed with the Maxim machine gun, the implementation of the Maxim freed up hundreds of thousands of technologically inferior but still lethal weapons (such as breech-loaders) for trade within the region.

Likewise, arms trading in the Persian Gulf meant an influx in arms shipped towards India and the Northwest frontier of Russian Turkestan, Northwest India, and Afghanistan. The issue of arms being illegally traded among Indians has been a long held fear of British officials in the region from Tipu Sultan's use of European weapons and soldiers in the late 1700's to the 1857 Indian Rebellion and the introduction of new firearms in the Indian armies. Controlling Indian access to firearms was paramount among imperial designs in the region, as a safeguard against possible rebellion. Armed groups in India or the Indian frontiers in Afghanistan and Baluchistan were a constant threat to British rule.

As Emrys Chew argues, control of the arms trade in the Gulf should be seen as the expansion of British commercial power and desires to defend it.⁷⁴ The fears of arms ending up in the hands of Indians, Afghanis, and East Africans gave the British solid reasons to police arms trading in the Gulf. Many of the early treaties with Gulf powers were focused on piracy and anti-

⁷³ Ibid, 109.

⁷⁴ Chew, 105.

slave trading, and only later did the British implement treaties on controlling the trade of arms in the Gulf. Treaties were established first in Persia in the 1880's, and then in other polities throughout the early 1900's. Muscat, as the center of arms trade, did not formally bow before British policing efforts until a 1912 agreement, which strengthened the implementation of previous agreements in 1898 and 1903, and formally centralized the arms trade in Muscat allowing for easier control. However, before the 1912 agreement, Muscat was still both the center for arms trade in the region and beyond overt British influence in this trade.

Kuwait agreed to prohibit the import and export of arms in May of 1900, and allowed British and Persian ships the power to search Kuwaiti ships for arms.⁷⁵ The treaty, allowing for both British and Persian action in the affairs of Kuwait, helped to internationalize arms trade policing in the city. This was done in direct relation to the banning of arms traffic in India and Afghanistan, in order to stifle local opposition in the face of growing national movements.⁷⁶ However, this agreement also worked to decrease the growth of opposition forces in the Gulf and strengthen influence over British-backed polities. Mubarak asked the British for aid in the form of firearms by November of 1900 while limiting the import of arms into his city.⁷⁷ Mubarak's request happened before the war between 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rashid and Mubarak. The British declined his request, because they believed he should stop fanning the fires of war in the Nejd. While Kuwait agreed to limit arms imports, Mubarak would be somewhat dependent on Britain for arms traffic and self-defense. Also, by disallowing arms traffic in some ports but not all, the British could monitor the flow of arms in the region. While the amount of imported arms in Muscat varied wildly from year to year, there was a noticeable increase of arms imports from

⁷⁵ The British Library, IOR/R/15/1/739/3. The same series of Kuwaiti treaties referenced in chapter one.

⁷⁶ Chew, 157.

⁷⁷ The National Archives of the UK, FO 602/16/140-42. The letters between Kemball and Calcutta deal with the situation in the Nejd, as well as Mubarak's request for arms.

£40,100 from 1899-1900 to £89,900 from 1900-1901,⁷⁸ which coincides with the control of arms imports in Kuwait. There is not enough evidence to posit a direct correlation, but before the 1901 agreement Kuwait was a port in which arms were traded.

Agreements on the arms trade between Britain and Kuwait would also limit other powers and what they can trade within the region. In a secret dispatch dated the 28th of May, 1901, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rashid contacted the Persian Gulf Residency to enter under British protection in exchange for arms from the British and support the overthrowing of Mubarak as sheikh of Kuwait.⁷⁹ This issue was discussed through a series of hastily written letters among British officials in the region, notably ambassador to the Porte Sir N.R. O’Connor⁸⁰, and H.M. Consul in Basra A.C. Wratlaw. The information, apparently revealed in part by the local Wali, also mentioned the Emir of Nejd before ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rashid (Muhammad bin ‘Abdullah) agreed to protect a theoretical railway across the Arabian interior for the Ottoman government. While the British were not strategically interested in challenging Mubarak, as they had recently signed an agreement with him to establish ties with Mubarak and legitimize Mubarak against these very threats to his rule, this dispatch highlights two very clear interests of the British and their aims in the region. Firstly, the control of arms in the Persian Gulf of course did not entirely stamp out local powers and their ownership of firearms. But, it did give the British great power in controlling the arms trade, allowing for such events as ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rashid offering protectorate status in return for arms and support to make strategic sense based on the supply of

⁷⁸ Busch, 404.

⁷⁹ The National Archives of the UK, FO 602/16/243. The file starting a series of letters on the subject of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rashid and his motives in the region.

⁸⁰ “Porte” is a shorthand for the Sublime Porte, a term originally used by the French to describe the Ottoman central government. Similar to the use of Moscow or London to refer to Russian and British policy, the Porte represents the gate outside of Topkapi Palace from which official delegations met and policy was implemented. By this time, official policy was made in a separate office building. Similarly, after the 1908 revolution policy was made again elsewhere. However, the “Porte” was still used as shorthand for Ottoman foreign diplomacy and policy among the Western powers

arms in the region. Secondly, Muhammad bin Abdullah's offer of protecting Ottoman railways could have made the British more uneasy in supporting 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rashid, given the perceived threat of Ottoman rails in the Gulf at the time. The subject of Ottoman railways in relation to the Persian Gulf and Kuwait is a subject I will expand upon later on in this chapter.

Britain generally had European cooperation when enforcing arms traffic control. However, the French were the main exception, as international arms dealing was exceedingly profitable for the French.⁸¹ French and British influence in Muscat was contested at the turn of the century, and the arms trade in Muscat was likewise a center for international dealings across the wider Indian Ocean area. French influence in Muscat and French arms trading could be felt across the Gulf, however. In January of 1904, as described in a brief report from the Gulf Residency, three Frenchmen entered Kuwait with the intention of trading arms in the region. Mubarak found out, and forced them to leave Kuwait, upholding the deal he made with the British.⁸² The Frenchmen left without much incident, but their movement into Kuwait shows the reach of French arms traders at the time. The report only mentions the three men as French arms merchants, with no governmental or military connection. It is highly unlikely they would have a political patronage, but the access that French citizens had to arms trading in the Persian Gulf and wider Indian Ocean highlights the reach of firearm trading.

In 1902, an agreement was reached between Persian and British agents on each side of the Persian/Raj border to facilitate better control over arms smuggling. However, despite this, by as late as 1907 over 100 Afghans were reported in Muscat buying weapons to ship to the frontier, with an estimated 200 rifles a week crossing into Makran in British India along the far

⁸¹ Chew, 118.

⁸² The National Archives of the UK, FO 602/16/355. A brief report to the Gulf Residency about the three Frenchmen, their plans to sell arms in Kuwait, and Mubarak's expulsion of them.

eastern Persian side of the Gulf.⁸³ British fears of arms within the region as a threat to their greater colonial project were very real. British political action within Kuwait shows an expansion of already present imperial infrastructure in order to try and bring the Persian Gulf under greater tutelage. Interest in Kuwait as part of the Gulf was shaped by British strategic needs.

