

THE BRITISH THREAT TO THE OTTOMAN PRESENCE IN THE PERSIAN
GULF DURING THE ERA OF ABDŪLHAMĪD II AND THE RESPONSES
TOWARDS IT

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ABSTRACT

THE BRITISH THREAT TO THE OTTOMAN PRESENCE IN THE PERSIAN GULF DURING THE ERA OF ABDŪLHAMĪD II AND THE RESPONSES TOWARDS IT

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This thesis analyzes how the Ottomans attempted to survive under the intensified British threat in the Persian Gulf during the period of AbdŪlhamid II (1876-1909). British statesmen at that time and Western sources inspired by these political elites have argued that there was no British menace that aimed to undermine the Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf but that the Ottomans could not rule and hold the region. This thesis argues the contrary, that there was a formidable British threatening policy toward the Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf which aimed at keeping the Ottomans out of the region by various effective means, particularly by using local autonomous sheikhs who served as protégés in undermining the Ottoman administration in the Gulf region. Furthermore, this thesis argues that the Ottomans generated policy for the region that has formed in response to the British threat. In this regard, the Ottoman government generated several responses, which were also reforms for the local people and administration in the Gulf region, to avert the British threat; however the Ottomans faced the serious challenges of Britain and the autonomous sheikhs in the realization of these responses. In all, this study concludes that the Ottoman Empire did not control the region completely and effectively owing not to its incompetence, yet the British policy did not allow for the Ottoman presence in the region.

Keywords: Abdülhamid II, British Threat in the Persian Gulf, Autonomous Sheikhdoms, Ottoman View of the Persian Gulf, Ottoman Responses against the British Threat.

ÖZ

II. ABDÜLHAMİD DÖNEMİNDE BASRA KÖRFEZİ'NDEKİ OSMANLI VARLIĞINA YÖNELİK İNGİLİZ TEHDİDİ VE OSMANLI YANITI

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Bu tez, II. Abdülhamid (1876-1909) döneminde, Osmanlı Devleti'nin Basra Körfezi'ndeki varlığına yönelik İngiliz tehdidi altında bölgede var olma çabasını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Dönemin İngiliz devlet adamları ve onların ifadelerinden yararlanan batılı kaynaklar Osmanlı'nın bölgedeki varlığını hedef alan bir İngiliz politikasının olmadığını fakat Osmanlı'nın bölgeyi yönetmeyi ve elinde tutmayı beceremediğini öne süregelmektedirler. Ancak, bu tez, yerel liderleri Osmanlı'ya karşı kullanmak gibi çeşitli yollarla Osmanlı Devleti'ni bölgeden uzak tutmayı amaçlayan tehditkar bir İngiliz politikasının var olduğunu göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Dahası, bu çalışma Osmanlıların İngiliz tehdidi altında şekillenen ve onu bertaraf etmek üzerinde dönen bölge vizyonunu incelemektedir. Bu bağlamda, Osmanlılar aynı zamanda bölge halkı ve bölgedeki yönetimi için reform niteliği taşıyan yanıtları İngiliz tehdidine karşı geliştirseler de bu politikaların hayata geçmesinde İngiltere ve yerel liderlerden kaynaklanan ciddi sorunlarla karşı karşıya kalmışlardır. Kısacası, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun bölgeye tamamen hakim olup etkin bir şekilde yönetememesinin nedeni kendi beceriksizliği değil Osmanlı'yı bölgede istemeyen etkin İngiliz politikasıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: II. Abdülhamid, Basra Körfezi'ndeki İngiliz Tehdidi, Özerk Şeyhler, Osmanlı'nın Basra Körfezi Vizyonu, Tehdide Karşı Osmanlı Yanıtları.

To My Family

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INTRODUCTION

The Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf during the era of Abdülhamid II (1876 - 1909) was very much challenged by the significant influence of Great Britain in the region. The Ottoman government, with its provincial extensions, therefore, struggled against this strong British presence, which it perceived as a threat. Nevertheless, some western writers, such as Frederick Anscombe, deny the existence of the British threat and define the Ottoman perception of the British threat as “over-suspicion”, “misunderstanding”, “dealing with unlikely threats” and “an enemy that often was not there”. He maintains that there was not a real British threat in the Persian Gulf.¹ In this regard, this study begins with demonstrating that there was a concrete British threat in the Persian Gulf that undermined the Ottoman presence which impeded the consolidation of Ottoman rule, and that this was a very real threat which was especially taken very seriously during the reign of Abdülhamid II. In fact, the negative British foreign policy, as a whole, toward the Ottoman Empire with the beginning of the Abdülhamidian era and the specific British policy toward the Gulf in the same period threatened the interests of the Ottoman Empire in the Gulf. Ottoman policy makers and bureaucrats generated an outlook toward the region in view of this threat and attempted to develop policies that would impede the British threat and consolidate the Ottoman presence there. Nevertheless, they were not able to reach their objectives, as the British were already entrenched in the region and their activities and their close relations with the local sheikhs did not allow the Ottoman government to achieve its objective of the consolidating the Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf.

The British threat towards the Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf stemmed from the stimulus of protecting the supremacy of Britain from any power. At the beginning of the 19th century, Britain established its supremacy over the Gulf in order to protect its interests in India. For instance, it had been disturbed by piracy from the coasts of the Gulf, especially from the Pirate Coast, the present day United

¹ Anscombe, Frederick F., *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, pp. 2, 4, 70.

Arab Emirates, so it eliminated piracy by power and put the Pirate Coast under its protection. Afterward, the Pirate Coast began to be known as the Trucial Coast in the 19th century. Along with the Pirate Coast, Oman, Muscat² and Bahrain entered into “protection agreements” with Britain that stipulated not to alienate any part of their territory to another power and not to enter in relations with a third party without the consent of Britain. In sum, British policy, to protect its supremacy in the region, was based on excluding the incursion of other foreign powers, including the Ottoman Empire, from the region.

Nevertheless, British state elites considered that the Ottomans seemed to emerge as a threat to British supremacy. The Ottomans tried to reinforce its existence in the Persian Gulf in 1871, in line with the Tanzimat³ centralist regulations, with an aim of hindering further British incursions into the northern sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf, Iraq and Arabia. From the Ottoman perspective, in order to protect Iraq and Arabia, the Ottomans focused on the regions such as Kuwait, Hasa, Qatar and Necd which were targeted in the 1871 reform, and the entities, such as Bahrain, which had “protection agreements” with Britain. The British threat and subsequent Ottoman response will be analyzed in this study with an emphasis on the contested areas of Kuwait, Hasa, Qatar, Necd and Bahrain. The Ottomans desired to establish an Ottoman presence in these areas to counter the British threat. However, this attempt placed the Ottomans in confrontation with Britain which considered the presence of the Ottomans as a threat to its supremacy there. Thus, Britain strove to undermine the Ottoman influence in the region by applying several menacing means.

The abovementioned region which I will refer to as the Persian Gulf in this study, has been a key region in the last decades affecting international politics. It has faced four important wars since 1980: the Iran-Iraq War from 1980-1988, the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990 and subsequent intervention of the UN coalition led by the US in 1991 and lastly and notably the US led occupation of Iraq since 2003. In these international events, the aim of protecting the status-quo in the Persian Gulf against a rising regional power such as Iran or Iraq was influential. However,

² Muscat was a separate Emirate at that period.

³ Tanzimat was an Ottoman reform era from 1839 to 1876 in which the Ottoman state made many reforms for the establishment of the modern state apparatus by bureaucratization and centralization.

protecting and promoting the interests of the western Powers especially, the US, has been the most influential factor in resulting clashes in the Persian Gulf.

The existence of petroleum in the Gulf countries has been demonstrated as the most important reasons for the foreign interests in the region. The countries which have the most petroleum reserves of the world are in the Persian Gulf such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and Kuwait. Owing to the over-emphasis on petroleum, the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf seems to be largely ignored in the current analyses. The Persian Gulf is in a key location which ensures the influence over several strategic lands including the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Iran, India, the Indian subcontinent and Africa. Therefore, a Great Power does not want to leave the control of the Persian Gulf to a rival power or an emerging regional power. This existing policy is the legacy of the ages, but the period of the British supremacy was when the strategic importance of the region gained significance.

The strategic importance of the region and the competition for dominance over this strategic region dates back to the 16th century. The strategic salience of the Persian Gulf increased with the Western (Portuguese) incursions into India in the 16th century. There had been competition between several Western powers such as Portugal versus Britain, Holland versus Britain and Britain versus France to gain control over the Gulf. The Ottoman Empire had entered into the scene with the beginning of the Portuguese interventions to the region. Ottoman forces conquered Arabia and the Persian Gulf during the era of the Süleyman I to contain the Portuguese intervention. However, the influence of the Ottomans had loosened to a great extent in the following ages. Britain emerged as the winner of the showdown among the Western Great Powers in the Gulf in the 19th century and subsequently it established its supremacy over the region.

This study attempts to prove the existence of a well-grounded British threat to the Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf during the reign of Abdülhamid II. The threat, which did not diminish after the Abdülhamidian era, will be examined in the first two chapters of this thesis in its two dimensions. First of all, Anglo-Ottoman relations greatly deteriorated with the beginning of Abdülhamid II's rule; thus, the British menace to the Ottoman existence in the Gulf was the consequence of the shift in the British policy aiming at the breakdown and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. In this context, the British threatening policy towards Arabia, Hejaz and more intensively in the southern part of the Persian Gulf shows that Britain wanted to

acquire all of the Arab regions for its imperial objectives and strategic requirements. Therefore, the regions of the Persian Gulf under the Ottoman rule could not be spared from this threat. Secondly, British threats to the Ottoman presence in the region focused on this study will be analyzed specifically. Evidence of the British threat to the Ottoman presence in the region was that Britain, in principle, did not want any challenge to its supremacy in the region, so it thwarted all foreign interventions into the Gulf. Thereby, it considered the Ottoman entry into the region in this context and tried to contain it. It used autonomous sheikhdoms as agents against the Ottomans. The threats emanating from these British-backed sheikhdoms, as are shown in the Ottoman documents provide further evidence of the British threat.

In the following three chapters, the Ottoman view of the region formed under the influence of the British threat and the policies generated against the British threat will be investigated. In the third chapter, the Ottoman outlook for the region, which was shaped under the influence of the British threat, will be analyzed. For instance, Ottomans investigated various British methods threatening the Ottomans, including, especially, the incitement against the state, gun smuggling, and use of force and, most importantly, using British ships effectively. On the other hand, the Ottomans generated an outlook for the people of the Gulf, their loyalty to the state and religion along with Ottoman sovereignty formed under the influence of the British threat. For instance, the Ottoman government accepted itself as sovereign over the Persian Gulf, thus legitimizing its actions on this basis. Furthermore, the Ottoman government considered people loyal to itself, and considered the misgovernment of the Ottoman officials, hence its own failure, as a hindrance to this loyalty. Thereby, this consideration stimulated the Ottoman administrative reforms to reinforce the bonds between people and the state. However, either these aims of the Ottomans were solely wishful thinking and so did not coincide with the realities of the region or the Ottomans stepped back from its claims, such as in the issue of sovereignty, when they were confronted with the British opposition.

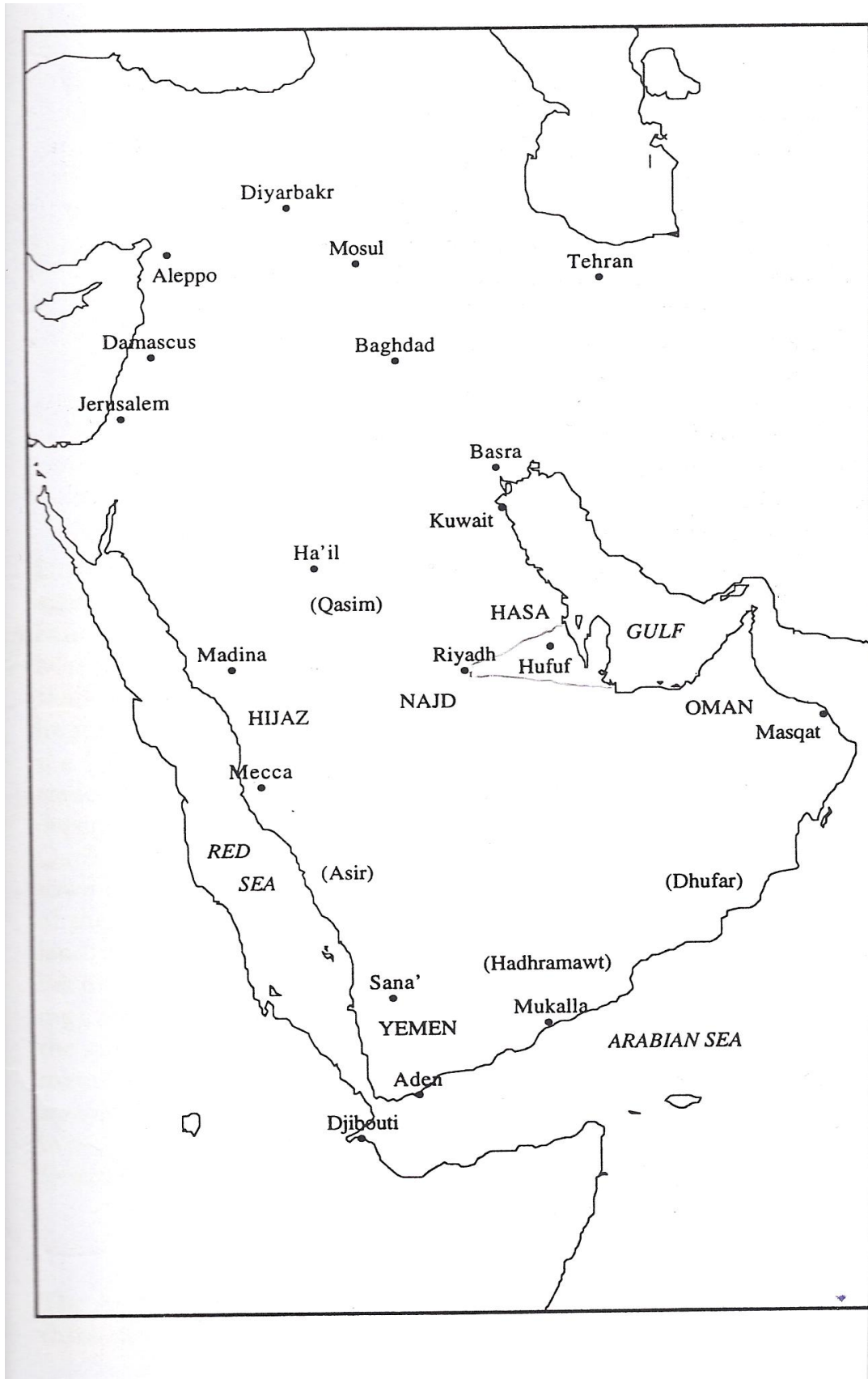
In the fourth chapter, the relations between the Ottomans and local sheikhdoms in the context of the influential British threat will be analyzed in light of the autonomy of the sheikhs. There were close relations between the autonomous sheikhs and Britain, which made Ottoman rule in the region very vulnerable to the British threat. This demonstrates that the traditional political structure of the region,

based on the semi-independence of local leaders, provided fertile grounds for the British intervention. In this framework, the relation between the Ottomans and Ibn-i Reşid, who was the head of the Shammar tribes in Necd and close ally of the Ottomans, will be analyzed as a case study. Furthermore, Qatari Sheikh Casim El-Sani's policy of playing the British off the Ottomans will be studied as another case study as well. All of these case studies involve Britain and its threat as a factor affecting Ottoman relations with these leaders.

Finally, the Ottomans generated policies and measure against British infiltration, such as establishing administrative structures and dispatching Ottoman ships to the Persian Gulf. These responses against the threat were, at the same time, reform made for the benefit of the local people and the interest of the Ottoman state. Ottoman statesmen were occupied with devising measures to impede the British threat to the Persian Gulf. With this aim, several commissions were founded at the center of the state and a number of reports sent to the Sublime Porte and Yıldız Palace, which was the most important administrative center in the reign of Abdülhamid II, to seek appropriate measures to obstruct Britain and to consolidate Ottoman rule. However, these reformist responses against the British threat were not successful owing to, primarily, the British threat. For instance, the British-supported, autonomous, local sheikhs opposed modern reforms because these would hinder their autonomy.

In sum, this study challenges the assertions which claim that there was no British threat. This thesis also debunks the claim that states there was an Ottoman obsession about British threat which led in failing to make reforms which would improve the lives of the people and consolidate Ottoman rule. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that it is invalid to assert that there was not a British threat which was willing, witting, obvious and intensive. Thus, this thesis argues that there was a British threat with which the Ottomans had to contend. In the context of this influential threat, the Ottomans firstly searched for ways to thwart this threat in order to survive. The Ottoman government generated a strategy and policy for the Gulf region to maintain an Ottoman presence in the region in the context of the influential British threat. The Ottomans produced responses to obstruct the British threat in the region. These responses were not only measures taken against the British threat but also reforms made in the interest of the people in the Gulf. 'Reform' and 'response' were inseparable because 'consolidation of the Ottoman rule and making the lives of

people better' and 'thwarting the British threat from the region' were highly related, and would ensure the realization of each other. Nevertheless, these responses were not as influential as intended due to the British policy of undermining the Ottoman influence by several means. Finally, Ottoman history addressing the period of Abdülhamid II in the parts of the Persian Gulf analyzed in this study was shaped by the "British threat" and "Ottoman responses to obstruct it".



Map.1 The Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula

Source: Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 9.