Communication and Connecting the Globe

Another important aspect of British imperial infrastructure at this time was the telegram and post office as an impetus for control. Both are centers of communication and directly tie the centers of imperial control to the outward areas, and are therefore symbols of governance and influence beyond their mere practical use within the global empire. The first direct use of telegraph lines by the British in the Persian Gulf was in 1862, connecting Fao south of Basra with Gwadar in Makran. After the subsequent linking of Fao and Baghdad by telegraph lines in 1864, India and London were linked directly by wire through the Persian Gulf.⁸⁴ This connection was, argues Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, directly followed by strengthening present trade routes and, therefore, increasing the supply and demand of arm dealing in the region, specifically between Arab and Northwestern/Afghani polities.⁸⁵ The opening of these communication ways, while not creating the illegal arms business in the region, influenced the growth of this trade in a way that was most likely unforeseeable to British officials at the time, allowing for greater communication between participants in the trade.

Based on treaty, a post office was allowed to be established in Kuwait on February 28, 1904.⁸⁶ The post office itself was not established until 1915 during World War I after the British

⁸³ Busch, 278.

⁸⁴ Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 107.

⁸⁵ Choudhury, 115.

⁸⁶ The British Library, IOR/R/15/1/739/4. The same collection of Kuwaiti treaties referenced earlier.

occupation of Fao, but the agreement is significant because it shows the expansion of British communication and governmental facilities into Kuwait. Persian Gulf resident Sir Percy Cox (1904-1913) heard a rumor in October of 1905 that the Ottomans were allowed by Mubarak to build a post office in Kuwait.⁸⁷ Mubarak was immediately questioned and denied such an agreement, which was part of a larger interview with Mubarak over his rumored growing anti-British sentiment in the Gulf. As seen by the Residency's rapid response to such rumors and their questioning of Mubarak on the post office specifically, Cox viewed a post office as important and a representation of governmental control in a region, beyond the mere practical effects of communication. A telegram office was established later in July of 1912⁸⁸ and finished during the war in 1915.

The post office built in 1915 under the Raj was discussed in communications between New Delhi and London throughout February of that year. In these communications, then Secretary of State of India First Marquess of Crewe (1910-1915) advised that it is undesirable to take any action which may "appear to affect the status of Kuwait."⁸⁹ However, the officials of the foreign office in London agreed it best to follow the Indian Government's orders in establishing a post office. In a secret dispatch from the Kuwait post office in late January of that year Foreign Secretary of India Sir Percy Cox, promoted from his former role of Gulf Resident, notes that Sheikh Mubarak desired the establishment of a regular post office from India that used Imperial penny postage rates, as an expansion of the post office established for the war effort. Mubarak

⁸⁷ The National Archives of the UK, FO 602/16/551. Part of an interview with Mubarak as to determine his opinion of the British and disprove many supposed rumors on his anti-British sentiment that passed through the Gulf at this time.

⁸⁸ The British Library, IOR/R/15/1/739/13.

⁸⁹ National Archives of the UK, FO 371/2476/13247. The emphasis on "status" appears as it did in the dispatch between First Marquess of Crewe and the Foreign Office in London. Even when at war with the Ottoman Empire, the British were wary of upsetting the current political status of Kuwait too much.

wanted to be included in the larger British communication channels, not just those used for the strategy of war.

Within this same dispatch, Cox desired decreasing the cost rate of telegrams in Kuwait to similar rates as those sent from other offices in the Persian Gulf.⁹⁰ Cox's commentary is important because he expands the role of Kuwait within the already established British communication system of India and the Gulf, as well as highlighting Mubarak's desire for further British infrastructure. While I cannot state Mubarak's specific reasoning for the desired post office, Cox and others interpreted it as a growing relationship as part of the British imperial system. British expansion of communication as a way to make its empire more cohesive came on the backs of several treaties and offices established from Egypt to India with the goal of securing and solidifying its colonial enterprise. Establishing offices in the Gulf, and specifically in Kuwait, was of strategic importance to the Empire and a step in global communication security.

Railways as Weapons of Empire

The possibility that Kuwait would become the Persian Gulf terminus for the Baghdad Railway was a major issue behind British involvement in Kuwait. The Baghdad Railway was the planned eastern extension to the Anatolian Railway that reached from Konya to Baghdad, connecting the city to Istanbul. The railway is popularly brought up in connection to Berlin, as its construction would likewise span rail connection from Baghdad to Berlin and other European cities. The railway was constructed in large part with German engineers and financed mainly by the Deutsche Bank through the Anatolian Railway Company. Its construction was a source of

⁹⁰ National Archives of the UK, FO 371/2476/13247. Cox appears to have used the post office in Kuwait for this dispatch, which shows the rapid expansion the British had when establishing the enterprise.

international controversy at the time, given the amount of influence the rail would give Germany in the Ottoman political structure. From the Gulf Residency perspective, the main source of controversy was the location of the eventual terminus for the railway. The two possibilities were either Basra or Kuwait, and the choice would have ramifications as to the status of Kuwait and the reach of Ottoman and German authority in the Persian Gulf. If Kuwait was independent, or semi-independent, could the Porte build a railway there? If the Porte built the railway in Kuwait, would this be an act of aggression against an outside polity or building within a legally subordinate political entity? Kuwait becoming the possible Persian Gulf terminus for the Baghdad Railway was the driving issue behind British fear of the railway.

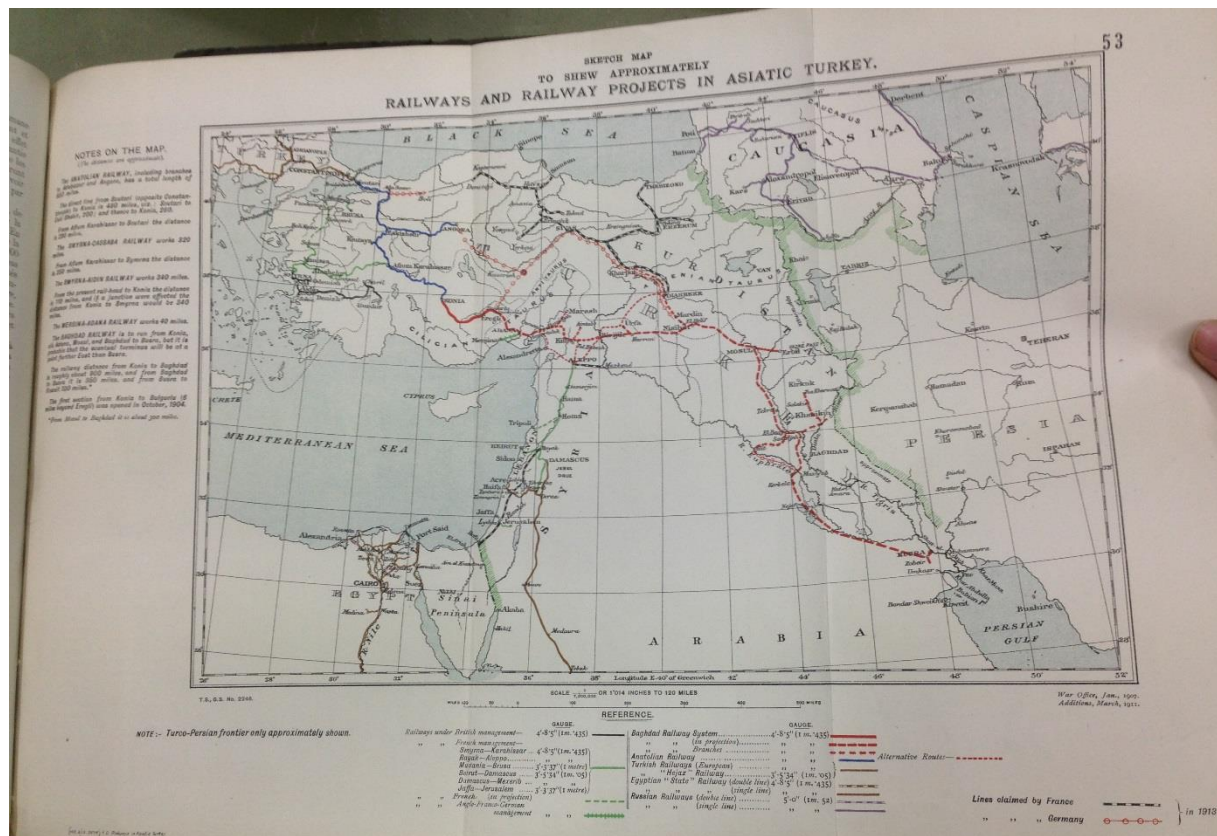


Figure 1, Map of railways in the Ottoman Empire by 1913. The planned Baghdad Railway is the dotted red line, as it was still under planning and under construction at this time.