CHAPTER 2

THE THREATENED EMPIRE

The British threat toward the Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf primarily was due to two reasons. The first reason was that the Gulf was a region subjected to British intervention and threat due to British strategy toward the Gulf stemming from general British policy for India and Arabia. The second reason was that hostility arose between the Ottoman Empire and Britain in the Gulf as a consequence of the generally impaired relations between the two states beginning with the enthronement of Abdülhamid II. In this regard, the Ottomans felt threatened by British presence in the region simply because Britain was deemed as a foe of the empire that aimed for the empire's collapse. Thus, before analyzing particular reasons for the British threat stemming from British policy and its presence in the Persian Gulf; it is necessary to examine the general Anglo-Ottoman relations at the time of Abdülhamid II. In this framework, the analysis reveals how Britain evolved from the guarantor of the Ottoman territorial integrity to an enemy of the Ottoman state.

In order to understand the negative Anglo-Ottoman relations at the time of Abdülhamid II, firstly the background of general foreign intervention until the era of Abdülhamid II will be taken into account. Secondly, the negative shift in the British policy for the survival and territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire in the same period with a focus on the Ottoman perception of this great shift will be problematized. In analyzing this change in British policy, the notable change in international politics and its effects on the Ottoman Empire and financial threats toward the Ottoman state will be taken into consideration. Thirdly, British threats toward the Arabian Peninsula will be touched upon. In the last section, it will be shown that British threats were intensified in the regions closer to the Persian Gulf, including Aden and the southern sheikhdoms in the Persian Gulf such as Muscat, Oman and the Trucial Coast. As Britain was firmly entrenched in Aden and the southern sheikhdoms since the beginning of the 19th century, British interventions in Aden and the southern sheikhdoms will be analyzed in order to demonstrate that the northern sheikhdoms in the Gulf were an inevitable part of this intensified British intervention into the whole Gulf.

2.1. The Background of Foreign Intervention in the 19th Century

The Ottoman Empire began to be called as the “Sick Man of Europe” in the 19th century after the emergence of the Eastern Question, which was the controversy among the European Great Powers about the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, in Küçük Kaynarca Treaty in 1774. Nationalist movements, internal insurgencies, foreign interventions and a number of wars had weakened the Ottoman Empire⁴ to the point that the viability of the Ottoman Empire endangered by the beginning of the 19th century.⁵

The 19th century began with several complicated and interrelated internal and external problems involving foreign intervention. Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt showed that the Ottoman Empire could not adequately defend its distant territories on its own. The Ottoman-Russian Wars from the 18th to 19th centuries exhausted the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and threatened the empire’s survival. Russia supported the people of the Balkan territories for the purpose of seeking their independence; consequently, there were a number of nationalist upheavals in the Balkans. The Greek insurgency in 1821-29 attracted the Great Powers, and they interfered on the side of Greece. On the other hand, the upheaval of the Wahhabis in Arabia and the Greek revolt in the beginning of the 19th century could be suppressed by only the army of Mehmed Ali of Egypt. Thus, the military weakness of the Ottoman central state became very apparent.

The catastrophic rebellion of the governor of Egypt, Mehmed Ali Paşa from 1829 to 1833 and in 1839, with its serious consequences for the Ottoman Empire showed that the Ottoman Empire, had to depend on one or more foreign supporter(s) in order to ensure its survival. Britain emerged as the fervent supporter of the Ottoman maintenance and territorial integrity with the view of utilizing the Ottoman Empire as a barrier against Russian expansion toward the Middle East and particularly for India. For instance, Britain, together with France, hindered the Russian threat over the Ottoman state in the Crimean War (1853-56).

Nevertheless, this dependence of one or more foreign power(s) made the Ottoman Empire more vulnerable to foreign intervention because the Ottoman

⁴ Çetinsaya, Gökhan, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890-1908*, Oxon, Routledge, 2006, p. 127.

⁵ Rogan, Eugene L., *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire, Transjordan, 1850-1921*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 2.

ministers had to take consider the interests of the western powers for the sake of the support that would be given for the integrity of the state.⁶ These supporters and guarantors of the survival and integrity of the Ottoman Empire granted themselves the right to interfere in the internal affairs of the Ottoman state. In addition to meddling internal state affairs, the capitulations, the status of foreign powers as the protectors and supervisors of religious communities and reform provisions, respectively, missionaries and the consuls in most parts of the empire were influential means in the foreign intervention. For instance, the consuls of the foreign states pressured the Sublime Porte for the removal of governors and other administrators opposed their interests in the 19th century.⁷ In this context, foreign great powers could steer Ottoman politics. There was also a very strong economic influence along with political influence felt in every important corner of the empire⁸ because of the capitulations and the activities of the consulates.

These foreign interventions were felt in every province of the empire. Furthermore, some foreign powers had special interests for specific provinces of the Empire. In this context, Ottomans felt threatened from Basra, Yemen to the westernmost cities of Balkans.⁹ In fact, Ottomans felt they were “under siege from a host of threats to its increasingly vulnerable position”.¹⁰ The Ottomans realized that they were in a vulnerable position to sustain their viability and integrity. This sense of vulnerability was reflected in several fields of life such as education and art, and eventually created an entrenched sense of “predicament” in the minds of the Ottomans.¹¹ For instance, even the medals of the state, depicting the Ottoman state as a castle surrounded by waves, in the Tanzimat period indicated this sense of being threatened.¹² Moreover, Ahmed Cevdet Paşa as a prominent statesman and intellectual of both the Tanzimat and Abdülhamid II eras pointed out that the state

⁶ Akarlı, Engin D., “Abdülhamid’s Islamic Policy in the Arab Provinces”, in *Türk-Arap İlişkileri: Geçmişte, Bugün ve Gelecekte I. Uluslararası Konferansı Bildirileri (18-22 Haziran 1979)*, Ankara, Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Araştırma Enstitüsü, undated, p. 49.

⁷ Akarlı, “Abdülhamid’s Islamic Policy”: p. 48; Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 127.

⁸ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 127.

⁹ Deringil, Selim, *Simgeden Millete, II. Abdülhamid’den Mustafa Kemal’e Devlet ve Millet*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2007, p. 23.

¹⁰ Fortna, Benjamin C., *Imperial Classroom, Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 47.

¹¹ Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*: pp. 33, 84.

¹² See Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 61-2.

would be able to eliminate the threats surrounding it if the required reforms would be made.¹³ As a result, the most important issue for both the intellectuals and statesmen in the 19th century was the threats surrounding the empire and the elimination of such threats.¹⁴

Another feature of the threats or interventions in the 19th century is of key relevance for the Persian Gulf: “the adversaries were increasingly able to operate from within” rather than attacking on the borders.¹⁵ It means that foreign states meddled in the internal affairs of the empire and promoted the aspirations of independence and autonomy of several groups.¹⁶ In other words, this was “peaceful penetration”.¹⁷ In fact, foreign powers had protégés in several provinces, and they made propaganda among the population. Therefore, foreign powers could gain strongholds in the Ottoman Empire. Ottomans held that if this penetration was not checked, the empire would be partitioned.¹⁸ It will be seen in following chapters in detail that Britain threatened the Ottoman presence in the Gulf by using local sheikhs as protégés.

In conclusion, Abdülhamid II became the sultan of a state of whose survival was based on the support and guarantee of other states. Britain was the fervent supporter of the Ottoman territorial integrity in that period. However, the Ottoman statesmen had to take into account the interests of the Great Powers in their politics with an aim of not endangering the support given by them. Foreign states could exploit this vulnerability of the Ottoman state. Furthermore, the foreign powers had other means of “peaceful penetration” to consolidate their influence in the Ottoman centre and provinces such as capitulations, activities of the consulates and merchants, missionaries and their status as the protectors or supervisors of the treaties and regulations allowed for the protection of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire. Ottomans were aware of this vulnerable situation and sought ways for freeing them

¹³ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 188.

¹⁴ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 135 .

¹⁵ Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*: p. 84; Çetinsaya, Gökhan, “The Ottoman View of British Presence in Iraq and the Gulf: The Era of Abdülhamid II”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 39. No. 2 (2003), pp. 194-203, p. 194.

¹⁶ Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*: p. 87.

¹⁷ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 127; Yasamee, F.A.K., *Ottoman Diplomacy, Abdülhamid II and the Great Powers, 1878-1888*, İstanbul, The Isis Press, 1996, p. 46.

¹⁸ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 127.

from this, but the Ottoman state could not consolidate enough power to thwart the interventions by the era Abdülhamid II. In this framework, Sultan Abdülhamid took over an Empire depending on the support of foreign powers to sustain, and, consequently, the empire was exposed to several foreign interventions, which also made it weak. This predicament would continue and increase in the era of Abdülhamid II.

2.2. Britain: From Guarantor to Enemy

As a continuation of the perception of being encircled and threatened, the political elites during the era of Abdülhamid II found themselves a threatening atmosphere as was the situation of the previous decades. Deringil quotes a phrase depicting the state of mind of the Ottoman political elite from Said Paşa, a (even the most) prominent political figure of the Abdülhamid II regime; Said Paşa “The Sublime State stuck among the Christian states and Principalities (sic)” (“*Devlet Aliyye'nin Düvel ve Emaret-i Hiristiyane içine çakılıb kalmış olduğundan...*”).¹⁹ He pointed out the weak and vulnerable position of the Ottoman Empire in European politics. In explaining in another document the situation of being threatened, Said Paşa added that the most ingenious diplomacy would not be enough for the defense of the Ottoman Empire in such a precarious environment.²⁰

The sense of being threatened and encircled increased to a great extent with the beginning of Abdülhamid II's rule.²¹ The reason for the rise in the threat perception was due to the change in the international politics of the day and British policy toward the survival of the Ottoman Empire. Before this dramatic shift, the Ottoman Empire's survival relied on the guarantee of Britain and the consent of other Great Powers to protect the Ottoman Empire in order to maintain the international order, of which the Ottoman Empire was part.²² However, the change emerged in the Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878 when the empire was abandoned by Britain and other allies who had been against Russia by then. The roots of the change resided mainly in the elimination of the status-quo, which was established after the Vienna

¹⁹ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 62.

²⁰ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 135.

²¹ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 112.

²² Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: pp. 48, 54.

Conference in 1815 and observed in the Crimean War because of the unification of Germany and Italy. Secondly, British policy for the preservation of the Ottoman territorial integrity shifted because Britain began to consider that it did not need a territorially integrated Ottoman Empire after the opening of the Suez Canal. Lastly, anti-Ottoman public opinion distanced Britain from the Ottoman Empire on the eve of and in the wake of the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War because of the asserted atrocities against Christians in Bulgaria. Britain shifted its policy from the protection of the Ottoman Empire's integrity to allowing for its breakup. In other words, Britain began to be in favor of the disappearance of the Ottoman state rather than its survival. Britain realized that adherence to the principle of "maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire" was unfeasible for Britain. For instance, Lord Salisbury²³ did not consider it inappropriate to leave the İstanbul and Çanakkale Straits to Russia; furthermore he was of the opinion that Britain had backed the wrong party since the Crimean war. In other words, according to Salisbury, it had been a mistake to support the Ottoman Empire as a barrier and buffer against Russian penetration in the Near East. British statesmen were convinced that Egypt would be enough to hold India since then.²⁴ In this framework, Lord Salisbury was convinced of the impossibility "of setting the Turk government on its leg again, as a genuine reliable Power".²⁵ Thus, Salisbury lost his zeal for the *de-facto* independence of the Ottoman Empire.²⁶

The shift in British foreign policy firstly emerged in the İstanbul (Tersane) Conference in 1876 and then following the 1877-78 War. The Berlin Treaty showed that the Great Powers such as Britain, Russia, France and Austria-Hungary had the objective of plundering and partitioning the Ottoman Empire.²⁷ This meant that the

²³ In fact, Salisbury was a fervent supporter of the Ottoman partition both in the post of the foreign ministry and prime ministry in the era of Abdülhamid II (Troeller, Gary, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia, Britain and the Rise of the House of Saud*, London, Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1976, p. 7).

²⁴ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 142; Goldberg, Jacob, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia, The Formative Years, 1902-1918*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 35; Karpat, Kemal, *The Politicization of Islam, Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 146, 178; Ortaylı, İlber, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*, İstanbul, Alkım Yayınevi, 2006, p. 46; Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: pp. 44, 48.

²⁵ Lowe, C. J., *The Reluctant Imperialists, British Foreign Policy, 1878-1902*, Volume I, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967, p. 31.

²⁶ Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: p. 57.

²⁷ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 128; Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*: p. 39.

Ottomans had to face all the Great Powers alone. It was, obviously, a great shock for the Ottomans. As a result of the Berlin Treaty, the Ottoman state was forced to leave two-fifths of its entire territory and one-fifth of its population. The Ottoman Empire was obliged to make reforms for Armenians in the Eastern provinces, and Britain became the supervisor of these reforms. Additionally, the Ottoman Empire was forced to pay heavy war compensation to Russia.²⁸ Furthermore, the Berlin Treaty left the Ottoman Empire with indefensible borders both in Balkans and in the Middle East. Sultan Abdülhamid II was conscious of the military weakness of the empire in defending its vulnerable frontiers.²⁹ The Persian Gulf was one of the empire's weak frontiers, which encountered British infiltration after 1878. After the Berlin Treaty, the British occupation of Cyprus in 1878 occurred as did the French occupation of Tunisia in 1881. It will be explained below that the British occupation of Egypt abolished the possibility for a recovery in the Anglo-Ottoman relations.

Along with political problems, the Ottomans faced the most difficult financial problems in the history of the empire with the beginning of the rule of Abdülhamid II. The Ottomans had also felt a financial threat since Abdülmecid because of the foreign loans. The state that Abdülhamid II took over was financially bankrupt, declaring its inability to pay its foreign debts in 1875 with the Ramazan Kararnamesi.³⁰ Nonetheless, the financial pressure increased excessively at the beginning of the Abdülhamid II's rule. The bankruptcy of the treasury was institutionalized with the Muharrem Decree in 1881, and the Ottoman Public Debt Administration was founded which left the administration of the Ottoman finance in the hands of foreign debtor states.³¹ However, the problems continued. For instance, the empire could not collect revenue efficiently, and the economic growth was at a very low level. In these difficult conditions, the only preference was economic cutbacks instead of further foreign loans. However, this led to a reduction in investment for the infrastructure which, ultimately, hindered the long term solution

²⁸ Deringil, Selim, *The Ottomans, The Turks, and World Power Politics*, İstanbul, The İsis Press, 2000, pp. 9-10; Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*: p. 179; Rogan, Eugene L., "Aşiret Mektebi, Abdülhamid II's School for Tribes (1892-1907)", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 28. No.1, (1996), pp. 83-107, p. 83.

²⁹ Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: p. 45.

³⁰ Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: p. 45.

³¹ Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*: p. 39, Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: p. 46.

for the empire's financial problems.³² In addition to general financial problems, the Ottoman Empire was fined an exorbitant amount in war compensation to Russia in the Berlin Treaty. This financially constraining situation severely intimidated the Ottoman statesmen because it was thought that the Great Powers might take the administration of the finance of the state in their hands as they had done in Egypt, and, eventually, might extinguish the political independence of the state.³³ Abdülhamid II was aware of this financially threatening environment and its possible consequences; thus he tried to repay the foreign public debt as quickly as possible with the view of gaining financial freedom for the empire.³⁴

In this deteriorating context of the relations, the close links between Britain and the Ottoman Empire disappeared. Hence, Britain began to be perceived as the primary threat to Ottoman survival.³⁵ In the beginning of Abdülhamid II rule, the Ottoman suspicions with regard to Britain increased owing to several events. For instance, British insistence upon reforms for Armenians, which was stipulated in the Berlin Treaty, disturbed the sultan and Ottoman bureaucrats. Consequently, Ottomans considered every British move as a plan threatening the sultan and the existence of the Ottoman state.³⁶ What is more, Abdülhamid II had suspicions with regard to British intrigues, both for him and for the Ottoman Empire. For instance, Abdülhamid II considered Britain to be responsible for the dethronement of Sultan Abdülaziz in 1876 and the following attempt of the coup of Ali Suavi, which was made to dethrone Abdülhamid II and enthrone Murad V again, in 1878.³⁷

In addition to the Anglo-Ottoman relations, the emerging alliances between Russia and France in 1893 and Britain and France in 1904 on the eve of World War I made benefiting from the conflict of interests of the European Great Powers difficult for Abdülhamid II.³⁸ Unlike his predecessors, Abdülhamid II had to ensure the survival of the empire in a different and much more difficult alliance system.

³² Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: p. 46.

³³ Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: p. 46

³⁴ Akarlı, "Abdülhamid's Islamic Policy in the Arab Provinces": p. 46.

³⁵ Deringil, *The Ottomans, the Turks and the World Power Politics*: p. 13.

³⁶ Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*: p. 211.

³⁷ Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*: p. 45.

³⁸ Farah, Talal Toufic, *Protection and Politics in Bahrain, 1869-1915*, Beirut, American University of Beirut, 1985, p. 92; Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*: p. 26.

In this environment of the first years of Abdülhamid II's rule, a negative attitude was developed quickly against Britain in the minds of the Ottoman statesmen, intellectuals and more importantly, Sultan Abdülhamid II. The sultan said that "Britain was the state which had to be most eschewed among [the] Great Powers".³⁹ Even the circle of Ottoman Anglophiles shared the same perspective. For instance, a well-known Anglophile Kamil Paşa who tried to draw the empire into alliance with Britain at the time of Abdülhamid II's reign recognized that circumstances had changed since the Crimean War. According to him, Britain had lost confidence in the Ottoman Empire and might be tempted to promote Armenian and Arab alternatives in Asia instead of it.⁴⁰ In these circumstances, Sultan Abdülhamid and his advisers believed that if the British threat would continue without control, it would end the political authority of the Ottoman government in the Middle East and Europe, leading to the establishment of "zones of influence" and to the ultimate partition at the end.⁴¹ The Ottoman sense of being threatened by Britain was not one-sided; Britain also considered the Ottoman Empire as a hostile state. British statesmen feared much more from an Ottoman alliance with another European Great Power such as Russia or Germany.⁴²

As a result of the deterioration in the relations with Britain, the Ottomans sought a new ally with the view of obtaining assistance for its maintenance and thwarting the British menace. A rapprochement between Germany and the Ottomans began because Germany was ready for such an alliance. Germany considered the weak Ottoman Empire as a market for its emerging colonial policy aiming at an expansion to the East "*Drang nach Osten* (Drive to the East)".⁴³

In the framework of the "Drive to the East" policy, Germany did not prefer the partition of the Ottoman Empire at the international conferences. In fact, it pursued a policy dependent upon benefiting from Ottoman sources by peaceful

³⁹ Quoted in: Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*: p. 45; for a study analyzing the Ottoman stance against Britain particularly in media since the beginning of the Abdülhamid II rule. See: Özcan, Azmi, "The Press and Anglo-Ottoman Relations, 1876-1909", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 29. No. 1 (1993), pp. 111-117.

⁴⁰ Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: pp. 33-4.

⁴¹ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: pp. 127, 8.

⁴² Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 129.

⁴³ Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 34.

means.⁴⁴ Germany thought that its aims would be better served by the economic, military, and political renaissance of the Ottoman Empire in the Asian lands. It was believed in that a strong Ottoman Empire might offer formidable resistance against Russian and British expansion in the Middle East. Furthermore, it was thought that the Ottoman caliphate might be an expedient tool in the Muslim populated British colonies.⁴⁵

2.3. Arab Regions under British Threat

The Ottoman state had begun to give priority to its Arabian territories unlike previous years, and viewed these areas as the future of the empire after the loss of most of the Balkan lands in 1878 War.⁴⁶ For instance, the Arab provinces began to be in the first rank in the Yearbooks (*Salnames*), and the officials in the Arab provinces began to be paid more than their colleagues in other provinces with the beginning of Abdülhamid II's rule.⁴⁷ Abdülhamid II wanted to increase the influence of the Ottoman state in the Arab provinces in order to compensate for the losses in the Balkans.

Ottoman statesmen realized that Britain regarded the regions such as Arabia, Iraq, and the Gulf as its "zone of influence".⁴⁸ They assumed that Britain wanted to absorb all of Arabia under its rule⁴⁹ and to incorporate it into its Indian Empire.⁵⁰ For instance, Kamil Paşa stated that Britain would take these Arabian regions under its control under the pretext of civilizing them.⁵¹

The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 was considered by the Ottomans as a turning point in the emergence of a hostile shift in British policy toward the Ottoman

⁴⁴ Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*: p. 45.

⁴⁵ Earle, Edward Mead, *Turkey, The Great Powers, and the Baghdad Railway, A Study in Imperialism*, New York, Russell & Russell, 1966, p. 127.

⁴⁶ Akarlı, "Abdülhamid's Islamic Policy": p. 44; Kumar, Ravinder, *India and The Persian Gulf Region, 1858-1907, A Study in British Imperial Policy*, New York, Asia Publishing House, 1965, p. 124.

⁴⁷ Akarlı "Abdülhamid's Islamic Policy": pp. 44, 49-50.

⁴⁸ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 128.

⁴⁹ Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*: p. 45.

⁵⁰ Kuhn, Thomas, "Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism: Contesting Boundaries of Difference and Integration in Ottoman Yemen", *Comparative Studies of South Asia and the Middle East*, Vol. 27. No.2 (2007), pp. 315-331, p. 319.

⁵¹ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 143.

Empire.⁵² Abdülhamid II began to have very serious doubts with regard to the British intentions over the Ottoman territories in Arabia after the occupation of Egypt.⁵³ Britain occupied Egypt in order to protect the route to India after the opening of the Suez Canal. The nationalist Urabi Revolt gave an expedient pretext for Britain to occupy Egypt.⁵⁴ It was envisaged by the Ottomans that Britain would use Egypt as a base for the destabilization of the Ottoman Empire's Arab provinces.⁵⁵ In fact, Britain encouraged the tribes along the coasts of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf against the Ottomans since its occupation of Egypt.⁵⁶

After the occupation of Egypt, the Anglo-Ottoman relations would not be repaired until the demise of the Ottoman Empire. Britain no longer needed the Ottoman Empire as a safe route to India or a barrier against other Great Powers, particularly Russia due to the occupation of Egypt. Britain was convinced that it could ensure the security of the route to India by its own power. On the other hand, the Ottomans became sure of British hostile intentions toward the Ottoman Empire. As explained above, Britain became the state that Ottomans considered as the most hostile state to the empire.

After the occupation of Egypt, Ottomans were highly convinced that Britain had intentions to free Arabs from Ottoman rule by promoting the sentiments of Arab political independence, and to establish a rival Arab caliphate in Mecca or Cairo.⁵⁷ Abdülhamid thought that Britain had designs upon the caliphate due its Muslim population of approximately 150 million⁵⁸ and its notable imperial objectives in the Middle East, such as conquering Arabia and Iraq and steering the Muslim World.⁵⁹

⁵² Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 142.

⁵³ Kurşun, Zekeriya, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti: Vehhabi Hareketi ve Suud Devleti'nin Ortaya Çıkışı*, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1998, pp. 144, 152.

⁵⁴ Earle, *Turkey, The Great Powers, and the Bagdad Railway*: p. 195.

⁵⁵ Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: pp. 111.

⁵⁶ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 159.

⁵⁷ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 128; Kuhn, "Shaping and Reshaping Ottoman Colonialism": p. 319; Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: p. 27.

⁵⁸ Abdülhamid II, *Abdülhamid'in Hatıra Defteri*, ed. İsmet Bozdağ, İstanbul, Kervan Yayınları, 1975, p. 74.

⁵⁹ Buzpınar, Ş. Tufan, "Opposition to the Ottoman Caliphate in the Early Years of Abdülhamid II", 1877-1882, *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 36. No. 1 (1996), pp. 59-89, p. 64; Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*: p. 45.

These convictions with regard to the British intentions were deeply entrenched in the minds of the Ottoman statesmen and they highlighted this threat in their reports. Nusret Paşa, the Honorary Inspector of the Sixth Army, pointed out the intentions of Britain in his report sent to Yıldız Palace (Abdülhamid II) in 1893 that, “The current policy of the Britain in this matter is to carry out their perceived intention, alongside the occupation of Egypt, to establish an Arab government in Arabia, a Sudanese government in Africa, so separating the Caliphate [from Ottomans], and placing them completely under their [British] rule”.⁶⁰ Salih Münir Paşa, the Ottoman Ambassador to Paris, also called the Yıldız Palace’s attention to the British objectives in Arabia on the same issue ten years later in 1903. He stated that Britain aimed at taking Arabia, Necd and Hejaz gradually out of the Ottoman government’s hands. Furthermore, Britain would like to give the holy Islamic caliphate to the sheriffs of Mecca who would be under the British influence. He stated that Britain lastly would make Arabia, Necd and Iraq British colonies like Aden and other places.⁶¹

British policy and intentions for Arabia in reality were consistent with the perception of Abdülhamid II and his bureaucrats. After 1881-82, Britain encouraged the rise of Arab nationalism and promoted the idea of an Arab caliphate. In fact, Britain employed Christian Arabs as ideologues of Arab nationalism and Cairo as the publishing center of this emerging movement.⁶² Britain suggested that the caliphate should be in the possession of the strongest Islamist state, so it assumed that this state was itself at that time. In this framework, it would like to bring the caliphate to Egyptian Khedive, which was under its control or Mecca sheriff which was planned to be taken under British control.⁶³

2.4. The Intensive British Threat in Closer Regions to the Gulf

The British threat in several parts of Arabia, especially the southern part of the Persian Gulf, Aden and Yemen will be examined below. This discussion

⁶⁰ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 135.

⁶¹ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 142.

⁶² Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*: p. 184.

⁶³ Öke, Mim Kemal, *Hilafet Hareketleri*, Ankara, Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1988, p. 12; for a detailed study analyzing British aims and plans to found a rival Arab caliphate instead of the Ottomans, see: Buzpınar, “Opposition to the Ottoman Caliphate in the Early Years of Abdülhamid II”.

demonstrates that there was a strong British presence in Arabia, so the Gulf could not be spared from this intensive British encirclement in Arabia.

The Ottoman view of being threatened and encircled from the four sides of Arabia by Britain and its local allies in Arabia were discussed in detail in Ottoman documents. It was stated that Arabia was open to British threat due to its four areas being under British influence: from the west; Aden, from the south; the tribes of El-Şehr and El-Melka; from the east, Muscat and Bahrain; and lastly from the north, Ibn-i Reşid.⁶⁴ Particularly, the littoral regions of Arabia were considered as the points of entry of British influence. In this regard, the coasts in Arabia from Qatar to Aden were considered open to foreign intervention.⁶⁵ The Ottomans envisaged that though Britain had control over these and other key positions in the Gulf such as Aden, Melka, Ceziret-ul Ebu Ali, Ebu Zinni and Muscat, it was not satisfied with controlling only these points and struggled for control of all of Arabia, which was very important for Britain because of Arabia being along the route to India.⁶⁶ The Ottomans developed scenarios for each of these sheikhdoms in Arabia and the threats emanating from them. It is understood that the threats became intensified while moving close to the Persian Gulf. This obviously shows that Britain attached significant importance to the Persian Gulf than to other regions of Arabia.

Ottoman concerns for Arabia began with Aden, which was very strategically important for entering and controlling all of Arabia. The Ottomans considered that the importance of Aden for Britain stemmed from its position of being a centre for ships. Britain accepted the special autonomous positions of the sheikhs around Aden under British suzerainty, and it helped them when they clashed with other sheikhs. Additionally, Britain helped sheikhs to collect taxes from people in the region. Due to the lack of customs in Aden, Arabs came there to trade. This was a disadvantage to the Ottoman economy. Furthermore, Britain treated above mentioned sheikhs of

⁶⁴ 14 Mayıs 1299: Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, İstanbul (hereafter BOA), Y.PRK.UM 5/100. The Ottoman suspicions with regard to Ibn-i Reşid will be explained in the following parts of the study. In the studies with regard to the Persian Gulf, Ibn-i Reşid refers to the different persons who became the heads of the Shammar tribes successively and applied similar policies toward the Ottomans and Britain. In this study, which is about the era of Abdülhamid, five successive heads of the Shammar tribes are included. They are Muhammed Ibn-i Abdullah (1872-1897), Abdülaziz Ibn-i Mut'ib (1897-1906), Mut'ib Ibn-i Abdülaziz (1906-1907), Sultan Ibn-i Hamud (1907) and Sa'ud Ibn-i Abdülaziz (1907-1909) (Almana, Mohammed, *Arabia Unified, A Portrait of Ibn-i Saud*, London, Hutchinson Benham, 1980, pp. 269-70; Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 175.

⁶⁵ 10 Mayıs 1308: BOA, DH.MKT 1952/23

⁶⁶ 1 Muharrem 1309: BOA, Y.PRK.AZJ 20/2

El-Şehr and El-Melka like the sheikhs around Aden. In fact, the British gave those sheikhs preferential treatment. Britain wanted to display its presence with grand construction projects such as the harbor in Aden. Finally, Britain gave importance to making propaganda with an aim of gaining the support of the people around Aden.⁶⁷

The southernmost part of the Persian Gulf, Muscat, was considered as a threat to Ottoman rule in Arabia and also in the Persian Gulf, for Muscat was beyond Ottoman claim and under British rule. Ottomans attached importance and pursued cautiously the expansion and consolidation of the Muscat Sheikh, which was under the influence and protection of Britain. Due to British assistance, the Muscat Sheikh was given new weapons and soldiers so he could establish a regular army (“... *asker-i muntazama gibi kuvvet bulması*”). As such, he expanded his rule to Hadramut and Oman. The Ottomans were alarmed and worried because of his expansion and consolidation toward to the regions under Ottoman rule such as Necd.⁶⁸ The Muscat Sheikh consolidated its rule to a great extent. With an aim of alleviating and facilitating the expansion of the influence of Muscat Sheikh, Britain helped him with ships. Owing to this help, the Sheikh of Muscat annexed the territories of the tribes of Sur, Ci’lan and Zigar whereas the tribe of Zigar gave taxes to the emir of Necd under Ottoman rule only ten years earlier.⁶⁹

At the beginning of Abdülhamid II’s rule, Britain was no longer an ally of the Ottoman Empire. It shifted its policy from preserving territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire to allowance for or even aiding and abetting the disintegration of it. Furthermore, it considered Arabia and Iraq as possible zone of influences, even colonies, after the realization of the wished breakdown of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, Britain had specific plans for these regions such as an Arab caliphate. The Ottomans were aware of British threatening plans toward the survival of the empire and Arabia. In this regard, the Ottomans sought some ways to impede the British threats such as searching for a new ally that would support the empire’s territorial integrity. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire tried to thwart British plans over it by using its own means and policies such as the caliphate and Ottoman influence over the Muslims in the colonies of Western powers.

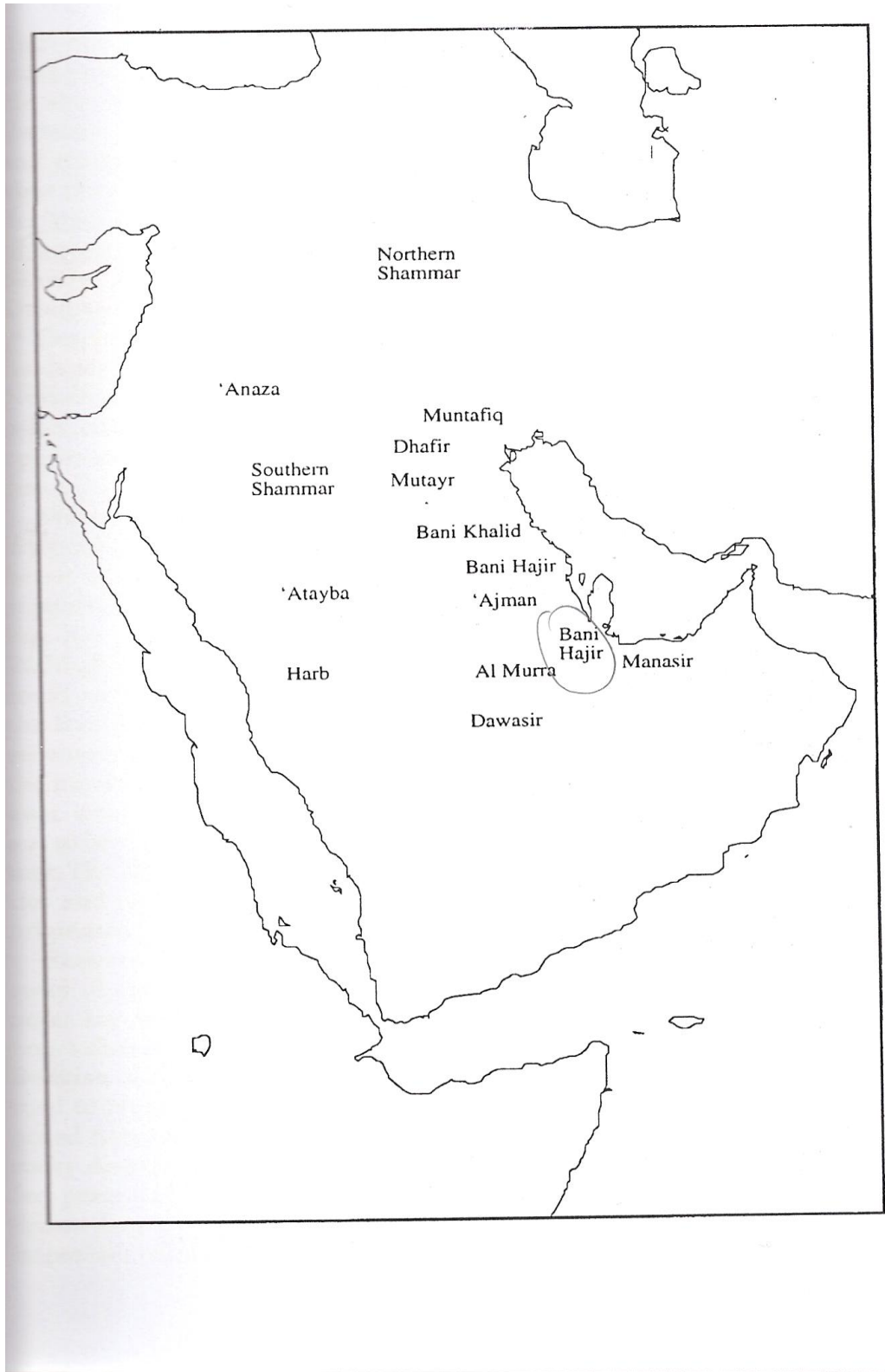
⁶⁷ 14 Mayıs 1299: BOA, Y.PRK.UM 5/100 .

⁶⁸ 8 Eylül 1306: BOA, Y.PRK. AZJ 17/95.

⁶⁹ 14 Mayıs 1299: BOA, Y.PRK.UM 5/100.

In the context of these deteriorating relations, it can be argued that the British threat in the Persian Gulf was the normal consequence of overall relations. For instance, Sultan Abdülhamid opposed British interests wherever he could as he did in the Persian Gulf. On the other hand, British authorities in India assumed that the Ottoman Empire would accept whatever was being proposed to it in the Persian Gulf because of its weakness after the 1877-78 war.⁷⁰ In addition to general Anglo-Ottoman relations, the Persian Gulf was part of British plans and threats toward Arabia which were intensified in the regions close to the Persian Gulf. Furthermore, the firmly entrenched British presence in the southern sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf placed the Ottomans in the northern part of the Gulf in a very difficult position.