Ottoman railways were historically an international affair. They have, in large part, been built and operated with foreign capital. As seen above (*Figure 1*⁹¹) many railways within the Ottoman Empire were constructed and managed by foreign nations or a mixture of Ottomans and foreigners. The railway is also an extension of state power and control of the center. To quote Marian Aguiar, while she was referring to the British Empire in India, “the railway might have been funded by foreign investors, but it was built because of the unprecedented state guarantee for those speculative loans.”⁹² Foreign investment was the primary source of capital for the construction of Ottoman railways, with only three rails financed in-part or entirely by the Ottoman Empire: the Mudanya-Bursa line, the Haifa-Daraa line, and the Hejaz Railway.⁹³ The Mudanya-Bursa line and the Haifa-Daraa line were financed in part by other nations, and were created to connect inland cities of production with coastal cities of trade. The Hejaz railway was considered a special project and was funded by both the Ottoman government and individual grants from patrons around the world, but mostly from India. The Hejaz railway (brown in *Figure 1*) was constructed to connect Medina with Damascus. As such, it was greatly advantageous for the annual pilgrimage population, as the numbers of pilgrims who were able to come to Mecca and Medina began to grow globally from international connections such as British steamships. The Anatolian Railway (blue in *Figure 1*) was constructed largely from

⁹¹ The National Archives of the UK, FO 424/239/53. A folder on further (somewhat miscellaneous) affairs of “Asiatic Turkey” between July and September 1913. This map of Turkish rails has been used throughout British and Residency correspondence when regarding Turkish rails. In this specific case (the best photo I had of the map), the map was referenced and used within the folder, however, the main conversation of the various letters and telegrams in this section of the folder was not centered on Turkish rails and the map was merely referenced and included within the folder when the letters were collected.

⁹² Aguiar, 7.

⁹³ Bülent Bilmez, “European Investments in the Ottoman Railways, 1850-1914,” in *Across the Borders: Financing the World's Railways in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Ralf Roth and Günter Dinhl, 183-206. (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 188.

German efforts and was managed by Germans, despite the first parts (the Haydarpasa-Izmit line) being constructed through a French company and sold in 1880 to a British consortium.⁹⁴ Eventually concessions for the railway overall fell into German hands, with plans to expand this railway to connect Syria and Mesopotamia to Istanbul via rail.

These railways, constructed by foreign capital, were part of a global trend of European investment in foreign infrastructure. This did not overall change production or where production went within the Ottoman Empire, but rather heightened the relationship between already present centers of production and centers of trade.⁹⁵ Likewise, railways were seen by many Ottoman reformers and European investors alike as signs of modernity, and railways were a path through which the Ottoman government could modernize their economy. The percentage of foreign investment given to physical infrastructure rose between 1890 and 1914 sharply, while all other sectors decreased. Between 1890 and 1914, the percentage of foreign investment in Ottoman railways rose from 41.1% to 63.1%, and investment in harbors rose from 2.3% to 4.3%. There is a noticeable shift towards infrastructure over industry, as investment in industry dropped from 10% to 5.3%, while mining and banking dropped as well.⁹⁶ To use Selim Deringil's analysis of the late Ottoman Empire's infrastructural projects,⁹⁷ the Arabian lands in the late stages of the empire were treated as a semi-colonial periphery and rails built to them were designed for resource extraction firstly and travel secondly. A similar trend can be found in British India, where rails funded by international investment are designed to efficiently use resources and

⁹⁴ Ibid, 194.

⁹⁵ Bilmez, 198.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 199.

⁹⁷ Selim Deringil, "“They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery”: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003) : 332. Deringil views that the Ottoman Empire, using “borrowed imperialism” as a survival technique in the late 19th/early 20th centuries, treated its Arab provinces as colonial subjects in a similar fashion to the British Raj patronage. While this can be debated as to its exact accuracy, I do somewhat agree with it overall and think the article's economic outlook is accurate.

connect areas of production to the coast. This view in the late Ottoman Empire on their non-Turkish lands as semi-periphery was probably spurred by then contemporary European imperial organization and racialized views of spreading civilization.

The Hejaz railway was built in part to ease pilgrimage to the cities Mecca and Medina, allowing a transnational movement of Muslims from the other global Muslim empires such as Britain, France, and Russia. But, like many railroads, the Hejaz railway was connecting the periphery to the center. Railways allow for increased communication, as well as increased control. Railways allow for the transportation of individuals and citizens within a region, but also the transportation of goods, troops, equipment, etc. As railways expand, so does a government's ability to control a region by allowing governmental enforcement (such as tax collection, census, military, etc.) to move more quickly and accurately through regions. The Hejaz railway, while helping pilgrimage, also worked to transport troops into the southern Arab regions, tying them more effectively to the center.

The British were very interested in the Hejaz Railway, and kept detailed log books on every station and its potential use, as well as the military capabilities. One of the most detailed of such logs was made in 1906. While the railway did not reach Medina until 1908 (well ahead of British estimations of a 1910 completion), by 1906 the railway had reached Mudawara from Damascus, a city about halfway between Ma'an and Tabuk⁹⁸ The British calculated that, upon completion, it would take about four and a half days to travel from Istanbul to Mecca, which was drastically shorter than previous over land transportation. This railway could connect Damascus, a city with a minimum constant standing garrison of 12,000 troops from the Ottoman Vth Army Corps, directly into Arabia.⁹⁹ In the war between Kuwait and 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rashid, Ottoman

⁹⁸ The National Archives of the UK, FO 371/156/317/10.

⁹⁹ Ibid, FO 371/156/317/8.

troop movements between Basra, Baghdad, and Ha'il were tracked vigorously, however, their movements were still measured by distances of several days between these relatively close cities. Through the Hejaz Railway and its connections to the Anatolian railway, troops could eventually move from Istanbul to the Hejaz in four and a half days. The British calculated that three battalions of 800 men each, plus all their needed supplies, could be transported from Damascus to Ma'an in a day. Using the German-financed Anatolian Railways to move troops, the Ottomans successfully mobilized against the 1897 Cretan Revolt in two weeks and won the 1897 Greco-Turkish War.¹⁰⁰ Such rapid movement of the Ottoman army was unprecedented in the region before the development of these railways, and it is these very military capabilities the British officers in the Persian Gulf Residency had in mind when thinking of the Baghdad Railway. The British studied the Hejaz railway, and while the railway benefitted the British Empire due to its transportation of British Muslims on Hajj, the British were also keenly aware of its possible military applications. A similar railway connecting Berlin to the Persian Gulf was viewed in the grand strategic game as a threat to British dominance in the region.