⁷⁰ Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf*: pp. 120, 124.



Map 2. The Tribes in the Persian Gulf and Arabia

Source: Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p 35.

CHAPTER 3

THE ENCIRCLED GULF: THE BRITISH THREAT IN THE PERSIAN GULF

Frederick Anscombe argues in his book *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar*, that the Ottoman perception of the British threat in the Persian Gulf was baseless because Britain was only interested in maritime affairs, but it was forced to be involved in the affairs of the coastal and inner regions of the Persian Gulf because of the Ottoman Government's weakness in ruling the region.⁷¹ The ideas of Lord Lansdowne, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1900-1905, might be the sources for Anscombe's assertions but Lansdowne was more fair than Anscombe because he included at least the "coast" into the area of British interest, underscoring that "British interests in Arabia were confined to the coast and must not be extended inland".⁷² Both Anscombe and Lansdowne assumed that Britain did not want to confront and clash with the Ottomans but it had to do because of the incompetence of the Ottomans in ruling the region, for instance, on the issues of piracy, gun smuggling and slavery.

This chapter focuses upon supporting the argument that the Ottoman perception of the British threat to the Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf was well grounded and that the Ottomans were correct to feel encircled by Britain as, firstly, Anglo-Ottoman relations had deteriorated during the Abdülhamidian era. Secondly, Britain considered the Gulf region as a whole very important for its national interests; therefore, it did not recognize and tolerate the Ottoman presence there, contrary the arguments of Anscombe and Lord Lansdowne. British national interests originated from its strategic outlook, imperial objectives and economic policy with regard to the Persian Gulf. In this chapter, it is maintained that Britain considered the entire Persian Gulf as an indispensable part of its imperial ambitions, strategic outlook, and economic policy.

In terms of British imperial objectives, the Gulf was one of the entrance points of British penetration into Ottoman Arabia, Iraq and beyond. Secondly, the

⁷¹ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: pp. 1, 7, 171.

⁷² Howarth, David, *The Desert King, Ibn-i Saud and His Arabia*, New York, Mc Graw-Hill Book Company, 1964, p. 56.

Gulf was viewed as a strategically critical position for the British colonial presence in India. Lastly, economically, the Persian Gulf was an important market for Britain. It was also a port to reach Arabia and Iraq. Therefore, Britain wanted to secure supreme control over the Persian Gulf to protect all of these interests. Apart from the strategic, imperial and economic importance of the region as a whole for the British, there was no distinct separation between the coast and mainland in the Persian Gulf because of the characteristics of the region. The primary feature of the region is that the mainland is geographically very close to the coast. Moreover, boundaries were not important in the region where traditional allegiances prevailed.

Britain interfered into the Persian Gulf in order to hinder a possible rival to its supremacy in the region and in the route to India. The Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf was accepted in this framework of possible rival. Therefore, the Ottoman perception of the British threat was not an “overblown suspicion” or “obsession” as asserted by Anscombe,⁷³ but it was because of British politics, strategy and autonomy of the local sheikhdoms.

This part of the study will show how Britain used local leaders against the Ottoman influence. Thus, this part of the thesis will argue that “the weakness of the Ottoman administration in the Gulf”⁷⁴ did not lead to the failure of the Ottomans and the loss of the region, but British threats toward the Ottoman presence weakened the empire excessively. The Ottoman perception of the British threat in the region will be examined from three dimensions. The first one is the British strategy towards the Gulf, which was based on routing out other states, including the Ottoman state, from the region. Secondly, the threats from the sheikhdoms under the protection of Britain or in close relations with it are analyzed here. The third dimension is that the British threats toward the Gulf were considered to be influential for Hejaz.

3.1. British Strategy toward the Gulf

The Ottoman perception of the British threat was, firstly and perhaps most importantly, verified by the Britain’s own policy to exclude other powers from the region. Britain was highly determined to protect its supremacy in the Persian Gulf, so

⁷³ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: pp. 2, 4, 70.

⁷⁴ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: pp. 7, 143.

much so that it had no tolerance for the existence or infiltration of other powers in the region.

In this framework, although one aspect of the Ottoman perception of the British threat toward the Persian Gulf was a consequence of general Anglo-Ottoman relations in this period, another dimension of the menace against the Ottoman presence in the region stemmed from British policy toward the region, which was based on holding the region because of the British imperialist objectives and strategic imperatives. In terms of imperialist objectives, British policy toward the maintenance of the Ottoman Empire shifted dramatically at the beginning of Abdülhamid II rule so Britain planned to grasp some, especially Arabian, regions of the Ottoman Empire after the realization of the estimated and wished for breakdown of the empire. Thus, the Gulf itself was considered to be a strategically appropriate zone from which the British penetration into the entire empire to establish zone of interests would be achieved. Actually, Britain might easily control and use the Gulf for the extension of its influence over the other Arab provinces. In conclusion, the Gulf was the region complementing the general picture of being encircled in Arabia and even beyond, by its feature of being the point of penetration.

In terms of strategic imperatives, the British interest toward the region originated from the fact that the Persian Gulf was on the route to India (the jewel of British imperial crown) so safeguarding the route to India was the main consideration of Britain. Lord Curzon, the viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905 pointed out that “British supremacy in India is unquestionably bound with British supremacy in the Persian Gulf, if we lose control of the Gulf we shall not rule long in India”.⁷⁵ Thus, Britain struggled to protect the route to India from other powers, including the Ottomans. It was believed by British statesmen that the existence of a foreign power in the Gulf would cause trouble for British rule in India owing to the proximity of the Gulf to India. For instance, Britain feared the influence of an Ottoman Pan-Islamic appeal in the Persian Gulf because of its potential repercussions for India.⁷⁶ However, there were some other strategic British concerns. These were suppression of the slave trade, piracy, development of commerce, and protection of British

⁷⁵ Yapp, Malcolm, “British Policy in the Persian Gulf”, in C. Edmund Bosworth, R. Michael Burrell, Keith McLachlan, and Roger M. Savory (eds), *The Persian Gulf States, A General Survey*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1981, p. 82.

⁷⁶ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 3; Earle, *Turkey, The Great Powers, The Baghdad Railway*: p. 196; Yapp, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf*: pp. 82, 85.

interests in Persia or Mesopotamia. In fact, Britain accepted the Persian Gulf as the gateway to Mesopotamia and Persia, which were included in the zone of British interest.⁷⁷ Britain considered the Persian Gulf as the key region that needed to be controlled in order to protect all of these strategic interests. Britain envisaged that if it did not control the entire Persian Gulf, piracy would re-emerge and the pirates would abduct slaves and smuggle weapons, damaging British commercial interests.

In addition to strategic and political considerations, Britain attached great importance to the Gulf because of the economic benefit it provided. The Gulf and its hinterland, Arabia, had been indispensable parts of Britain's rapidly-growing commercial interests in India since the beginning of the 17th century. This region became a market for British products and a convenient port for access to inner regions such as Arabia and Iraq. In fact, a significant amount of the Gulf's trade was done with Britain.⁷⁸ Such, the economy of the Persian Gulf was completely integrated into the Atlantic economic system in which Britain had paramount influence.⁷⁹

Britain was highly convinced that it would meet these imperial and strategic objectives toward Arabia and India, respectively by establishing its unchallenged supremacy over the Gulf, which was possible by excluding other powers from the region. The Gulf turned into a "British lake" due to this policy. The most influential means to exclude the other powers were several "protection" agreements with the sheikhdoms since 1820s and a British naval presence in the sea of the Gulf.⁸⁰ Britain did not occupy any territory in the Gulf, but it had the local autonomous sheikhs serve as its protégés to control the region and contain any foreign encroachment,

⁷⁷ Busch, Briton Cooper, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1967, pp. 9, 12; Peck, Malcolm C., *Historical Dictionary of the Gulf Arab States*, London, The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1997, p. 89; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: p. 1.

⁷⁸ Alghanim, Salwa, *The Reign of Mubarek Al-Sabah, Shaikh of Kuwait 1896-1915*, London, I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1998, p. 39; Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 127.

⁷⁹ Ortaylı, İlber, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*: p. 141.

⁸⁰ Abu-Hakima, Ahmad Mustafa, *The Modern History of Kuwait, 1750-1965*, London, Luzac&Company Limited, 1983, pp. 114, 117; Adamiyat, Fereydoun, *Bahrein Islands, A Legal and Diplomatic Study of the British-Iranian Controversy*, New York, Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1955, p. 161; Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: pp. 127, 129; Çetinsaya, "The Ottoman View": p. 194; Howarth, *The Desert King*: p. 31; Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*: p. 140; Philby, H.ST. J. B. Philby, *Arabia*, London, Ernest Benn Limited, 1930, p. 157; Staley, Eugene, "International Economic Rivalries in the Persian Gulf, 1896-1914", in Charles Issawi (ed), *The Economic History of the Middle East, 1800-1914*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 351; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: p. 1.

which were the special conditions attached to the protection agreements and special relations with the sheikhdoms.⁸¹

To ensure British supremacy in the region, the protection agreements with the local sheikhdoms had a very important role.⁸² These protection agreements aimed at excluding other foreign powers, particularly the Ottomans from the Gulf.⁸³ Britain entered into protection agreements with Kuwait (1899) and Bahrain (1820, 1879, 1892), and had very close relations with Qatar,⁸⁴ Ibn-i Saud and Ibn-i Reşid who were rival sheikhs of Necd, in addition to British explicit dominance over the southern sheikhdoms such as the Trucial Coast.⁸⁵ The British method of alienating other powers was implemented when any state tried to infiltrate a particular sheikhdom. At that time, Britain tightened its hold over a tribe by signing a new agreement as it did with Bahrain in 1892 after two previous protection agreements, but more apparently with Kuwait, which was planned as the terminus of the Berlin-Baghdad railway.

Bahrain had a number of agreements with Britain drawn up in 1820, 1879 and 1892 stipulating that Bahrain would not enter into any agreement or relations with another state without British consent.⁸⁶ Kuwait also signed an exclusive treaty with Britain stipulating that Mübarek El-Sabah, the head of tribes in Kuwait, would not sell or lease any part of his territory to a foreign power without prior permission of Britain. Furthermore, he also agreed not to accept the representatives of other states without British consent.⁸⁷ Particularly, the latest two agreements with Bahrain and the Kuwaiti protection agreement in 1899 were designed to thwart the Ottoman infiltration into the region. It should be kept in mind that these promises to exclude other powers from the sheikhdoms were given in return for active British protection

⁸¹ Çetinsaya, *The Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 129.

⁸² For a detailed study analyzing the agreements between the Gulf sheikhdoms and Britain, see Albaharna, Husain M., *The Legal Status of the Arabian Gulf States, A Study of Their Treaty Relations and Their International Problems*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1968, p. 4.

⁸³ Abu-Hakima, *Kuwait*: p. 117.

⁸⁴ The protection agreement with Qatar was signed in 1916 (Peck, *Historical Dictionary*: p. 209).

⁸⁵ Almana, *Arabia Unified*: p. 22; Peck, *Historical Dictionary*: p. 209; Wilson, Sir Arnold T., *The Persian Gulf, An Historical Sketch From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1954, pp. 246-247.

⁸⁶ Adamiyat, *Bahrein Islands*: p. 182; Peck, *Historical Dictionary*: p. 26; Philby, *Arabia*: p. 163.

⁸⁷ Abu Hakima, *Kuwait*: p. 118; Longrigg, Stephen Hemsley, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*, Beirut, Gregg International Publishers, 1968, p. 304; Kelly, J. B., *Arabia, the Gulf and the West*, The United States of America, Basic Books, 1980, pp. 170, 180.

of the autonomy of the local tribes. The commitment of British protection provided strength and security for local sheikhs to challenge the Ottomans. In sum, Britain had substantively influential agreements that excluded other powers and established British dominance over the sheikhdoms.

As Britain attributed the functions of the exclusion of other powers to the protection agreements, they served as the explicit means of British supremacy in the region. In this regard, claiming the British relations with the local leaders to be "... a loose skein of alliances with key coastal sheikhs..." is inappropriate for accurately understanding the British presence in the Gulf and its means (threats) to protect this dominant position.⁸⁸

Although Britain tried to hinder any encroachment of any power into its zone of interest, some Western powers attempted to infiltrate to the region. Britain began to feel threatened by other European Great Powers such as Russia, France and particularly Germany in the late 19th century and early 20th century.⁸⁹ Such incursions of the other Great Powers increased especially after the 1890s.⁹⁰ For instance, Russia attempted to establish consulates at Bushire, Basra and Bandar Abbas, though there was not any Russian citizens there, and started to make ship journeys from Kuwait to Odessa. On the other hand, Germany tried to infiltrate into the region through the well-known Berlin-Baghdad railway. All of these attempts of the foreign powers were perceived as threats to British interests in the Gulf and India.⁹¹ France and Russia ceased to be threats for Britain as a result of the alliances established with them in 1904 and 1907, respectively. However, Germany continued to be a threat until the beginning of World War I.⁹² Therefore, Britain took measures against other Great Powers by tightening its control over the sheikhdoms. Due to this tightening, it could increase its influence and consolidate its supremacy over the region on the eve of World War I.

In relation to the Ottoman encroachment, Britain tried to make its supremacy more precise by undermining the Ottoman presence in the Gulf through new

⁸⁸ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 4.

⁸⁹ Alghanim, *The Reign of Mubarek Al-Sabah*: p. 150; Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, p. 3; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: pp. 1, 5.

⁹⁰ Farah, *Protection and Politics in Bahrain*: p. 90.

⁹¹ Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 34.

⁹² Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: pp. 5, 6.

agreements that stipulated “non-alienation of territory” without the British consent.⁹³ It can be asserted that there existed a mutual threatening between the Ottomans and Britain in the Gulf. From the beginning, Britain was firmly decided to ward off the Ottoman Empire from the Persian Gulf in order to protect its own interests.

While Britain was jealous of any power that exerted its influence in the Persian Gulf, the Ottoman Empire did not view itself as any power or outsider to the region. The Ottomans, on the contrary, perceived the British there as the outsider and they realized even before Abdülhamid II’s rule that British supremacy would be a threat for the Ottoman sovereignty over the Gulf and beyond. Therefore, the Ottomans tried to contain the British threat by exerting stricter control in the region.

The Ottoman Empire followed similar policies in several peripheral regions such as Yemen, Transjordan and Libya after the Tanzimat within the framework of the centralist reforms. One of the main objectives of these centralist regulations was to hold and consolidate the empire strictly against the challenges from within and abroad. Indeed, these peripheral regions became the frontiers, defense lines of the empire to thwart foreign incursions.⁹⁴ In this context, the northern sheikhdoms in the Persian Gulf including Kuwait, Hasa, Qatar and inner Necd were reincorporated into the Ottoman state with the military campaign held in 1871 under the Baghdad governorship of Mithad Paşa (1869-1872) who aimed at countering British threats.⁹⁵

It was apparent that the campaign in 1871 would have several possible repercussions for Anglo-Ottoman relations when these relations were close. Although Mithad Paşa paid attention to Anglo-Ottoman relations as did prominent figures of Tanzimat such as Reşid, Ali and Fuat Paşas, he gave priority to Ottoman interests; thus, he decided that the campaign would be more beneficial for the Ottoman state.⁹⁶ The competition between the successors of Faisal the Great (El-Saud), Saud and Abdullah, provided a pretext for the Ottomans to regain Ottoman

⁹³ Almana, *Arabia Unified*: p. 22; Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf*: p. 124.

⁹⁴ Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*: p. 2.

⁹⁵ Çetinsaya, “The Ottoman View”: p. 194; Şehbenderzade Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi, *Senusiler ve Sultan Abdülhamid (Asr-i Hamidi’de Alem-i İslam ve Senusiler)*, İstanbul, Ses Yayınları, 1992, pp. 89, 92.

⁹⁶ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: pp. 128-9; Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf*: p. 113.

authority over the region.⁹⁷ After the campaign, there was an attempt to re-establish the Ottoman state apparatus in the region.⁹⁸

Britain was aware of existing and possible negative effects of the campaign for it from the beginning of the campaign. Therefore, Ali Paşa, the Ottoman Grand Vezir in 1871, tried to assure that the Ottoman government had no intention of threatening British interests in the Gulf.⁹⁹ However, Ali Paşa failed in this persuasion because Britain perceived the Ottoman campaign as a direct threat to the British predominance and interests in the region, which would harm its supremacy and, eventually, image among the tribes. Moreover, the Ottoman presence limited British freedom of action in the northern part of the Gulf, such as Qatar and Hasa.¹⁰⁰ Hence, the rise of the Ottoman influence in the Gulf advanced British apprehensions.

Although Mithad Paşa left the Baghdad governorship in 1872, Abdülhamid II continued to pursue the policy of consolidation and expansion in the Gulf¹⁰¹ particularly after the dramatic losses in the Balkans in the 1877-78 War.¹⁰² Therefore, the Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf continued to be a menace to the British supremacy until World War I when the Ottomans withdrew from the region.¹⁰³ Hence, it can be said that there was mutual suspicion between Britain and the Ottoman Empire. Both states responded to each other's incursion. From this point, it can be stated that Britain contained the threats originating from the Ottoman presence so the containment policy of Britain was 'threat' for the Ottomans.

Ottoman penetration into the Gulf sometimes occurred with support of a foreign power. The possibility of such an alliance between a Great Power and the Ottoman government disturbed Britain because such an alliance strengthened Ottoman sovereignty in the Gulf and its hinterland. For instance, a Russian railway plan from Kuwait to Tripoli (Kapnist Plan) in 1897-99 was taken very seriously by

⁹⁷ Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf*: p. 113; Abu-Hakima, *Kuwait*: p. 84.

⁹⁸ Al Rasheed, Madawi, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis, The Rashidi Tribal Dynasty*, London, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1991, p. 204; Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*: p. 15.

⁹⁹ Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf*: p. 115.

¹⁰⁰ Yapp, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf*: p. 82.

¹⁰¹ Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 34.

¹⁰² Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*: p. 44.

¹⁰³ Yapp, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf*: p. 81.

the British authorities.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, the Berlin-Baghdad railway, which began to be planned in the same year as the Kapnist Plan, created similar anxieties for the British government, and so the British Foreign Ministry declared that Britain would not permit the railway plans envisaging Kuwait as a terminus.¹⁰⁵

The most important development in the Gulf in terms of bringing together a Great Power and the Ottoman government against Britain in the period under review was the Berlin-Baghdad Railway.¹⁰⁶ The railway project not only served Germany's economic and strategic interests and ambitions in the Middle East, but also it would ensure a more active policy for the Ottomans by which they could challenge British supremacy or even hegemony in the Gulf. For instance, the new railway could provide fast transportation for Ottoman troops to the region.¹⁰⁷

From the beginning of the project, Britain was aware that the Berlin-Baghdad Railway with its terminus in the Persian Gulf, would weaken British interests in Iraq, Persia and, more importantly, India by bringing together Germany and the Ottoman Empire at a strategically important location: the coast of the Gulf.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, Britain tried to lessen the side effects of the railway plan through several ways, such as participating in the plan as an associate and assuming control of the southernmost part of the railway, which was in the Persian Gulf. However, these particular attempts failed. Yet, Britain implied its role in Ottoman finance owing to its paramount influence in the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (*Düyun-u Umumiye*) with an aim of hindering the plan.¹⁰⁹ Ultimately, British policies toward the planned terminus of the railway, Kuwait, were mostly effective in undermining the effects of the plans of the railways in the region. The plans towards Kuwait

¹⁰⁴ Alghanim, *The Reign of Mubarek el-Sabah*: p. 151; Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 34; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*: p. 142.

¹⁰⁶ Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf*: p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 34; Kayalı, Hasan, *Arabs and Young Turks, Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997, p. 33; Kral Abdullah, *Biz Osmanlı'ya Neden İsyan Ettik*, trans. by. Halit Özkan, İstanbul, Klasik, 2007, p. 73; Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*: p. 58; Ortaylı, İlber, "The Port Cities in the Arab Countries", *Türk-Arap İlişkileri: Geçmişte, Bugün ve Gelecekte I. Uluslararası Konferansı Bildirileri (18-22 Haziran 1979)*, Ankara, Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiye ve Ortadoğu Araştırma Enstitüsü, undated, pp. 229-30; Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: p. 45.

¹⁰⁸ Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf*: p. 185; Önsoy, Rıfat, *Türk-Alman İktisadi Münasebetleri, 1871-1914*, İstanbul, Enderun Kitabevi, 1982, p. 43.

¹⁰⁹ Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf*: pp. 180, 186, 248.

became influential also over the Ottoman existence in the region. As stated earlier, Britain had signed a protective agreement with Kuwait in 1899 stipulating that Kuwait would not allow any part of its territory to enter into agreement with any foreign power without the prior consent of Britain.¹¹⁰ Four years later, after the failure of the British participation in the project Lord Lansdowne, the British foreign minister, declared in the House of Lords that, “We should regard the establishment of a naval base or of a fortified port on the Persian Gulf by any other Power as a very grave menace to British interests, and that we should certainly resist with all the means at our disposal”.¹¹¹ With such explicit, strongly entrenched, threatening position of Britain, the Ottoman state felt compelled to consolidate its rule in the region with the support of a foreign power, such as Germany. However, this increased the anxieties of Britain and it tightened its grasp in the region by taking Kuwait under its protection. The German-Ottoman railway plan led to the loss of Kuwait even before its realization. This shows that Britain did not permit the Ottoman presence in the region.¹¹²

It is impossible to assert that there was not a direct and influential British threat to the Ottoman presence and interests, as Britain was highly determined to protect its supremacy over the route to India by excluding other powers from the region. Britain did not tolerate the slightest intervention of any foreign power. In this context, it found appropriate ways to undermine the influence of the Ottoman Empire in the Persian Gulf. Consequently, British strategy toward the region, which was based on excluding other powers that might threaten the British presence, verified the Ottoman perception of the British threat in the region.

¹¹⁰ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 138; Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*: p. 319; Philby, *Arabia*: p. 169.

¹¹¹ Adamiyat, *Bahrein Islands*: p. 188; Philby, *Arabia*: p. 162.

¹¹² For further information analyzing the issues of the Ottoman-German rapprochement in the time of Abdülhamid II and the Berlin-Baghdad railway, see Abdülhamid II, *Abdülhamid'in Hatıra Defteri*: pp. 75-81; Alghanim, *The Reign of Mubarek el-Sabah*: pp. 150-190; Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*: pp. 187-234; Earle, *Turkey, The Great Powers and The Bagdad Railway*; Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf*: pp. 137-193; Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*; Önsoy, *Türk-Alman Münasebetleri: 1871-1914*.

3.2. The British Threat by means of the Sheikhdoms

Ottoman bureaucrats and the notables from the region pointed out that the British threat toward the Ottoman presence came from the sheikhdoms that were in close relations with Britain. The Ottoman reports from various sources with regard to this issue offer explicit evidence of the existence of the British threat. A short while after the Ottoman campaign in 1871, the Ottomans began to feel more threatened by Britain in the region, especially with the beginning of Abdülhamid II's rule. There were two reasons for the increased British threat during that era. Firstly, as was explained in the Chapter 1, the Anglo-Ottoman relations deteriorated rapidly at the beginning of Abdülhamid II's rule. Secondly, the Ottomans directly faced the British presence in the Gulf after the 1871 campaign because of proximity to Britain in the Gulf and being more involved in the affairs of the region after the establishment of the Ottoman presence in 1871.

Britain undermined the Ottoman presence in the Gulf by using local leaders as their protégés. Hence, this intervention can be considered as a kind of "peaceful penetration". Ottoman statesmen were aware of this "peaceful penetration". Some Ottoman statesmen referred to this "peaceful penetration" as "a kind of influence" over the sheikhdoms without providing a certain definition about the nature of this relationship.¹¹³ On the other hand, some of the Ottoman statesmen defined "a kind of influence" as "moral influence" (*manevi nüfuz*) over the sheikhdoms.¹¹⁴

Whatever its term, the British threat to the Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf was realized by the autonomous local leaders backed by Britain. Using local actors in foreign intervention could be seen in other parts of the Ottoman Empire such as using Christian minorities in the riots.¹¹⁵ In the region analyzed in this study, the local actors were excessively autonomous tribes and their leaders backed by Britain. In this context, the Ottomans perceived a threat with regard to the sheikhdoms, some of which were under its, albeit nominal, sovereignty. These sheikhdoms included Kuwait, Necd, which was under the rule of Ibn-i Reşid and Ibn-i Saud, Qatar and Bahrain, which was assumed under Ottoman sovereignty by the Ottomans in spite of its obvious status under the protection of Britain. In the *jurnal*

¹¹³ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 127.

¹¹⁴ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 135.

¹¹⁵ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 134.

sent by a member of the Basra Municipal Council (*Basra Şehremini Azası*) in 1891 to Yıldız Palace, a conviction can be observed in the mind of a local notable loyal to the Ottoman state that if the British threats arising from the relations of local leaders with Britain would be maintained, the influence of the Ottoman Empire would be eliminated from both Basra and the northern sheikhdoms under its sovereignty.¹¹⁶

Bahrain greatly disturbed the Ottomans because of its independence under British protection. Although the Ottomans did not want to recognize Bahrain's independence status, they were highly aware of this *de-facto* situation. In an earlier report from 1883, it was claimed that British policy in Bahrain was based on excluding Ottomans from the island and using it for further infiltrations to the coasts of the Gulf, as this policy stemmed from the strategic position of Bahrain in the sea of the Gulf and its closeness to Basra.¹¹⁷ Therefore, Bahrain was considered as a base for British encroachments by which tribes in the littoral of the Gulf obtained weapons and ammunitions due to this strategic status. Ottoman authorities were convinced that if necessary measures would not be taken for Bahrain, and if the local Ottoman government (*Necd Mutasarrıflık*) would continue to be weak in the face of the threat stemming from Bahrain, all Arabian tribes would receive new weapons and eventually mobilize against the Ottoman government.¹¹⁸

Kuwait was also a source of anxiety for the Ottoman government. The position of Kuwait after Mübarek El-Sabah's protection agreement with Britain in 1899 became a serious and explicit threat to Ottoman territorial integrity. The Ottomans attributed to Britain the role of inciting rebellions and causing disorder in the Gulf and Necd by using Kuwait. In a document sent to Yıldız in 1901, Britain was accused of intriguing with and inciting the Kuwaiti Sheikh, Mübarek El-Sabah, to rise against the Ottoman state. Moreover, Mübarek was depicted as the servant for British interests because of his provocative actions among the tribes. For instance, he sought the support of several tribes that were under Ottoman rule to rebel against the Ottoman administration by sending his representative; wicked Ebu El-Hayl ("*...namındaki şeriri*") together with letters explaining his (ill-intended) objectives. He also asked for the support of the British Consul General in Basra for this

¹¹⁶ 1 Muharrem 1309: BOA, Y. PRK.AZJ 20/2.

¹¹⁷ 14 Mayıs 1299: BOA, Y.PRK.UM 5/100.

¹¹⁸ 11 Temmuz 1309: BOA, DH.MKT 84/21.

insurrection. Moreover, Britain provided Abdülaziz Ibn-i Suud, who was a refugee in Kuwait under the auspices of Mübarek, with weapons and ammunitions in order to expand malice (*fesat*) among the tribes in Necd. Actually, Mübarek overlooked the British relations with Saudi family who were refugee in Kuwait from 1891 to 1901 to create an ally in Arabia which is close to both Kuwait and Britain.¹¹⁹

After the 1899 protection treaty was signed, Kuwait, as a northernmost sheikhdom, was considered by the Ottomans as a formidable buffer separating Basra from the southern sheikhdoms along the coast and Necd. It is seen from the report (*mütalaa*) sent by the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the Ottoman state began to make plans such as building land routes that would not pass through Kuwait in 1905 in order to reach Hasa where the Ottoman administration existed more concretely. Britain gave priority to Kuwait rather than other sheikhdoms because of the common Ottoman-German plans depicting Kuwait as the terminus of the Great Berlin-Baghdad Railway (“...*Bağdat hatt-ı kebirinin nokta-ı müntehası*”).¹²⁰ In this regard, Kuwait became a very vulnerable point in the Persian Gulf region from which several threats emanated.

In the Council of Ministers’ (*Meclis-i Vükela*) report in 1904, the re-emerged actor in the Persian Gulf, Abdülaziz El-Suud, who was the descendant of the rulers of two previous Saudi states that had been troublesome for the Ottomans, was also branded as an ally of Britain because of his close alliance with Mübarek El-Sabah. Due to this alliance, he received the support from Britain.¹²¹ In fact, Mübarek El-Sabah wanted to realize his objectives such as expanding the influence of Kuwait to Arabia by the virtue of the Saudis. It was expedient for Mübarek El-Sabah to undermine the Ottoman rule in the region by supporting the Saudi struggle against Ibn-i Reşid who was allied with the Ottomans. Abdülaziz Ibn-i Saud was supplied with arms, men, camels and provisions by Mübarek El-Sabah. Although the British opposed arm trafficking (in principle), they allowed Mübarek’s arms trafficking to undermine the Ottoman presence in the region.¹²² Abdülaziz’s competition with Ibn-i Reşid was also signified as dangerous in Ottoman Council of Ministers’ (*Meclis-i Vükela*) report in 1904 because Bahrain had been taken under British protection as a

¹¹⁹ 6 Eylül 1317: BOA, Y.PRK. HR 31/52.

¹²⁰ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR.SYS 104/10.

¹²¹ 21 Mart 1320:BOA, MV 109/15.

¹²² *Almana, Arabia Unified*: p. 30; Philby, *Arabia*: p. 186; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: p. 20.

result of the rivalry between Bahraini sheikhs in the mid-19th century. Hence, competition among Necdî sheikhs as a result of the rise of Ibn-i Saud after his recapture of Riyadh in 1901 was considered as a menace to the Ottoman rule in the area because the competition between two Necdî sheikhs might be used by Britain as a pretext of penetration. In considering all of these points, it was advised to take measures to contain and control Ibn-i Saud.¹²³

The Council of Ministers depicted in the same report Ibn-i Saud as the pawn of British penetration and the servant of British objectives (“... *amal-i ecnebiyye’ye hadim...*”). It was believed that if the Ottoman government would not pursue a more resolute policy against this Saudi threat, the entire region would pass under the protection of Britain in a short period because of the explicit rapprochement between Ibn-i Saud with Britain.¹²⁴

In this regard, Ibn-i Reşid appealed for the intervention of the Ottomans to impede the expansion and consolidation launched by Ibn-i Saud.¹²⁵ Although Ibn-i Reşid contacted the Ottoman government for assistance against Ibn-i Saud, the Ottomans had even lost their trust in Ibn-i Reşid due to the accusations of his rivals and Ottoman officials, as well as his dubious relations with Britain. For instance, Sadun,¹²⁶ who was the head of the Mıntefik tribal confederation and a major rival of Ibn-i Reşid, reported in 1883 that British policy with Ibn-i Reşid depended on the security of the pretended travelers in Arabia who were actually British officials,¹²⁷ yet other secret possibilities for cooperation between Ibn-i Reşid and Britain had to be considered as well. Indeed, Ibn-i Reşid bought new weapons from Damascus and Basra. Moreover, the Ottoman troops that had escaped from the Ottoman army, the deserters, (*asker kaçakları*) went to Ibn-i Reşid to shelter. There were rumors that Ibn-i Reşid collected men from the tribes for further consolidation in the Gulf without the consent of the Ottomans.¹²⁸ Therefore, although Ibn-i Reşid was an ally

¹²³ 21 Mart 1320: BOA, MV 109/15.

¹²⁴ 21 Mart 1320: BOA, MV 109/15.

¹²⁵ Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 55; Al Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*: p. 143.

¹²⁶ For Sadun. see Philby, *Arabia*: pp. 157-158.

¹²⁷ One of the well known travelers visiting Ibn-i Reşid was Palgrave who came to Ibn-i Reşid as a doctor in the name of Napoleon in 1862 (Freeth, Zahra and Winstone, H.V.F, *Explorers of Arabia, From the Renaissance to the End of the Victorian Era*, New York, Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1978, p. 158).

¹²⁸ 14 Mayıs 1299: BOA; Y.PRK.UM 5/100.

of the Ottoman state, the Ottomans had suspicions about him because of the rumors and complaints raised by his rivals about his secret relations with Britain and his autonomous acts that contradicted the interests of the Ottoman government.¹²⁹

In addition to the Ottomans surveillance in the Arabian littoral of the Gulf, they also closely followed the British plans toward the Iranian part of the Gulf because of its possible repercussions on the Ottoman lands. The Ottomans had experiences since the 16th century which indicated that Iran had had salient influence over the Arabian coasts of the Gulf. Therefore, the British presence in Iran would directly affect Ottoman rule in the Gulf. In a report based on the information obtained from Indian newspapers in 1899, it was stated that Britain had the aim to invade the Meshed port, which was the nearest entrance of the Shatt-ul Arab which had a strategic position for both Iraq and the Persian Gulf. It was argued that after capturing Meshed, it would be easy for Britain to capture the Arabian part of Iraq.¹³⁰

In conclusion, the Ottoman central authority perceived several serious threats from the sheikhdoms in the Persian Gulf. The most obvious threat was from Bahrain, which was independent due to British protection. However, the Ottomans could not even trust the sheikhdoms under Ottoman sovereignty such as Kuwait or its agent in the region such as Ibn-i Reşid, for Ottoman statesmen were highly convinced that Britain encouraged local leaders to undermine the Ottoman rule in the region. The local leaders could challenge the Ottoman state easily because of British protection provided for them against Ottoman power.

3.3. The Effects of the British Threat in the Gulf upon Hejaz and Other Regions of the Ottoman Empire

For the Ottomans, the Gulf was not an isolated and remote part of the empire but a strategically vulnerable point having the possibility to affect all of the empire in general and Arabia in particular. In this context, the rise of any local power supported by Britain was considered as a menace to Ottoman rule in Arabia, particularly in Hejaz. The proximity of the Persian Gulf to Hejaz was worrisome for the Ottoman statesmen because of the paramount British influence in the region. The

¹²⁹ The Ottoman politics and practices towards Ibn-i Reşid and the relations between two parties will be analyzed in detail, in the Chapter 4.

¹³⁰ 22 Şubat 1314: BOA, Y.PRK.TKM 41/35.

Ottoman perception of the British threat was not only related with the sheikhdoms in the region but also beyond. Hence, both the Ottoman officials in the region and the centre evaluated the British threat carefully because of its possible repercussions for Hejaz and other regions. In this regard, the Ottoman perception was not the consequence of a simple supposition but the result of serious contemplation due to the side effects of the threat for the entire empire.