Was the Baghdad railway an actual threat to British interests? Whether or not a perceived threat, rivalry, or the conception of great power politics was valid or real is of little significance, because British, German, and Ottoman policy reflect perceptions of their realness. Kaiser Wilhelm envisioned a grand globally-connected German run system to counter British naval imperialism, which he would manifest through the Baghdad Railway.¹⁰¹ The use of railways to create a theoretical German-dominated Middle Eastern bloc to challenge the British sounds preposterous in scale as a logical countermove to British imperialism in the region, however, it

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan S. McMurry, *Distant Ties: Germany, the Ottoman Empire, and the Construction of the Baghdad Railway*, (Westport, Praeger Publishers, 2001), 29.

¹⁰¹ Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2010), 2.

was this grand vision conjured by the Kaiser when he visited Constantinople in 1889 and 1898. In the latter visit, Wilhelm proclaimed himself an eternal friend of Sultan Abdul Hamid II and his 300 million Muslim subjects. He counted the global Muslim population, which were by majority British subjects, as part of Abdul Hamid II's fold due to his title as caliph.¹⁰² The use of the sultan's title of caliph in the late Ottoman Empire has been the subject of much scholarly debate, however, it had historically been a source of alliance with Britain. Wilhelm's use of the title when addressing the Sultan shows a desire to appropriate and potentially weaponized the Ottoman caliphate, as eventually happened when the Ottomans declared jihad against the Entente Powers in World War I, which the Entente Powers blamed (erroneously) on German diplomatic intrigue.¹⁰³

However, the railway meant more to the Germans and the Ottomans than just troop movement. A railway from Baghdad to Constantinople, connecting formerly unconnected cities to each other, served to expand governmental and private economic interests. German railroad engineer Wilhelm von Pressel and eventually the Deutsche Bank came to view the railway as most effective when it was an entirely Ottoman enterprise, and feared politicization of the railway under German ambassador to the Porte Adolf Marschall von Bieberstein as counterproductive and possibly dangerous.¹⁰⁴ The Anatolian Railway Company made its successful bid for the railway between Konya and Baghdad in May of 1899, but did not formally agree until March 5, 1903 after a six month long survey of the land dubbed the Stemrich expedition¹⁰⁵ The concession included financial and mineral resource rights for the German

¹⁰² Ibid, 14.

¹⁰³ Mustafa Aksakal, "'Holy War Made in Germany'? Ottoman Origins of the 1914 Jihad." *War In History* 18, (2011) : 185.

¹⁰⁴ McMurray, 42.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 51.

financiers along the railway, however the railway was to be constructed under the Baghdad Railway Company. While the Baghdad Railway Company was a subsidiary of the Anatolian Railway Company, it operated under Ottoman law and was an Ottoman joint stock company.

The Berlin-Baghdad railway could have been viewed suspiciously but benignly by the British, if not given its terminus. The railway would reach from Konya to Baghdad, uniting Anatolian rails with eastern Arabia, but it would not stop there. The Ottomans sought a Persian Gulf port stop as the final terminus for the Baghdad railway, and while the Stemrich expedition approached Basra as its eventual terminus, the Ottomans also looked to Kuwait as a possible port. Basra at the time was much larger than Kuwait, having a population of around 935,000¹⁰⁶ compared to Kuwait's population of 35,000 by 1914.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, Basra has historically been connected to Baghdad and Ottoman holdings in Mesopotamia, while Kuwait's historical status as under Ottoman rule was more questionable, especially after the Status Quo Agreement

The Gulf Residency insisted they could not leave Mubarak to the Ottomans. Instead, they sought to 'help' Mubarak by using their position to alter any terminus for the Baghdad railway.¹⁰⁸ By 1911, British Ambassador to the Porte Louis Mallet agreed that Kuwait couldn't be abandoned, but the British could make use of Kuwait by trading power to give the British partial control over where the Baghdad Railway ended.¹⁰⁹ Marling suggests minimal Turkish sovereignty over Kuwait could be recognized in return for British ownership of the end of the Baghdad railway and the Ottomans dropping all claims south of Qatar.¹¹⁰ The Foreign Department agreed, adding specifications on limiting Kuwaiti port access to only the British and

¹⁰⁶ McMurray, 47.

¹⁰⁷ Busch, 32.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 22.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 65.

protecting Mubarak's domestic sovereignty.¹¹¹ All of this communication took place between January 4 and January 27, but no solid conclusion was reached between the branches of British foreign diplomacy and the Residency as to what deal should be offered. These propositions, which seemingly allow Kuwait as a possible port end for the Baghdad Railway, would only do so if the last sections of the railway and subsequent Kuwaiti port terminus would be entirely under British control, keeping the original plans of Kuwait as outside of a German or Ottoman run railway. While all proposed agreements stated that some form of Kuwaiti sovereignty was willing to be traded, Kuwaiti administrative autonomy under the Residency and a British monopoly on any port access was not up for bargaining.

By February of 1911 negotiations were under way with the Baghdad Railway Company and the Porte as to where the terminus should be, with the Ottomans reaching out to the British on the subject of Kuwait. The Ottoman Foreign Affairs Office agreed that only Ottoman land could be the terminus for the railway, and possibly desired to have an agreement made with Britain as to the future of Kuwait because the current status quo could not last.¹¹² In March the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs did reach out to the British and request an agreement be made on the status of Kuwait.¹¹³ I view this statement as the basis for the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention in which both nations agreed upon the status of Kuwait. British fear and diplomatic chatter in early 1911 brought the Ottoman Empire out of accepting a crumbling status quo in the Gulf and eventually led to agreement between the two nations as to the future of Kuwait. In Germany, contemporary newspapers such as *Frankfurter Zeitung* covered the Baghdad Railway in detail and colored Britain as an outside imperial power blackmailing the Ottoman Empire

¹¹¹ The National Archives of the UK, FO 371/1232/3968.

¹¹² The National Archives of the UK, FO 371/1232/141.

¹¹³ Ibid, 206.

through fraudulent territorial claims on Kuwait in order to have control over the last section of the railway.¹¹⁴ The ensuing diplomatic agreements were also a topic of discussion in Britain, and parliament debated the possible effect of the Baghdad Railway in British commerce on March 2. The section of rail leading to Baghdad would not be completed for many years, but debate over the possible British and Kuwaiti role in this section of rail made the Ottoman government confront the unstable and ill-defined relationship between itself and Kuwait.

The construction of infrastructure in the Gulf was a geopolitical move which actualized overall the imperial strategy. The British establishment of telegram offices, post offices, treaties on piracy, trade, and the movement of small arms were all ways through which the British manifested their presence in the Persian Gulf. The furthering of this infrastructure to Kuwait tied Kuwait into the wider British strategic context. Likewise, railways in the Ottoman Empire were seen as a way for both Europeans and Ottomans to expand influence from the center to the periphery. The Ottoman and British difference in opinion over Kuwait and the terminus for the Baghdad Railway in the 1900's would lead to the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention. In an era of increased international presence in the Persian Gulf, the Convention was made to secure the Persian Gulf as a British dominated waterway.

¹¹⁴ The National Archives of the UK, FO 371/1232/272. There was a long article published by the Frankfurter Zeitung on March 2, 1911 which detailed a German perspective of the deal being crafted between the Ottomans and the British. Needless to say, the article was very damning of the British.