Hejaz had a prominent importance in the minds of the Ottomans for ages. The most prominent figure of the Tanzimat, Mustafa Reşid Paşa, pointed out that there were three pillars upon which the Ottoman State was dependent. These were Islam, being in possession of the caliphate and serving as guardian of Mecca and Medina, and maintaining İstanbul as the capital city of the Ottomans. Mustafa Reşid Paşa did not invent something new, but this formulation highlighted his internalization of the classical legitimacy tools and perspective of the Ottomans. Therefore, his statements were a continuation of the classical Ottoman mentality. For instance, in a book written in the late 16th century, *Şemailname*, Taliki-zade Mehmed Kemal El-Fenari reflected this outlook. El-Fenari noted 20 pillars upon which the Ottoman state was based. Islam, Mecca and Medina were in the first and second ranks respectively.¹³¹ It should be kept in mind that, the Ottomans fought with Portugal in the 16th century primarily to protect Hejaz.¹³² Similar to India, which was “the jewel in the crown” of the British Empire, Hejaz was the “jewel of the caliphate crown” (*Cevher-i İklil-i Hilafet-i Seniyye*) of the Ottoman Empire.¹³³ Thus, holding Hejaz and the routes to it were indispensable, fundamental duties of the Ottoman caliphs.

This significance of Hejaz increased during the Abdülhamidian era because holding it legitimized the Ottoman caliphate and Ottoman rule over Arabia, both of which gained significant importance in the era of Abdülhamid II. Moreover, holding Hejaz was instrumental in intensifying Ottoman prestige in the minds of both Muslim subjects and Muslims abroad. In fact, being sovereign over Hejaz was an instrument used for both integrating the Ottoman Muslims into a cohesive

¹³¹ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 66.

¹³² Kuhn, “Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism”: p. 319; Uğur, Hatice, *Osmanlı Afrikası'nda Bir Sultanlık: Zengibar*, İstanbul, Küre Yayınları, 2005, p. 22.

¹³³ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: pp. 127 - 128; Peck, *Historical Dictionary*: p. 89.

community and expanding Ottoman religious influence overseas.¹³⁴ Additionally, Abdülhamid II needed the prestige of holding Hejaz together with the caliphate because possession of both could be utilized them as potential (political) assets and tools against the Great Powers that had Muslim populations in their colonies.¹³⁵

In terms of geographical proximity, while the Persian Gulf was seen as geographically and economically in the periphery of the Ottoman Empire, it was highly close the most important place of the Empire: Hejaz.¹³⁶ It also should be kept in mind that the boundaries in Arabia were drawn by allegiances rather than by lines of a map.¹³⁷ Thus, the change in the alliances among tribes might lead to monumental changes in the political scene of Arabia. For instance, while the tribes from Hasa to Medina and Mecca had been considered in favor of Ibn-i Reşid and consequently loyal to the Ottoman state, they might change their position and would side with a sheikh close to Britain, such as Ibn-i Saud when the interests of these sheikhs would be maximized. Therefore, the tribes from Hasa to Medina might be allied with Britain in a very short time. As such both physical proximity of the Gulf to Hejaz and the volatile feature of Arabian politics based on shifting allegiances of tribes resulted in the continuation of the Ottoman anxieties about the possibility of a British encroachment upon Hejaz.

The Ottomans had several defense lines for the protection of Hejaz such as Yemen, Syria and the Persian Gulf as well.¹³⁸ The importance of the Persian Gulf for Hejaz could be easily understood in comparison with other parts of the empire because the Ottomans considered even North and Central Africa as a “primary line of defense” for its rule over Hejaz and Arabia.¹³⁹ Hence, the developments in the Gulf were seriously followed by the Ottoman authorities who were active in the region, and evaluated the repercussions of any shift in the Gulf for Hejaz. The perspective considering any change and the rise of any local power backed by Britain as a threat to Hejaz and beyond were noted in the documents related to the Persian Gulf. It was

¹³⁴ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 126; Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*: pp. 28, 241; Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: pp. 26, 46.

¹³⁵ Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: p. 49.

¹³⁶ Al-Rasheed, *Politics in Arabian Oasis*: p. 263.

¹³⁷ Almana, *Arabia Unified*: pp. 21, 23, 53.

¹³⁸ Kuhn, “Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism”: p. 319.

¹³⁹ Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*: p. 258.

thought that autonomous sheikhdoms with the support of Britain might challenge the Ottoman rule over Hejaz. The anxiety stemmed mainly from the rise of the Wahhabis from Necd in the early 19th century in which they invaded Hejaz and damaged the sacred Muslim sites. This background had always remained fresh in the minds of the Ottoman statesmen.¹⁴⁰

The rise of the local sheikhdoms and the clashes among them were considered as a tool of Britain to reach to Hejaz. For instance, Kuwait as a sheikhdom under British protection might enlarge its influence to the interior regions of Arabia, particularly Hejaz. The existence of Ibn-i Reşid and Ibn-i Saud, both of whom were deemed as non-trustable and unreliable, in the hinterland of Kuwait, Necd increased the Ottoman anxieties because the hinterland of Necd was Hejaz.¹⁴¹

Problems and disorder among the local leaders in the region were considered to have a possibility of affecting Hejaz directly. As a result, the conflict between Ibn-i Reşid and Mübarek El-Sabah was evaluated in the framework of its possible negative effects on Hejaz. If Ibn-i Reşid would attack Kuwait, Britain would intervene on behalf of Kuwait due to its protection agreement made in 1899. The attack of Ibn-i Reşid against Mübarek El-Sabah might give Britain a pretext for establishing a zone of influence in which it could contact local leaders including even Ibn-i Reşid. The negative effects of this British presence would directly affect Hejaz. As a result, the order was directed to the Basra governor (*Vali*) that any clash between Mübarek and Ibn-i Reşid must be prevented in order to pre-empt any British penetration.¹⁴²

Similar concerns were observed two years later in 1904 with respect to a struggle between Ibn-i Saud and Ibn-i Reşid. The rise of Abdülaziz Ibn-i Saud and his competition with Ibn-i Reşid intimidated Ottomans because Abdülaziz could reach Medina as a result of his possible victory in his conflict with Ibn-i Reşid. He had already captured Qasim, which was a five day and fifteen days distance from Medina and Basra, respectively; hence, a possible defeat of Ibn-i Reşid would open the way to Hejaz for Ibn-i Saud. The Sheriff of Mecca, Avnürrefik, and Governor-Guardian (*Muhafız*) of Hejaz, Osman Nuri Paşa, also emphasized the possible

¹⁴⁰ See Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*.

¹⁴¹ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR.SYS 104/10.

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

repercussions of the capture of Qasim for Hejaz.¹⁴³ Qasim was considered to be in a key position on the route to Hejaz. In this regard, the Ottoman Council of Ministers warned that serious measures would be taken to contain Ibn-i Suud.¹⁴⁴

To sum up, the threats of local leaders, under the auspices of Britain, to Hejaz and beyond disturbed the Ottomans substantially. Hejaz made the Ottomans more aware of the British threat. Therefore, Ottomans evaluated the existence of the British threat and its extent correctly because of the strategical and symbolic importance of Hejaz for the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans had to take serious measures to contain the threats emanating from the Persian Gulf to Hejaz. Therefore, it could not waste its resources for a threat which did not really exist. The anxiety and measures against the British threat to Hejaz is clear evidence of the existence of the British threat in the Persian Gulf.

In conclusion, the Ottoman perception of the British threat was not groundless, but it was, firstly, based on the British policy of protecting its supremacy in the Persian Gulf because of its inevitable strategic importance for India, British imperial objectives towards Arabia and Iraq, and averting the emergence of a rival to the British economic supremacy in the region. Britain was protecting its supremacy by excluding other powers from the region. The basic mean of exclusion was the establishment of the British auspices over local sheikhdoms by protection agreements. Britain also had very close relations with other sheikhdoms that were not included into the protection agreements. Secondly, the Ottoman detailed reports reflecting British threats by means of the local sheikhdoms proved that there was a clear and present British threat. Thirdly, the Ottoman anxieties with regard to the threat toward Hejaz that emanated from the sheikhdoms under the British auspices also verified the Ottoman perception of the British threat. It can be claimed that the Ottomans could not waste precious resources for non-existent threats. The following chapter examines how this threat shaped the Ottoman outlook for the Gulf region.

¹⁴³ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*, p. 171.

¹⁴⁴ 21 Mart 1320: BOA, MV 109/15.

CHAPTER 4

The OTTOMAN VIEW of the PERSIAN GULF in LIGHT of the BRITISH THREAT

The Ottoman view of the Persian Gulf was formed in light of the British threat. This outlook toward the region was derived from four dimensions: British tools used to perpetuate the threat, the local people's attitude toward the threat, the influence of religion to impede the threat, and the assertion of Ottoman rights of sovereignty and their effects against the threat. The Ottoman perspective with regard to the British tools, people, religion and sovereignty eventually shaped the policies and measures to contain the British threat and to hold the region to a great extent. For instance, the Ottomans were convinced that British ships were the most influential part of the British encroachment into the region, so Ottoman bureaucrats offered the dispatch of Ottoman ships to the coast of the Persian Gulf to counter the intrusion. Similarly, the Ottomans perceived the native people in the Persian Gulf people as being nomadic (*bedouin*), ignorant and wild. Thus, the Ottoman centre and bureaucrats in the region produced responses against the British threat that took into account this stereotyped character of the people. As will be analyzed later in the thesis, one of the reasons suspending the Ottoman modern reforms in the Persian Gulf was the bedouin character of the local people. Furthermore, the religion of the people and Ottoman self-sovereignty proclamations for several parts of the Gulf inspired expectation for the Ottomans to establish an influential rule in the region. It might be claimed that this expectation stemming from the Ottoman view for the region renewed Ottoman enthusiasm to make new attempts to re-intensify the Ottoman existence.

The Ottomans realized that Britain had penetrated into the Gulf region by several effective means, such as arming the local people against the Ottoman state by gun smuggling, coercing them to act in line with the British interests and using British ships to support the above-mentioned means. Ottomans were highly convinced that these means were certainly capable of undermining the Ottoman presence in the region.

The Ottomans also assessed local people in light of their awareness for resisting against the British threat, which originated from their place in civilization, and their loyalty to the empire related to the issue of opposing the British threat. Firstly, the Ottomans assumed that the local people in the Persian Gulf were ignorant and living in brutal conditions. Therefore, the people were not accepted as aware enough to understand or oppose the British penetration. On the other hand, the loyalty of people in the Persian Gulf was appreciated. In fact, the subjects were accepted as loyal in the classical Ottoman state tradition, but the traitors (*fasid*) and the foreign powers deceived people not to obey the Ottoman state; thus the people were accepted as innocent. This assumption arose from the Ottoman need for the loyalty of the people for the purpose of ensuring order. In this context, the local people in the Persian Gulf were assumed to be loyal because of the state's need to thwart the British threat. The close relations between Britain and the local sheikhs, which was highly contradictory with their assumed and wished for loyalty, was tried to be explained as the consequence of misgovernment by the Ottoman bureaucrats and inappropriate centralist policies of the previous governors. Like foreign provocation and traitors, the mismanagement of the region by Ottoman officials was the scapegoat used to explain the seeming close relations between Britain and local sheikhs. In this regard, the Ottoman outlook for the people revolved around the issue of whether or not these people were civilized and loyal enough to understand and oppose the British threat. Those hopes and assumptions for loyalty proved that there was a substantial British threat aimed at being thwarted.

One of the primary reasons for regarding people as loyal in the Persian Gulf was the religion of people, which was Islam. Religion had a very salient influence in shaping the Ottoman view on the region. The Ottoman outlook considering religion as a factor binding people to the state was formed explicitly in the context of the British threat as on the point of how the people were perceived. However, the realities on the ground did not correspond with the assumptions of the Ottoman statesmen. In fact, the leaders in the Persian Gulf were very realist and pragmatic in the issue of being aligned with either the Ottomans or British because they sought maximization of their own interests. As such, religion was not so effective in directing people to act according to the interests of the Ottoman Empire.

Finally, the Ottomans tried to counter the British threat toward the Gulf by demonstrating its sovereignty over the region. In fact, they appealed to the

international principle of respecting sovereignty. The Ottoman government based its sovereignty claims on geography, history and international law. Nevertheless, Ottoman assertions were challenged by British objection. Indeed, Britain weakened Ottoman sovereignty by both generating its own arguments and using its military power. Therefore, the Ottomans realized this opposition and preferred refraining from direct confrontation with Britain in principle, and backed away from clashing in several events with Britain. To balance the precarious situation, Ottomans also kept local leaders, albeit nominally, under its rule from attacking Britain and British interests. These Ottoman claims of sovereignty ensured legitimacy for the Ottomans to renew their attempts to consolidate the Ottoman existence in the region. Following British opposition based on generating its own arguments and its military power demonstrated the extent of their attempts to the Ottoman statesmen. In conclusion, all of these dimensions of the Ottoman perspective of the region were shaped under the British threat each will be analyzed below in detail.

4.1. The British Means in Threatening the Persian Gulf

The Ottomans were convinced that Britain used several effective tools in threatening the Ottomans in the Persian Gulf. It was believed that Britain did whatever it needed to do in order to control the Persian Gulf. In 1887, Nafiz Paşa, the Governor of Basra, complained to the centre that Britain could do whatever it wanted to so as to control the Persian Gulf. He stated that Britain wanted to bind the people and the places along the coast of the Gulf, such as Bahrain and Qatar by using any method or pretext.¹⁴⁵ Britain applied a “carrot and stick” policy that was more suitable for a particular situation. In other words, Britain used a method of both threat and reward in bringing the local sheikhs under its influence.

Britain followed a “shrewd and cautious” policy in the region rather than applying direct control in the region, the British policy was based on indirect control; therefore, while providing weapons and money for the local sheikhs, it was careful not to interfere with their local affairs. Britain showed itself as a shelter for the locals. For instance, it presented itself as the protector of their “honour” (*namus*) and interests better than the Ottomans. For instance, reports respectively dated 1883 and

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

1888, emphasized how Britain gained great support in the region and how it used the rhetoric of the “protection of their honour” (*namuslarını vikaye*). Sadun, who was the head of Müntefik tribal confederation, explained the British policy in the Arab peninsula in his report sent to Yıldız Palace in 1883. He stated that Britain had used the local leaders in its encroachment into the Persian Gulf. Britain had helped the local leaders with money and weapons, and British officers in these regions did not interfere in the local affairs of the sheikhs (“...*himayelerinde bulunan ümeraya aslen itiraz ve müdahale etmezler*”). In fact, the British officers tried to win the minds and hearts of local people in line with the objectives of Britain (“... *ahalinin kalp ve eřkarlarını İngilizler’in makasıdlarına celb ve ittihada davet etmektir*”). The British demonstrated their compassion (*merhamet*) towards the local people on all occasions. They claimed to protect the honour (*namuslarını vikaye*) of Arabs. This policy was pursued by all of the British officers in Arabia cautiously. British policy in the Gulf was based on reconciliation with the heads of tribes rather than coercing them. Due to following these policies, Britain managed to exert great influence in the Persian Gulf.¹⁴⁶ In Sadun’s report, it is also noted that Britain used the propaganda as a mean of controlling the Gulf indirectly. Raşid Ibn-i Ali, a religious scholar, a member of *Ulema*, from Necd, emphasized this point, like Sadun, in his report sent to Yıldız Palace in 1888. British officials propagated the notion that Britain was better than the Ottoman state for the local people in the Gulf. Besides their honour being under British protection would be protected from all threats, and their rights would be respected as well.¹⁴⁷ It is understood that Britain wanted to exploit the most important sense in bedouin life: honour (*namus*). Thus, British representatives often pointed out that the honour of the people would be protected under the British auspices much better than under Ottoman rule.

Although Britain applied several policies to control the region, some tools were more emphasized by the Ottomans. The first method was arming and provoking the local people against the Ottoman administration in the region. The second tool of Britain was coercing local people to act in line with British interests. Last but not least, the navigation of British ships to the Gulf region made previously-mentioned two means possible as well as served the function of impressing people.

¹⁴⁶ 14 Mayıs 1299: BOA, Y.PRK.UM 5/100.

¹⁴⁷ 20 Cemaziyelahir 1305: BOA, Y. PRK. TKM 11/62.

4.1.1. Gun Smuggling and Incitement for Insurrection

The Ottomans were reported by British diplomats in İstanbul to be highly convinced that Britain encouraged local tribal leaders to rise against the Ottoman state¹⁴⁸ because Britain had the objective to control the Persian Gulf and Arabia entirely, thus it would not abstain from provocation and seduction.¹⁴⁹ In fact, these possible upheavals would, obviously, serve the British interests because they would lead into the elimination of order in the Persian Gulf. As previously explained, Britain aimed to intervene into the region by using the pretext of the lack of the security in the Gulf.¹⁵⁰

For instance, the Ottomans claimed that Britain encouraged Ibn-i Saud to rise against the Ottoman state.¹⁵¹ It was believed by the Ottomans that the “British Resident” in the Gulf, who was the British official representative of the Persian Gulf as a consul living in the Iranian side of the Gulf, had provoked Mübarek El-Sabah to kill his own brothers in 1896¹⁵² because Muhammed and Cerrah (the brothers of Mübarek who were killed by him) did not participate into the anti-Ottoman coalition formed by Ibn-i Reşid, Casim El-Sani, the head of the tribes in Qatar, and Bahraini chief.¹⁵³

The insurrections against the Ottoman Empire became possible owing to new arms and other equipment in the hands of the tribes.¹⁵⁴ The supplier of these new arms and provisions was Britain,¹⁵⁵ so Ottomans accused Britain because of its role in the gun smuggling in the Persian Gulf. Specifically, British ships navigating in the littoral of the Gulf region were blamed for taking part in the smuggling of weapons in the coastal areas of the Gulf region by using particularly the British protectorate Bahrain as a hub. The openness, which was construed to mean the inadequate or

¹⁴⁸ Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ 1 Muharrem 1309: BOA, Y.PRK.AZJ 20/2.

¹⁵⁰ 5 Teşrin-i Evvel 1311: BOA, Y.PRK.ASK 107/45.

¹⁵¹ Al-Rasheed, *Politics in Arabian Oasis*: p. 211.

¹⁵² Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*: p. 97; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: p. 8.

¹⁵³ Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf*: p. 138.

¹⁵⁴ 5 Teşrin-i Evvel 1311: BOA, Y.PRK.ASK 107/45.

¹⁵⁵ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 67.

even non-existent Ottoman authority in the Persian Gulf coasts from Qatar to Aden, was presented as the primary reason for making gun smuggling possible for Britain.¹⁵⁶ The openness of the littoral of the Persian Gulf region was the consequence of, firstly, the weakness of the local administration in terms of containing this trafficking.¹⁵⁷ Secondly, and, more importantly, the openness was mainly related with the lack of the Ottoman ships.¹⁵⁸ In this context, the Ottomans feared that the bedouin tribes could buy weapons as a result of this openness along the coasts of the Persian Gulf. It was noted that if these coasts would not be controlled, all of the tribes of Arabia could be armed with new weapons in a short time (*“Ceziret’ül Arab aşair ve sekinesinin az zaman içinde kamilen esliha-ı cedide ile müsellah olacakları”*).¹⁵⁹

Bahrain had a significant role in the gun smuggling because of the explicit lack of even nominal Ottoman authority. Bahrain was considered to be a hub of gun smuggling to the rest of Arabia. The guns and ammunitions imported to Arabia were smuggled by using Bahrain as the route, for the merchants in Bahrain were free in commerce due to the lack of control in the ports and on the sea of Bahrain.¹⁶⁰ Kuwait was also emphasized in some reports. For instance, it was pointed out that Martini rifles were imported to Iraq and Necd via Kuwait.¹⁶¹

Ottoman consulates in Iran and India also warned the center, especially the Sultan in terms of gun smuggling in the reports sent to Yıldız Palace. For instance, the Ottoman Ambassador in Tehran gave a detailed account of gun smuggling in his report sent to Yıldız Palace in 1893, and he offered some measures against the gun smuggling. Some British ships were actively utilized to import the weapons to the Ottoman territories by using the route of Bender Busehr in Iran. The weapons were imported into Kuwait, Basra, Muhammere and Bahrain under the cover of commercial goods. It was indicated that many guns, especially rifles, had been imported to the Gulf by then, so there was a serious danger in these regions. Furthermore, it was emphasized that the rebellion of Casim El-Sani in 1893 and the

¹⁵⁶ 25.L.1309: BOA, DH. MKT 1952/23.

¹⁵⁷ 16 Temmuz 1309: BOA, DH. MKT 84/21.

¹⁵⁸ 25.L.1309: BOA, DH. MKT 1952/23.

¹⁵⁹ 16 Temmuz 1309: BOA, DH. MKT 84/21.

¹⁶⁰ 18 Teşrin-i Evvel 1309: BOA, DH. MKT 160/48.

¹⁶¹ Çetinsaya, “The Ottoman View”: p. 197.

Ottoman weakness in suppressing this rebellion was the consequence of gun smuggling into the Gulf.¹⁶² The Ottoman Consul in Lince also highlighted gun smuggling by British ships through the route of Muscat, which was under British protection.¹⁶³

In these reports there were some examples indicating how armed tribes caused trouble in the region. For instance, Casim El-Sani, the head of the tribes in Qatar, received shipments of high-quality Martini rifles from Britain, Casim El-Sani distributed these guns to the people under his rule in order to attack the Ebu-Cinni tribe to exact revenge. Consequently, he attacked the Ebu-Cinni tribe with 300 men who possessed Martini rifles. This attack clearly led to the massacre of many people, and the rise of malice (*fesad*). It was stated that the Ebu-Cinni tribe also bought Martini and Gabrini rifles in order to seek revenge.¹⁶⁴ This shows that how the arming of a tribe triggered the arming of another tribe and, eventually, the elimination of order in the region.

In addition to the clashes between local leaders owing to the possession of weapons obtained from the British, the Ottomans believed in that Britain also played a provocative role in Casim El-Sani's rebellion against the Ottoman state in 1893. It was claimed that he rose up due to the encouragement and support of Britain.¹⁶⁵ The revolt and subsequent defeat of the Ottoman army by Casim El-Sani was related with the weapons Casim El-Sani had procured and their newness and high quality. In fact, Casim El-Sani had imported ammunition and new weapons (*esliha-ı cedide*) from Bahrain¹⁶⁶ and the British Consulate of Busehr in Iran.¹⁶⁷ In addition to causing disorder in the region, the gun smuggling also hindered the implementation of modern administrative and centralist reforms because guns ensured power, and consequently, autonomy for the tribes.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² 13 Eylül 1309: BOA, Y. PRK. EŞA 18/63.

¹⁶³ Bostan, İdris, "Basra Körfezi'nin Güney Kesimi ve Osmanlılar 1876-1908", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları, IX*, İstanbul, 1989, pp. 311-322, p. 314.

¹⁶⁴ 6 Şubat 1304: BOA, Y. MTV 37/93.

¹⁶⁵ 30 Mart 1309: BOA, Y. PRK. ASK 89/67.

¹⁶⁶ 6 Mayıs 1309: BOA, Y. PRK. SRN 3/89.

¹⁶⁷ Bostan, İdris, "The 1893 Uprising in Qatar and Sheikh Al Sani's Letter to Abdulhamid II", *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations, (STAR)*, No. 2 (1987), pp. 81-89, p. 83.

¹⁶⁸ Çetinsaya, "The Ottoman View": p. 198.

It should be stated that the Ottoman claims of the British role in gun smuggling were not groundless suspicions. Britain tolerated Mübarek El-Sabah's arm smuggling in spite of British self-asserted, well-known opposition to the gun smuggling. Britain considered that arms smuggling consolidated the tribes, allied with Britain, against the Ottomans. Troeller asserts that Lord Curzon believed that preventing the flow of arms to Ibn-i Saud would likely increase the possibilities of Ottoman dominance in the Gulf's hinterland. He believed that this would, obviously, have damaged British influence in Kuwait and along the coast. Troeller states "Once again principle bowed to expediency".¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, these secondary sources, benefiting mostly British sources depicted British role as only overlooking the gun smuggling but the Ottoman primary sources demonstrates that British ships often assumed an active role in the gun smuggling.¹⁷⁰ In fact, Britain had two functions in the arms trafficking in the region, that of "overlooking" and "active participation". All of these assertions were confirmed by an Ottoman statesman, Salih Münir Paşa who claimed that "There is nothing that is not lawful or permissible for the sake of England's interests" ("*İngiltere çıkarları uğruna, caiz ve mübah olmayan şey yoktur*").¹⁷¹ The weapons provided by Britain strengthened the local sheikhs to a great extent to challenge the Ottoman authority in the Gulf region.

4.1.2. Coercion

According to the Ottoman sources, Britain coerced local people to act in line with the plans, policies and the objectives of Britain. It intimidated and threatened local leaders when its interests required such action and it enforced the local people to act according to the interests of the local leaders under its auspices. The Zibare Event in 1896 in which Britain coerced local people who escaped from the oppression of Bahraini Sheikh to Zibare (Qatar) to return Bahrain will be analyzed as a case study to indicate how Britain oppressed and even harmed local people in order to protect and promote the interests of the sheikhs under Britain's influence.

¹⁶⁹ Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: p. 21.

¹⁷⁰ 13 Eylül 1309: BOA, Y. PRK. EŞA 18/63.

¹⁷¹ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 142.

Britain did whatever necessary to protect its own interests and its protégés in the Gulf region. Yet, Britain even forced local sheikhs, protégés, when its interests required and would be maximized. In this framework, British consuls in Busehr and Muscat and war-ships were the agents of British coercion policy. For instance, the consuls offered some things, such as surrendering criminals to Britain, to the sheikhs in the region. If these offers were rejected, the war-ships were sent and coerced the acceptance of their wishes by power.¹⁷² The Ottomans were highly convinced that Britain applied coercive methods against local sheikhs and people to reach its objectives. For instance, Britain acted unfriendly against Casim El-Sani, honorary governor (*fahri kaymakam*) of the Ottomans in Qatar, due to his rapprochement with the Ottomans. Britain confiscated 8,000 rube from Casim in response to the money of British citizens stolen in Qatar. After that event, a box of pearl and an amount of money of Casim was stolen by Isa Ibn-i Ali; the Sheikh of Bahrain from the representative of Casim El-Sani in Bahrain.¹⁷³

Although the Bahrain Sheikh was under the strongly established protection of Britain, he could not be spared from British rage when their interests clashed as was the case when the British Consul of Busehr went to Bahrain together with three war ships (*harp gemisi*) on 24 March 1905. He demanded that the Bahraini Sheikh to surrender the Sheikh's brother's son, Sheikh Ali Ibn-i Ahmed Ibn-i Ali, to him. The Sheikh of Bahrain refused this demand because there was no reason to accuse his nephew or to surrender him to the British (“... *ahz ve girift eylenmesini mucib bir sebep olmadıđından*”). The Sheikh indicated that if the Consul would insist on the seizure of his nephew, disorder would increase in Bahrain. Afterwards, he sent his nephew to the Qatari Sheikh, Casim El-Sani. When the Consul realized that the Bahraini Sheikh encouraged his nephew to flee and to take refuge in Qatar, he went to Qatar with a gunboat. British soldiers, who were left in Bahrain, attacked the house of the Sheikh of Bahrain and plundered his assets, including the clothes of women, animals and six of the Sheikh's ships. Then, the British Consul destroyed the ships by sinking them, and sent the plundered goods to Busehr, Kuwait and Muscat

¹⁷² Bostan, “Basra Körfezi'nin Güney Kesimi ve Osmanlılar”: p. 313.

¹⁷³ 17 Şubat 1303: BOA, DH. MKT. 1490/79.

to be sold in the market. The Consul left Bahrain only after occupying the Sheikh's house with a force of 50 soldiers.¹⁷⁴

There were some local repercussions for this event. For instance, Kuwait's Sheikh, Mübarek El-Sabah, wanted British Consulate removed on 5 April 1905 due to the above mentioned events in Bahrain. In response to this, Britain sent four warships to Kuwait to intimidate Mübarek. Furthermore, the British constructed some marine pontoons in the sea in spite of Mübarek's opposition.¹⁷⁵ After this event, the commander of the Ottoman Sixth Army in Baghdad pointed out that he learnt that although the Bahraini Sheikh had declared its independence from the Ottomans, Bahrain began to declare its loyalty and allegiance to the Ottoman Empire after this event.¹⁷⁶ The Ottoman authorities closely followed the problems between local leaders and Britain because they perceived such problems as a chance to prevent British intervention and to promote Ottoman rule in the Gulf. They assumed that the heads of tribes whose interests were damaged by Britain might turn to the Ottomans.

Another well-known example of the British coercion policy was the Zibare Incident. This event shows to what extent Britain forced local people to act according to its wishes and interests in the Persian Gulf. This event began in March 1895 when the Al-bin-Ali tribe of Bahrain left the island because of a political dispute with the Sheikh of Bahrain, and took refuge in Qatar. They settled in Zibare with the help of the Ottomans and Casim El-Sani.¹⁷⁷

The report of the Sixth Army gave the details of Zibare Event. 200 households (*hane*) from Bahrain took refuge with the Sheikh of Qatar, Casim El-Sani. They were settled into Zibare, which was in ruin at that time. Then the Ottoman state appointed an administrator and six troops to Zibare. After that, the commander of the British navy stationed along the Zibare coast threatened the refugees to return Bahrain in three days. If they would not agree to go back, he would bombard Zibare. On this occasion, the commander usurped the seven ships of these people. Two days later, he returned with two British ships and renewed his threats. Casim suggested the return of people within three months, which would provide enough time for

¹⁷⁴ 17 Muharrem 1323: BOA, HR. SYS 104/10.

¹⁷⁵ 24 Mart 1321: BOA, HR.SYS 104/10.

¹⁷⁶ 7 Mart 1321: BOA, HR. SYS 93/34.

¹⁷⁷ Zahlan, Rosemaire Said, *The Creation of Qatar*, New York, Barnes & Noble Books, 1979, p. 50.

collecting and transporting their goods. However, the commander refused this offer and asserted that they would be bombarded if they would not return within 15 days. He again took away eleven ships of the refugees. At the beginning of this event, the Ottomans struggled to hinder the British intervention to Zibare. The Ottoman major in Qatar pointed out that if the Ottoman government would not take necessary measures, Sheikh Casim would leave the refugees and flee to the desert. It was stated that the harmful objectives of Britain would be obstructed by sending a ship to the coast of Zibare.¹⁷⁸

In line with the recommendation of the commander, the requested Ottoman gun vessel (corvette) went to Zibare. When British authorities realized the existence of the Ottoman corvette, British ships bombarded Zibare and destroyed the ships of the Al-bin-Ali tribe in the port. Britain forced local people to return by using the men of the Nu'aym tribe. Therefore, the entire tribe, with the exception of the Sheikh of Al-bin-Ali tribe agreed to return Bahrain. Moreover, the British navy threatened to destroy Casim's dhows if he would not pay a fine of 30,000 rupees. Casim refused, and his fleet was destroyed as well.¹⁷⁹

4.1.3. British Ships

Ottomans believed that the supremacy of Britain in the Gulf was based on the encroachment of Britain by its ships. Britain could also use its above mentioned tools: provocation, gun smuggling and threatening through the employment of British ships. For instance, the guns could be transported by ships and Zibare could be bombarded by the British ships. The ships carried British officials for holding meetings with local sheikhs. In addition, British ships performed symbolic functions through saluting the sheikhs which implied the autonomy of the sheikhs and the supremacy of Britain over the region. Moreover, British ships impressed local people by showing the strength of Britain. The meetings and the saluting increased the Ottoman sense of being encircled and threatened in the Persian Gulf. Thus, the Ottomans were convinced that the British ships were effective means for the British encroachment in the Persian Gulf.

¹⁷⁸ 5 Ağustos 1311: BOA, Y.PRK.ASK 106/11.

¹⁷⁹ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 164; Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*: p. 50.

Ottoman statesmen were highly aware of the British threats stemming from the British gunboats, so it was seen as necessary to pursue their activities carefully. In this context, an order was given to provincial authorities such as the provincial governor and the commandership to follow and monitor the British ships navigating in the littoral of Nejd.¹⁸⁰ As mentioned above, the Ottomans related Casim's rebellion in 1893 with the provocation of Britain. British ships came to the coast of Qatar to hold conversation with and give some gifts to Casim after his rebellion.¹⁸¹ In another event in 1893, some arms including a cannon that belonged to Casim El-Sani, were delivered to Bahrain by a British ship. It was discovered by an Ottoman lieutenant that these arms were sent by the translator of Bender Busheyr, the Consulate of Britain. In this framework, the order went out to pursue Casim and the sender secretly.¹⁸²

British ships also provided the contact between local sheikhs and the British officials. The Ottomans were aware that local Gulf leaders and representatives of Britain met aboard British ships to hold interviews with local people. However the Ottomans did not know what was discussed in the meetings held between local heads and British officials. Indeed, limited knowledge without substance increased the Ottoman suspicions with regard to British relations with local leaders. The Ottomans considered these meetings as the preparation of conspiracies against the Ottoman state; consequently, these meetings increased the Ottoman sense of being threatened. The saluting which was performed when British ships came along the coasts of the Gulf increased the Ottoman apprehensions as well because these ceremonies were indications and declarations of the independence of the local sheikhs.

The Ottomans attributed symbolic meanings to the acts of saluting, such as firing guns from ships as an indication of the autonomy of the local sheikhdoms. Therefore, such kind of saluting increased the Ottoman sense of being threatened and penetrated. For instance, Casim El-Sani felt obliged to explain to the Ottoman authorities that he did not fire a gun because of giving a welcoming (*hoşemedi*) a British ship which came into Qatar but he did so in order to thank Ibn-i Reşid for the gift sent by him to Casim El-Sani.¹⁸³ The saluting that was held when British ships

¹⁸⁰ 29 Kanun-u Evvel 1314: BOA, DH.MKT 2158/49.

¹⁸¹ 6 Mayıs 1309: BOA, Y.PRK. SRN 3/89.

¹⁸² 19 Eylül 1309: BOA, DH. MKT 168/14.

¹⁸³ 14 Kanun-u Sani 1305: BOA, Y. PRK. UM 15/134.

and crews in them visited Bahrain was also followed by the Ottomans. It was reported that a British ship, “İspanisk” came into Bahrain and the British officials invited Bahrain’s Sheikh to the ship. In the saluting, both sides fired guns when the Sheikh was coming to the ship. In addition to the saluting, the meeting between British officials and the sheikh was reported as well.¹⁸⁴

Another visit of a British ship to Bahrain, and the saluting held upon its arrival on 3 March 1895 was also under close Ottoman scrutiny. In the ceremony, the British ship fired five times to salute the Sheikh and in response, Bahraini Sheikh, Isa bin Ali El-Halife greeted them by firing a cannon five times from his ship. In addition, it was realized that the British Consul General came to Bahrain with an aim of negotiating with Bahrain Sheikh with this occasion.¹⁸⁵

The activities of British ships were also watched carefully in Kuwait. The captain of the Zühaf corvette sent a *jurnal* to the centre concerned with the relations between Kuwait and Britain. According to this report, the “Falorans”, a British ship, came to Kuwait and its captain “Kendil” and the British Consul in Bender Buseyr landed in Kuwait. The Ottoman officials in Zühaf noted the meeting between Mübarek, the Sheikh of Kuwait, and British officials. The symbolic meaning of this visit was also acknowledged in that although Mübarek had run up the Ottoman flag everyday, he did not do this for the visit of British representatives. In the report, it was added that British officials offered a British protectorate over Kuwait as has done in Muscat.¹⁸⁶

Ottomans not only watched these activities of Britain but brought these issues to the attention of the British government; however, each time the British rejected such accusations. The British attitude did not comfort the Ottoman authorities, but rather reinforced their suspicions about the British intentions and heightened their distrust towards Britain. For instance, the British foreign minister initially rejected the claim that an officer came to Kuwait from India. Later, he accepted this visit but claimed that the officer came to Kuwait to solve some ordinary affairs between Britain and the sheikhdom. British officials even accused the Ottoman officials in the region of giving inaccurate information to and even deceiving the Sublime Porte.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ 29 Mayıs 1310: BOA, Y. MTV 97/44.