Chapter Three: A Dotted Green Line

Ottoman Grand Vizier Ibrahim Hakki Pasha, at the end of 1910 negotiations with Britain on international funding and banking, pointed out that Kuwait was at the root of Turkish suspicion towards British actions in the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia. He viewed British actions from their 1899 treaty with Mubarak al-Sabah onwards as destabilizing Kuwait and turning the city into a center for arms smuggling in the Persian Gulf. And, while Hakki Pasha knew Britain acted in Kuwait to prevent the city from falling under the control of other powers, this naturally includes the Ottoman Empire and so must be viewed as an act taken against the Ottoman government. Finally, Hakki Pasha stated that the Baghdad Railway with German help must be allowed to be built to Baghdad, but beyond that station the future of the railway was uncertain.¹¹⁵ British ambassador Louis Mallet used this statement as evidence that Kuwait was a most valuable asset in bargaining on the location of the terminus for the Baghdad Railway and the British should “be most cautious in what we say to the Turks.”¹¹⁶ The Residency claimed Kuwait as essential for their security and economy within the Persian Gulf, and so no terminus to the Baghdad Railway could be built there.¹¹⁷ Kuwait’s location as the possible terminus for the Baghdad Railway was the cause in forming the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention.

The 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention, signed but not ratified on July 29, 1913, was the culmination of British policy within the Persian Gulf for the previous two decades. To speak of British imperialism in the Middle East in a modern context draws up images of Iraq, Palestine, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and so forth. However, before any of these events, there was British

¹¹⁵ The National Archives of the UK, FO 371/1232/20. This is a British Officer’s reporting of a conversation with Hakki Pasha on the subject of international banking and funding Ottoman railways, while the conversation is quickly detoured into the subject of Kuwait and the Baghdad Railway.

¹¹⁶ John C. Wilkinson, *Arabia’s Frontier* (London, I.B. Tauris, 1993), 87.

¹¹⁷ Murat Ozyuksel, *The Berlin-Baghdad Railway and the Ottoman Empire*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 184.

diplomacy in the Gulf. Kuwait's coming autonomy and eventual boundary drawing under the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention is a direct result of British and Raj anxiety towards the Baghdad Railway. Whether British and Ottoman officials were aware of it or not, Kuwait and all subsequent issues raised by the British on the subject had become reflective of British ambitions in the Gulf overall. While the Porte had no *de facto* rule within or over Kuwait, the British sought *de jure* recognition of their Kuwaiti rule in the 1913 Convention

Buildup to the 1913 Convention

The dichotomy between British and Ottoman interests was not generally seen as contradictory by British officials. As late as July of 1913 telegrams from ambassador Mallet to the Ottomans stated that it was the British mission in the Gulf to uphold Ottoman territorial integrity.¹¹⁸ Here Mallet is referring to a specific incident in which British officers had been fraternizing with local Arab leaders, namely Ibn Saud. Mallet warned officials in the Gulf from Bushire that all British officials should cease such friendly relations with groups the British Government does not have formal treaty relations with, and that British goals in the region were to uphold Turkish sovereignty. Such views, while not universal within British government and continuing a paternalistic view of the Porte's ability to retain its own territory, does illustrate the notion held among some British officials and politicians that strategic goals can be met without completely crumbling relations with the Ottoman government. There is not one British policy in the Middle East at this time, as London, the Indian Government, and the Residency can each have differing interests over Ottoman territory and the status of Kuwait.¹¹⁹ So, while London officials claim to support Ottoman territorial and governmental integrity, even with sincerity,

¹¹⁸ The National Archives of the UK, FO 424/239/9/16.

¹¹⁹ Wilkinson, 14.

these claims should be viewed as only part of the picture due to Kuwait's relationship with the British Raj's Gulf Residency.

Regardless of which status quo British officials worked to uphold, it was not to last. With hindsight, we can look at all British dealings in the Persian Gulf throughout the 1900's and 1910's with the knowledge that World War I was right around the corner. The post-war period is well known for its effects on the Middle East and subsequent nations formed during or after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1923. The Anglo-Ottoman Convention was important in finalizing British strategy in the region before the outbreak of war. Likewise, British influence in the Gulf greatly helped the war effort, acting as a staging ground for the invasion of Mesopotamia by Indian troops.

The need for the 1913 Convention came from failure of previous agreements on Kuwait to make a serious or lasting settlement on Kuwait's status as a territorial entity. For example, the Status Quo Agreement limited Ottoman and British military influence over Kuwait by prohibiting either nation to place troops in the city.¹²⁰ It was this agreement that began the international and legal effort by the Residency and Mubarak of eroding the Porte's *de jure* claims to reflect the *de facto* reality of Mubarak's relative freedom from Ottoman control as a part of the larger British sphere. The agreement's name defines its sole use: to uphold the status quo. Britain and the Porte agreed to uphold the state of affairs in Kuwait as they existed in 1901, however leaving any questions of legal sovereignty largely unanswered.¹²¹ The status quo of the time was the absence of Ottoman presence within Kuwait and Kuwaiti closeness to the Residency through Mubarak. Gulf Resident Colonel Kemball stated that HMG had no intent of interfering with

¹²⁰ Frederick F. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf : the Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 122.

¹²¹ The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/42/8.

Kuwait's relationship with the Sultan "as it exists."¹²² As we have seen, this authority was lacking in actual or physical abilities, as the British and Mubarak viewed the Ottoman government as outside of Kuwait. Therefore, any status quo the Ottomans agreed to at the time would result in the entrenched distancing of Kuwait from the Ottoman political sphere as a whole. The situation in 1901 is important to reiterate because this process was mirrored and made manifest again by the 1913 Convention, with similar consequences.

Anscombe states that the 1901 status quo agreement came from the Porte's preoccupation with other territorial and economic issues, from troubles with Ottoman authority in Macedonia and Yemen to budget problems. Then, argues Anscombe, the issue of Kuwait was viewed as small, distant, and something that could be decided upon later.¹²³ Similarly, from 1908 to 1911, European powers conquered more territories of the Ottoman Empire. In July of 1908, the Young Turk revolution forced a return to the constitution nullified by Sultan Abdul Hamid II and opened up multi-party politics, ushering in the Committee of Union and Progress as a leading political group in Ottoman governance. Later in 1908, Bulgaria declared independence and other Balkan lands were annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In March of 1909, a coup in the Empire forced Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the great architect of Ottoman foreign policy for the previous quarter century, to abdicate. The coup placed Mehmed V on the throne. Shortly afterwards, Italy invaded Ottoman Libya in 1911, with the Ottomans losing their last African territory.¹²⁴ The Ottomans then faltered on their claim over Kuwait, as they were supported by no other powers.¹²⁵ As a partial result of this, negotiations for the Anglo-Ottoman Convention

¹²² The British Library, IOR R/15/1/725/174.

¹²³ Anscombe, 123.

¹²⁴ Selim Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003) : 334.

¹²⁵ Ben J Slot, *Kuwait: The Growth of a Historical Identity*, (London, Arabian Publishing, 2003), 24. According to Slot's research,

seriously began in 1911. The British desired a settlement on the status of Kuwait to solidify their goal that no Persian Gulf terminus for the Baghdad Railroad would be placed in Kuwait unless it was under British control, as well as legitimize to the Ottomans the Residency's relations with Kuwait. In February of that year, the Turkish minister of foreign affairs Rifaat Pasha did reach out to the British and request an agreement be made on the status of Kuwait.¹²⁶ Rifaat Pasha stated that the Porte desired a terminus for the railway to be built on Turkish territory, so an agreement on the status of Kuwait must be made. While the Ottomans did not renounce any legal claims of Kuwait as late as 1912, further agreements with the British could secure the Porte's borders while helping them deal with larger threats to their rule in the Nejd and Persian Gulf at large.¹²⁷

Previous agreements between the Porte, London, and Kuwait were still in effect up until the signing of the 1913 agreement, but by the 1910s it was clear that Kuwait was no longer a part of the Ottoman sphere of influence, if it ever seriously was past 1901 and the Status Quo Agreement. However, this does not mean Kuwait was absent from any Ottoman affairs in this period. After the incidents that led to the 1901 Status Quo agreement, Mubarak was dissatisfied with active Ottoman presence in Kuwait. By 1905 Mubarak publically avowed his preference for Britain over the Porte.¹²⁸ However, by this time period Mubarak ceased outwardly involving himself in the affairs of the Nejd and had stopped warring with other local polities. Likewise, the property disputes Mubarak held with the Ottoman legalities of Basra on the rents and income from his properties in Mesopotamia flared off and on between 1902 and 1906. Mubarak gained

¹²⁶ The National Archives of the UK, FO 371/1232/3968/141. From a Sir G. Lowther to a Sir Edward Grey, detailing his conversation with the Turkish Minister on the Baghdad Railway and the desire on the Porte's behalf to finalize in agreement the status of Kuwait so that the railway can be confirmed to be built with a terminus on the Gulf that was also Turkish territory.

¹²⁷ Slot, 26.

¹²⁸ Anscombe, 139.

£6,000 a year from his property in Fao alone in 1901, and these properties were deemed lucrative and important by the Gulf Residency and Mubarak. However, Ottoman legal and diplomatic red tape tied up Mubarak's income due to the tenuous relationship between Kuwait and Baghdad at this time.¹²⁹ Mubarak blamed graft, the incompetence of Ottoman officials, and conspiracy against him as to why his rents and funds were withheld throughout this time. Much is written on these property disputes within British telegrams and communications, however the knowledge that they happened then eventually ceased is sufficient to point towards a lukewarm relationship between Mubarak and the Porte. Mubarak financially supported the construction of the Hejaz Railway, as well as financing the construction of a road between Basra and 'Ashar in 1909. In 1911 and 1912 he made additional contributions towards the Ottoman military in the Balkan Wars and the war against Italy. After the 1908 revolution and the forced abdication of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the new government referred to him as early as 1911 as the "Ruler of Kuwait" instead of the "*Kaymakam* of Kuwait."¹³⁰ This change in title could be in part due to the realities of British influence within Kuwait, or even changes in the Ottoman government after the 1908 revolution and 1909 coup. While I cannot give a reason as to why this change in title occurred, the wording shows a distinct change in the Porte's view of Mubarak and Kuwait's place within the empire.

British officials were not universal in their view of Kuwait as rightly under British influence, but they were in agreement as to the commercial significance of an agreement and the importance of the Baghdad Railway in determining any agreement. Beyond simply assuring

¹²⁹ The National Archives of the UK, FO 602/19/8. Throughout files dated from 1899 to 1906 there are several episodes in which Mubarak's property in Basra and Fao, with which he would gain duties, income, rent, etc. These situations arose from time to time as Mubarak's property would be seized or withheld, or on occasions where he claimed it was seized or withheld, and they were eventually mediated by the British or Mubarak and his sons.

¹³⁰ Ansecombe, 139.

Kuwait autonomy, the British desired commercial rights within the Baghdad Railway and Southern Mesopotamia. Parliamentary debates from March 8 of 1911, held in the Secret Series, show Leader of the Opposition Arthur Balfour (of Balfour Declaration fame) arguing for the importance of Kuwait within the larger system of British economic and trading cities throughout the Indian ocean, stating the “continuation of the [Baghdad] railway to the Persian Gulf is also a commercial subject.”¹³¹ He claimed that the status quo of trade and development within the Gulf was created by Britain and Britain wished to keep it, which required that the treaties with Mubarak keeping Kuwait outside of the Ottoman sphere of direct influence. He continued that Britain’s role in the Gulf, if a deal is not made solidifying Kuwait’s position, would worsen. The continuation of the Baghdad Railway, while tied to commercial adventures, is still Ottoman and German expansion into the Persian Gulf at direct threat to the status of Kuwait.

Balfour argued that if others wish to upend this status quo, then Britain must act to preserve their commercial and political rights. I assume by “others” Balfour is blaming the Ottoman and German railroad plans as disturbing this supposedly pro-British economic status quo. Additionally, Balfour connected this economic status quo to further reducing the rampant gun running in the Gulf. In this speech, Balfour supported the British buildup of economic and political infrastructure described in the previous chapter and insisted whole heartedly that opposition to the Baghdad Railway’s terminus on the Gulf was the path through which British foreign policy should support their prior agreements with Kuwait and their current economic status. A Member of Parliament in a subsequent meeting stated that trade from India across Baghdad had been declining over the last decade, and a Baghdad Railway without British control

¹³¹ The National Archives of the UK, FO 371/1232/319/2. This document holds two parliamentary debates on the subject of the Persian Gulf and the Baghdad Railway. While the discussion is wide ranging in topics, it centers on the commercial importance of the Baghdad railway and maintaining British economic dominance in the region.

or input would surely cause the ruin of British trade in the region.¹³² The 1913 Convention was supported by London based on strategic and economic grounds, wishing to create and environment favorable for British interests by assuring Kuwaiti autonomy separate from the Ottoman Empire and any German built Baghdad Railway terminus.

Not all agreed with Mr. Balfour and establishment British foreign policy in the Gulf, with one Member of Parliament stating that for Britain to claim railroad rights in Southern Mesopotamia based on treaties in Kuwait was paramount to Britain claiming rights to Spanish railroads based on Gibraltar.¹³³ While dissenting voices like these are important to understanding the debates around this topic in Britain, the majority opinion favored the security of British interests in the Gulf through protection of British infrastructure and Kuwait. In negotiations with the Ottomans, the British pressed for Ottoman recognition of British infrastructural actions in the Gulf such as buoying, setting up light towers, and security of shipping.¹³⁴ These actions had been going on for quite some time and helped secure British trading in the Gulf. Nonetheless, the British still sought official recognition of these actions. The Residency stated that the main British ship in the Gulf, the small gunboat HMS *Sphinx*, was in need of support from larger vessels to carry out the diplomatic and military exercises needed to secure British interests from pirates, gun-runners, etc.¹³⁵ Of course, it seems natural for the Residency to argue the dire need of their branch of government to possess further weaponized ships in the region. But, these were the main concerns from London with regard to any forthcoming agreement on Kuwait with the Ottomans. Negotiations for the agreement were made, from the British perspective, almost

¹³² The National Archives of the UK, FO 371/1232/326/15. This is a collection of Parliamentary debates from the above ones, after the above debates were postponed.

¹³³ The National Archives of the UK, FO 371/1232/319.

¹³⁴ Ozyuksel, 184.

¹³⁵ The National Archives of the UK, FO 371/1232/321/6. This is from the same document as the Parliamentary debates.

entirely with strategic needs in mind. The British sought to further their infrastructure within the Gulf and secure the *de facto* autonomy of Kuwait, both of which acted in direct opposition to the establishment of Kuwait as the Baghdad Railway's terminus.

The Anglo-Ottoman Convention



Figure 2 The Map of Kuwait's territorial boundaries after the signing of the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ The National Archives of the UK, FO 424/239/7-8. This is a fold out map located between page numbers 7 and 8.

The agreement, signed on July 29, 1913, outlines the status of Kuwait, as well as further economic and political issues between the British and the Ottomans.¹³⁷ The agreement formalizes the border between The Ottoman Empire and Persia, the Ottomans and Kuwait, and demarcates zones of control within Arabia itself. As shown above (*Figure 2*), it outlined the area of Kuwait that would be independent from direct Ottoman rule, while mostly remaining a separate autonomous region within the Empire. The line in red outlines areas directly under the rule of Mubarak al-Sabah with a radius of 40 miles, while the area outlined in green shows the boundaries within which tribes would pay fealty to Mubarak with a radius of 140 miles.

The agreement also dealt with the boundaries of Bahrain and Qatar with the so called Blue Line, and the British colony in Aden (which was added in March of 1914) with the Violet Line. The agreement demarcated the areas of influence for the British and the Ottomans, with all land south of a line drawn from north of Qatar to Aden placed under *de jure* British influence, while all land north save Kuwait was placed under direct Ottoman jurisdiction.

The agreement was not ratified due to conflicting desires and interpretations on Mesopotamian oil concessions and rights to navigation on Shatt al-‘Arab river, which Secretary of Foreign Affairs Edward Grey believed needed approval from the major powers. The Shatt al-‘Arab is the river formed by the meeting of the Tigris and Euphrates river at the town of al-Qurnah, flowing southward through Basra and then into the Persian Gulf. It is the main waterway through which the Persian Gulf was reached from Basra and as such control and access of it is important for economic and strategic regions. The true role of oil within the region was not at its zenith yet, and it was the conventions on the Baghdad Railway and the Shatt al-‘Arab that postponed ratification three times until March 1914. While all points were debated

¹³⁷ The National Archives of the UK, FO 371/1817/35336.

throughout the negotiation process, by its signing in 1913 the following commercial rights were part of the agreement. The Convention laid out an open door policy in the Shatt al-‘Arab, with boats from all nationalities trading along the river levied the same flat tax. The commission to run the taxation and regulation along the Shatt al-‘Arab would be Ottoman run with two members, but one British citizen chosen by the Porte would be on the commission. Likewise, two British citizens were to eventually be added to the Baghdad Railway Company’s board of directors, and any future line on the Baghdad railway from Basra to the Gulf could not be constructed by the Ottomans without British consent.¹³⁸ The British were permitted to add three steamships to their already present fleet in the Shatt al-‘Arab, alleviating some concerns over security of British trade and interests in the river, and British infrastructural projects such as light towers and quarantine areas were permitted.¹³⁹ From this deal, British commercial rights and infrastructural projects that protected these rights within the Gulf were secured. Likewise, by having an official say in any future Baghdad Railway project, Britain had control over where the Terminus for a Baghdad railway would be.

Regional and global oil companies, such as the Anglo-Persian Oil Company established in 1908 (APOC was a precursor to what would become the modern BP Company) and the Anglo-Saxon Petroleum Company (ASPC was owned by Shell) were crafting and taking new oil concessions in the region as well. The border between Persia and the Ottoman Empire was clearly demarcated in the Convention, which was heavily pushed by Britain to allow oil rights deals to be made with Persia.¹⁴⁰ While shares on any future Turkish Petroleum Company that would explore and find oil in the Ottoman Empire were agreed upon, with 50% to APOC, 25%

¹³⁸ Ozyuksel 192.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 190.

¹⁴⁰ Ozyuksel, 190.

to ASPC, and 25% to the Deutsche Bank, the ratification of the Convention was still postponed.¹⁴¹ However, in the meantime APOC had made oil exploration and concession deals with Kuwait, agreed upon on October 27, 1913, in which Mubarak and Gulf Resident Sir. Percy Cox agreed that if oil was found Mubarak would not give concessions to anyone but an official appointed by the British government.¹⁴² While oil in the region is a very large and historically vibrant issue now, at the time it was not fully known if these areas were oil rich or not. Regardless, the signing of this agreement does mark an eventual economic shift in the region as oil concessions to the major oil companies were made within this document.

Based on the 1903 charter, the Baghdad Railway Company had rights for mineral extraction up to twenty kilometers on each side of the rail,¹⁴³ giving German oil companies and the Deutsche Bank in particular a very strong claim on oil rights in the area. Keeping this in mind, looking retroactively at British actions on limiting German activity along the Persian Gulf in relation to the Baghdad Railway can be interpreted as securing oil rights for British or non-German companies. While German and British oil companies were rivals in the region, in mid-1913 American Standard Oil began sending forays to Istanbul with the intent of gaining access to oil concessions in Mesopotamia. This provoked cooperation, and by 1914, British ambassador Mallet was told of intent to issue Mesopotamian oil concessions to the Turkish petroleum Company.¹⁴⁴ However, much like the 1913 Convention, this message of intent was never formally signed before the outbreak of war. And, again similar to 1913 Convention, it was used regardless in international law as a basis for settling post-war oil rights in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf.

¹⁴¹ Wilkinson, 97.

¹⁴² The British Library, IOR/R/15/1/739/14.

¹⁴³ Ozyuksel 210.

¹⁴⁴ Ozyuksel, 214.

The ratification of the agreement was further delayed due to continued disagreements on navigation within the Shatt al-‘Arab, but also the Ottoman government’s role within the negotiation process. The Porte refused to sign an agreement that did not address them as a free and open power that could make commercial agreements free from capitulation-based attachments.¹⁴⁵ While this was not respected by the British, there was support for such ratification among some British officials. However, between the expiration of the last ratification deadline in June 1914 and the desire for renewed ratification, the July Crisis was in full swing and war was beginning in Europe. The Anglo-Ottoman Convention was never ratified, but its effects on the status of Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Aden were very real. Aden’s Violet Line was established along mountainous and tribal lines before extending across the desert to join the Blue line, effectively cutting Arabia in half for zones of influence.

In the end, the agreement left Kuwait with direct control over the territory marked in red, along the small semi-circle. Within the inner circle the islands of Warba and Bubiyan were listed, which both the Gulf Residency and Mubarak argued for in negotiations. Throughout 1911 and 1912 Knox and Captain Shakespeare painstakingly searched for references that allowed Kuwait to lay effective claim over the islands.¹⁴⁶ The greater green line denoted an area through which the Ottomans could neither post garrisons nor make administrative changes. However, Kuwait was not listed as fully independent in the agreement. All words in the agreement relating to sovereignty and suzerainty were taken out over negotiations and Kuwait is referred to as an autonomous Qada’ of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴⁷ While on paper this appears to be a reversal of British policy, the Gulf Residency viewed this as a gain for Kuwaiti independence from the

¹⁴⁵ Wilkinson, 98.

¹⁴⁶ Terence Clark, Hugh Arbuthnott, Richard Muir, *British Embassies Around the Gulf, 1575-2005*, (Kent, Global Oriental LTD, 2008), 186.

¹⁴⁷ Busch, 337.

Porte.¹⁴⁸ Through negotiations, the agreement held that upon ratification an Ottoman agent, similar to the active British agents in the Gulf from the Residency, would be stationed in Kuwait. Mubarak, in poor health at the time of negotiation, was furious and believed the British had allowed this section of the treaty in exchange for railroad rights on the Shatt al-‘Arab.¹⁴⁹ Mubarak’s anger is understandable, as the agreements made in 1899 and subsequent ones outlined that Kuwait as a political entity would be free from foreign influence without British approval.¹⁵⁰ Mubarak was eventually persuaded by Shakespeare, but as Busch points out, “[Mubarak] had no real choice”, and the agreement was soon afterward signed.¹⁵¹ Looking back retrospectively, we can see that Mubarak never had to deal with an Ottoman agent due to the treaty never being ratified, however, this was a pressing concern of his at the time.

Modern scholars are unsure exactly how Kuwait and Mubarak came out of this arrangement. While Busch views Mubarak as gaining a fair amount of land in exchange for an Ottoman agent who never showed up, Arbuthnott views Mubarak as making a grand step forward and gaining greatly from the deal.¹⁵² Retrospectively, I lean that Mubarak gained greatly from the deal in the long run, carving out a form of autonomy for his city while dealing with a possible Ottoman agent at the time. Modern scholars have looked back to British agreements with Kuwait and the Ottoman Empire before the war as founding the modern autonomy and existence of the Gulf States as centralized nation states. However, there are many who are still critical of the role British policies in the Gulf played in shaping the region politically. These critiques tend to place emphasis on the legality (or lack thereof) of British agreements and the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 338.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 339.

¹⁵⁰ The British Library, IOR/R/15/1/7392.

¹⁵¹ Busch, 339.

¹⁵² Arbuthnott, 190.

lack of widely held belief in British agreements. Feroz Ahmad states that the “1899 agreement with Sheikh Mubarak, which later writers have come to see as the basis of Britain's position in Kuwait, was not taken seriously by the British themselves.”¹⁵³ Ahmad looks at the 1899 Anglo-Kuwaiti Bond which formalized relations between Kuwait and Britain as not legally binding, quoting Lord Curzon when he said that if the Porte desired, they could simply ignore the agreement.¹⁵⁴ For Ahmad this creates a pattern in which the British Residency pushed the Ottomans for territorial gains while not taking the overall strategy seriously, by which I mean with binding consequences. I agree with Ahmad in that this push for agreements between the British and the Ottomans, as well as the British and Mubarak, came mostly from the Residency. These agreements made in 1899 and 1901 were likewise created without overall care towards implementation. However, I view the emphasis on legality as the sole defining issue of British influence, instead of an aspect, is limiting both in scope and critique. International legal institutions are systems of interpretations, and while these institutions are often strong they have failed the Ottomans before in 1911 when Italy invaded Libya, during the Balkan wars, and even nearly a century prior with the independence of Greece. British organization within the Gulf was legally based, but also existed outside of legal constraints. While the 1899 Bond was not legally binding, it still led to the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention. The Convention was likewise never ratified, and yet is still viewed as the basis for modern Kuwaiti political autonomy. The essence of legality is part of British imperial organization, but critiquing British political patronage in the Persian Gulf on the basis of legality alone side steps issues of power, ethical rule, imperialism, etc. that Britain can be widely critiqued for.

¹⁵³ Feroz Ahmad, "A Note on the International Status of Kuwait before November 1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 1 (1992) : 184.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 183.

However, looking at the eventual signing of this agreement, we must understand the Ottoman point of view somewhat. While the Ottomans were debating British overtures for an agreement in early 1913, the Grand Vizier General Mahmud Shevket Pasha stated, on the topic of territorial loss, “We would be in conflict with England over two desert districts like Kuwait and Qatar. What benefits could we hope for from these unimportant lands. I decided it was better to leave Kuwait and Qatar to England and concentrate on the rich provinces of Iraq.”¹⁵⁵ This is a far cry from 1900 and 1901 when the British feared a possible Ottoman invasion of Kuwait and escalation of war over the status of Kuwait.

The 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention was the culmination of British policy in the Gulf, which centered on British economic and political gain by working to create a status quo which supported their system of imperial management. With the coming of the Baghdad Railway to the Persian Gulf, Britain needed to actualize the autonomy of Kuwait, so as to keep the railway from favorable harbor and secure British economic and strategic interests in the Gulf. By making the 1899 and 1901 agreements, Britain safeguarded Kuwaiti autonomy from Hai’ili or Ottoman intervention, allowing for infrastructure already present within the Gulf to expand into Kuwait. Control of arms trafficking, communication, and movement were all important aspects of British geopolitical strategy in the wider Indian Ocean area, and were expanded to Kuwait over time. Lastly, to prevent the Baghdad Railway from reaching the Persian Gulf, Britain materialized Kuwaiti autonomy as space from the Ottoman Empire, securing British strategic interests within the Gulf as a British space.

¹⁵⁵ Ahmad, 184.

Conclusion

While the British declared war on the Ottoman Empire on November 5th of 1914, British Indian troops had shipped out from the subcontinent on October 31st towards Fao. The British Indian troops occupied the island after a naval bombardment on November 6 and opening up the way towards further invasion in Mesopotamia to the north from the Shatt al-‘Arab.¹⁵⁶ This early occupation led to near complete British control of the Gulf throughout the War. Kuwait was an important staging ground for later invasions, as well as a communication hub for countering Ottoman or German smuggling and espionage. While Mubarak al-Sabah died in November of 1915, his son Jaber II al-Sabah inherited the throne and pledged loyalty to the British.¹⁵⁷ This pledge cemented both the longevity of British strategy in Kuwait, and the role Britain had played in the al-Sabah family’s hold on power. Kuwait’s role within the British Empire was soon overshadowed by British dealings in other Arab polities throughout the war and after. But, before Iraq and Palestine, Kuwait and the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention was a focal point of British strategy in the Middle East.

The 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention is important for the history of the Middle East of course, as it establishes the channels through which Kuwait evolved into a modern nation state. It is one of the last international agreements made by the Ottoman Empire before World War One and its subsequent collapse in 1923. It helped demarcate the boundaries that were later used for oil concessions, and tipped the economic balance of power within the region in favor of the wealthy oil states which were mostly former British protectorates. The Convention, in my opinion, is important and matters because it was the final culmination of twenty years of British

¹⁵⁶ Robert H. Lieshout, *Britain and the Arab Middle East*, (New York, I.B. Tauris, 2016), 17.

¹⁵⁷ The National archives of the UK, FO 371/2476/186055.

diplomacy in the Persian Gulf, and came on the edge of expanding the methods of British imperial order to Kuwait. The drive of securing Kuwait as an autonomous political entity, expanding already present imperial infrastructure into the city, and legitimizing British claims while safeguarding against the perceived threat of the Baghdad Railway's Persian Gulf terminus all lead to and were part of the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention.

The 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention, after all, is an odd piece of international history stemming from imperialism. It's a signed treaty that was never ratified before World War One. Its chief signatory besides Britain, the Ottoman Empire, collapsed before it could even be properly implemented. Yet several modern nation states like Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen can directly find their boundaries back to the wording of the Convention. Kuwait, Yemen, and Qatar in particular arguably exist in their current form because of its implementation regardless. The Convention, while actualizing Kuwaiti autonomy, also expanded already present Persian Gulf British infrastructure into Kuwait and beyond, allowing for oil concessions, navigation along the Shatt al-'Arab, and demarcating zones of influence within Arabia. The Convention was a culmination of British efforts over the past two decades to realize strategic and economic needs within the Gulf, securing against most threats immediate to British imperialism in the Gulf, from arms trafficking from Muscat to Afghanistan, to Germany having Persian Gulf port access.

My paper's title and beginning reference the Persian Gulf as a "British Lake." This stems from a 1902 telegram by a French diplomat, in which he refers to British actions taken within the Persian Gulf as treating it like a "British Lake." I find this quote accurate and important, not because it reflects the reality of the Persian Gulf, but because the Residency in the Persian Gulf was trying to control the water as a British possession, and acted in order to secure British

interests. The Anglo-Ottoman Convention could be viewed as filling out the “British Lake”, having added Kuwait to the fold of British polities within the region. As Busch stated when he studied British imperialism in the Persian Gulf, the key joke with referring to the Persian Gulf as a “British Lake” is that “the ‘Lake’ was no lake at all, but an international waterway of steadily increasing importance in an age of imperial rivalries...”¹⁵⁸ The 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention was the culmination of Residency’s diplomatic projects centered upon Kuwait to create a Persian Gulf status quo to benefit the British Empire, to create and implement policies in Kuwait that reflected the idea of a “British Lake.”

¹⁵⁸ Busch, 1.

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