¹⁸⁵ 8 Ağustos 1310: BOA, DH. MKT 2093/63.

¹⁸⁶ 2 Mart 1315: BOA, DH. MKT 2189/111.

¹⁸⁷ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR.SYS 104/10.

Although British authorities claimed that its ships did not navigate against the Ottoman interests, the officials of the Ottoman state were convinced that these navigations were part of British secret objectives. For instance, in a report sent by the Ottoman Consul in Bombay on 13 January 1898, a ship with 150 troops from Bombay went toward Muscat in order to join three other ships. According to the reports of the Indian newspapers, this maneuver in the Gulf was a demonstration and threat against Iranians who killed a British telegram officer in Casik at the Iranian border. Nonetheless, the officials in the Bombay Consulate reported that a reason other than this should exist due to the conditions in Kuwait. In fact, Sheikh Yusuf İbrahim, an ardent enemy of Mübarek El-Sabah aiming to dethrone him escaped from Basra and went to Qatar, the Sheikdom of Casim El-Sani, so he could provoke the tribes there against Mübarek, and, therefore Britain might act against Yusuf İbrahim.¹⁸⁸ Subsequently, the Ottoman Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Mahsus-u Vükela*) evaluated this report and concluded that the reason rather for threatening Iranians was plausible, given British particular aims toward the Gulf and its relations with the sheikhs in the region.¹⁸⁹

In addition to the usage of British ships in a number functions such as for gun smuggling, threatening, secret meetings and saluting, the Ottomans were convinced that Britain used its ships in the Gulf to impress people. The Ottomans believed that Britain gave importance to its ships in the Gulf much more than the importance attached to its navy in other parts of the world. In fact, it was understood that Britain, as a sea power, tried to impress local people with its strength in the seas. It is seen that they were successful in these objectives. People believed that Britain could provide security and prosperity for them with its ships. The governor of Basra, Nafiz Paşa, stated that one or two British commercial ships paid a visit to the coasts of Basra every week to impress people with a view of drawing them to the side of Britain.¹⁹⁰ The yearbooks (*Salnames*) indicated that British ships ensured the contact of local people with the world.¹⁹¹ These ships transported both cargo and people. A significant number of British ships in the Gulf ensured Britain's close relations with

¹⁸⁸ 1 Kanun-u Sani 1313: BOA, YA. RES 91/29.

¹⁸⁹ 18 Şubat 1313: BOA, Y.A. RES 91/29.

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

¹⁹¹ Babuçoğlu, Murat, Eroğlu, Cengiz and Özdil, Orhan, *Osmanlı Vilayet Salnamelerinde Basra*, Ankara, Global Strateji Enstitüsü, 2005, p. 30.

the local people because of the increased number of contacts. In this context, local people were witnessing a form of British strength in the region. Furthermore, the British staff on these ships spoke Arabic, Persian and Turkish which also promoted close communication with the local people.¹⁹² Therefore, Britain could establish a network of propaganda with its staff. For instance, even ordinary officers used small steamers for their routine work such as going from one town to another town. In this setting, a low-ranking British officer was respected as much as the Queen of England by his colleagues. The British colleagues displayed great outward respect for each other in order to create the impression among the local Gulf people with respect to the strength of Britain. This situation was significantly different than when these same officials were in London.¹⁹³

With an aim of showing British pre-eminence in the Persian Gulf, Lord Curzon, made a journey, escorted with several ships towards the region. It can be considered as a demonstration of British supremacy, and, implicitly, a warning against other powers in the region. The voyage of Viceroy Lord Curzon, General Governor of India, which was followed by the Ottomans in its entirety, reflected all of the threats stemming from British ships. It was, first of all, considered a demonstration of British power through several symbols, but particularly with a significant number of ships along with gold and silver throne and some gifts. Secondly, the Ottomans thought that Curzon's flotilla had distributed arms to the locals. Thirdly, meetings and ceremonies were held aboard the ships when Curzon met with local leaders. The British Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lord Lansdowne described Lord Curzon's journey as a declaration of Britain to retain its paramount position in the Gulf. With this journey, Britain had, implicitly, warned Russia, France, Germany and, obviously, the Ottoman state.¹⁹⁴

The Ottomans correctly perceived this visit as an exhibition of British power and an attempt to enforce local sheikhs to make secret agreements with Britain. Hence, the Sublime Porte assigned its officials with the task of finding the reasons behind this visit.¹⁹⁵ This journey was evaluated by the Ottomans as an event

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

¹⁹³ 14 Mayıs 1299: BOA, Y.PRK.UM 5/100.

¹⁹⁴ Howarth, *The Desert King*: p. 55; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: pp. 11, 12.

¹⁹⁵ Kurşun, Zekeriya, *The Ottomans in Qatar, A History of Anglo-Ottoman Conflicts in the Persian Gulf*, İstanbul, The İsis Press, 2002, p. 113.

reflecting all of the dimensions of the Ottoman perception with regard to the British means in threatening the Ottoman existence in the region.

Ottoman authorities gained information about Lord Curzon's visit from the Indian newspapers and followed it carefully. It was reported on 7 October 1893 that he, firstly, would come together with the local sheikhs under British protection such as Bahrain, Kuwait and Muhammere.¹⁹⁶ In line with the Ottoman view, the officials in the Basra Vilayet believed that there was a secret British objective for this journey.¹⁹⁷ This "secret objective" with regard to the ambitions of Britain for the Gulf and Arabia were noted in the report of the commander of the Sixth Army and Baghdad Deputy Governor (*Vali Vekili*), Feyzi Paşa. He indicated on 18 November 1893 that Lord Curzon and the Admiral together with him aimed to distribute arms and money to the local sheikhs.¹⁹⁸ After relating the visit with the secret British objective of, Feyzi Paşa interestingly, indicated that the British General Governor of India was assumed as Harun Reşid the second (*...Harun Reşid-i Sani yad olunuyor*) in India. Due to the fact that the capital of Harun Reşid was Baghdad, Lord Curzon wanted to establish influence over it. If this would occur, the British government, consequently, could increase its influence in the Islamic World to a great extent.¹⁹⁹

The Ottomans also monitored the meetings of Lord Curzon with the local leaders. Upon Lord Curzon's arrival to Kuwait, Mübarek El-Sabah visited him on his ship. Lord Curzon gave him four golden clocks, four rifles and a short golden sword, and Curzon proposed giving Mübarek 5,000 rupees monthly. Along with Mübarek El-Sabah, other heads or their representatives made meetings with Lord Curzon. For instance, the secretary (*katip*) of Sheikh Sadun, Moshey, held an interview with Lord Curzon in the office of Mübarek El-Sabah.²⁰⁰

In sum, British ships had a key role in the realization of British penetration into the Gulf, for ships carried weapons for the sheikhs, and Britain could force and punish local people and leaders by using the ships. Moreover, the British ships impressed local Gulf population to the extent that they thought that no power other than Britain could have such impressive ships. Britain used the ships as very

¹⁹⁶ 24 Eylül 1319: BOA, DH. MKT 776/28.

¹⁹⁷ 26 Teşrin-i Evvel 1319: BOA, DH. MKT 776/28.

¹⁹⁸ 5 Teşrin-i Sani 1319: BOA, DH. MKT 776/28.

¹⁹⁹ 5 Teşrin-i Sani 1319: BOA, DH. MKT 776/28.

²⁰⁰ 5 Teşrin-i Sani 1319: BOA, DH. MKT 776/28.

influential means to threaten the Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf. These British tools also shaped the Ottoman responses against such tools. As explained in the introduction of this chapter, Ottoman statesmen advocated dispatching Ottoman ships to the Persian Gulf coast to impede the activities of the British ships.

4.2. The Ottoman View of the People of the Persian Gulf

The Ottoman perception of the local Gulf people was the second dimension of the Ottoman outlook of the Persian Gulf in light of the British threat. The Ottomans found people in the Persian Gulf brutal and ignorant to understand and resist the British threat and to be ruled as well. The character of bedouinness of the locals negatively influenced the Ottoman administration in the region. For instance, the center wanted the officials to take into account this feature of the local people in managing the region. On the other hand, the Ottomans preferred to view the people in the Persian Gulf as loyal to the Ottoman state so that their loyalty could be used to thwart the British threat. This outlook encouraged the Ottoman government to resist the British threat because it expected that the local people would support the Ottoman state in its struggle. Moreover, this perspective of loyalty shaped the Ottoman administration in the Gulf as did the issue of bedouinness because Ottoman bureaucrats and notables from the region believed in that the misgovernment by some officials in the region weakened the loyalty of the local people. Hence, the thinking was that if the administration ruled the region in an appropriate way, the loyalty of people would be reinforced.

In this context, the Ottoman pejorative perspective of the people in the Gulf will be examined, and then it will be questioned whether this approach was similar to the Western colonial perspective or if it was the continuation of the traditional Ottoman perspective viewing the distant provinces and “subjects” disparagingly for ages. Finally, the loyalty of the local people and leaders to the Ottoman state and the relations between the local people and the Ottoman officials in the region will be analyzed while focusing on the concepts of misgovernment and centralization.

4.2.1. The Ottoman Perception of Locals: “Bedouin” and “Ignorant”

The Ottomans were convinced that Britain had reached its objective of impressing people by their ships to a great extent. The detailed report of Sadun, the head of the Müntefik tribal confederation, to Yıldız Palace in 1883 concluded that the local Gulf people were, obviously, awed by British ships, and they believed that the only state in the world that had steamers was Britain. In fact, this was the result of the Ottoman navigation policy towards the Persian Gulf because although Necd was part of the Ottoman Empire, and there were many Ottoman officials, troops and the passengers going to Necd, they could go to the coasts of the Persian Gulf only by using British ships. This was an obvious indication of the weakness of the Ottomans. Therefore, the local people in the Gulf could not believe that any state other than Britain might have like ships, so the people certainly did not believe that the Ottoman Empire could have such ship. In concluding his report, Sadun highlighted that the local people's positive view toward Britain stemmed, seemingly, from their being impressed with the existence and efficiency of the British ships in the Persian Gulf region.²⁰¹

Nevertheless, Sadun, then, equated this impression and perception of the local people, assuming that no state other than Britain could not have such ships, with the ignorance and even primitiveness of the people in the Gulf.²⁰² Sadun, who himself was from region, pejoratively pointed out that the local people did not believe the possibility of the Ottomans having ships because he assumed that the minds of local people were in their eyes which means that their minds could reach out as far as what was in front of their eyes ("*Zira ahali-i merkumun akılları gözlerindedir*").²⁰³ The character attributed to the local people by Sadun was that they were so ignorant and were not capable of abstract thought. This discriminatory outlook was shared by other Ottoman officials, and these prejudices were reflected in their reports. Along with this feature of being ignorant and un-sophisticated, other reports from the region depicted local people as "wild" and "bedouin" as well.

As discussed earlier, Casim wanted to attack the Ebu-Cinni tribe to exact revenge with the rifles he bought from Britain in 1889. Although he was advised by

²⁰¹ 14 Mayıs 1299: BOA; Y.PRK.UM 5/100.

²⁰² 14 Mayıs 1299: BOA; Y.PRK.UM 5/100.

²⁰³ 14 Mayıs 1299: BOA; Y.PRK.UM 5/100.

the Ottoman authorities not to attack, he would not consider this recommendation and continued to be insistent because of his wild nature.

*“...hareket-i mezkureden sarf-ı nazar etmesi nasayihinde bulunulmuş ise de tabiat-ı vahşiyesi hasebiyle mutlaka intikam almak efsarında musır olduđu...”*²⁰⁴

With regard to the later rebellion of Casim El-Sani in 1893, he and his tribe were described as people lived in savage nature (“... ve Casim El-Sani ile beraber hal-i tevhişte kalan bil-umum kabaile...”).²⁰⁵ In another report sent to Yıldız Palace about the upheaval of Casim El-Sani, it was reiterated that the people in Qatar lived in bedouinness and brutality. Furthermore, it was emphasized that the officials in Qatar did not take into consideration of these two characteristics of the local people so, consequently, a rebellion ensued. It might be stated to attract attention of the Yıldız Palace to take into consideration of the characters of bedouinness and brutality of people in ruling the region.

“Vakianın sebeb-i zuhuru ise ahalisi bedavet ve vahşet-i müfritede olan öyle bir mevkide mukteziyat-ı mizaç ve mekan her nasılsa gözetilmeyerek istimal-i şiddetle vaki olan su-i tasarruf ve idareden ibaret idiği ilaveten izbar olunmuş”).²⁰⁶

The failure to establish a modern administration in the region was attributed to the wild and ignorant character of the local people in the Gulf. For instance, the Basra governor presented the brutal character of Casim El-Sani as the barrier to instituting modern reforms. Furthermore, Casim was accused of disturbing the stability in the region owing to his wild acts.²⁰⁷

The characters of people; being ignorant and unsophisticated provided fertile grounds for Britain to incite people against the Ottoman Empire. Seyyid Talib Paşa, the son of *Nakib-ul Eşraf* of Basra, also emphasized the ignorance and uncivilized

²⁰⁴ 6 Şubat 1304: BOA, Y. MTV 37/93.

²⁰⁵ 25 Mayıs 1309: BOA, Y. MTV 78/178.

²⁰⁶ 20 Haziran 1309: BOA, Y. MTV 113/79.

²⁰⁷ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: pp. 158, 160.

character of the local people, and, according to him, this helped Britain to encourage sedition in the region.²⁰⁸ The reform proposals were also shaped under the effect of this pejorative Ottoman outlook. The commission examining the rise of Ibn-i Reşid in Necd also stated that control of this region would be possible by using military power because of the bedouin and wild character of the people who did not understand anything other than brutal force.²⁰⁹ The Yearbooks (*Salnames*) also touched upon the bedouin character of the local people in Necd, stating that they were even ignorant about their religious way; Hanbali sect.²¹⁰

Sultan Abdülhamid II shared the ideas of his officials and notables from the region on the issue of the ignorance and savageness of the local Gulf people. He opposed the issue of owning of the arms by local people due to their ignorance and brutality. Çetinsaya notes that Abdülhamid II stated that, “anywhere in the world, the giving of arms to this kind of people eventually creates undesirable states of affairs”.²¹¹

This pejorative attitude was not limited to the Arabs in the Persian Gulf, but it was part of the general Ottoman elite’s outlook toward Arab, Kurdish and Turkish tribes. Similar to the tribes in the Gulf, they were labelled as “living in wildness and bedouinness”; (*hal-i vahşet ve bedeviyette yaşarlar*)²¹² and “submerged in ignorance”.²¹³ According to Rogan, the Ottoman elite believed that nomadic life was a world of hardship where the daily struggle of life had given the desert Arabs no time for education, religion, or other benefits of civilization.²¹⁴

Deringil argues that this Ottoman approach toward tribes was a “borrowed colonialism”. He states that the Ottomans equated colonialism with modernism, so the Ottoman state internalized the perspective of the adversary imperial states in looking to its peripheral territories with the aim of modernizing the places. According to him, the Ottoman elite benefited from colonialism in its struggle for

²⁰⁸ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: pp. 143.

²⁰⁹ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 146.

²¹⁰ Babuçoğlu, Eroğlu and Özdil, *Osmanlı Vilayet Salnamelerinde Basra*: p. 115.

²¹¹ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 139.

²¹² Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: pp. 85, 86.

²¹³ Rogan, “Aşiret Mektebi”: p. 84.

²¹⁴ Rogan, “Aşiret Mektebi”: p. 91.

survival against foreign powers.²¹⁵ The Principal Palace Secretary of Abdülhamid II, Tahsin Paşa also labelled the policy toward Arabs, Kurds and Albanians as “colonial policy” based on the cultivation of local chiefs and notables; yet this policy did not aim to undermine existing balances and hierarchies.²¹⁶ Kuhn also describes the Ottoman policy toward the Persian Gulf, Libya and especially Yemen as colonialist policy because of the suspension or elimination of modern administrative reforms in these areas. He argued that this discrepancy in the ruling of these areas is the “institutionalization of cultural inferiority of the indigenous people vis-à-vis the conquerors”.²¹⁷ Through the elimination of modern reforms, Kuhn suggests that the Ottoman bureaucrats in the provinces and the center affirmed their view of the local people as “savages” who could not be ruled like the more “civilized” Ottoman subjects.²¹⁸

On the other hand, it can be considered that this pejorative outlook of the Ottomans was the continuation of the Ottoman (elitist) tradition that accepted the periphery such as Arabian tribes and Turkish nomads as ignorant, bedouin and brutal. For instance Ottoman elites called the nomad Turks and Kurds as “Turks without conscious” “*Etrak-ı bi idrak*” and “Kurds without conscious” “*Ekrad-ı bi idrak*” in the classical era of the Ottoman Empire. Even the words “Türk” and “Arab” referred to “uneducated Anatolian villagers” and “desert bedouin” in the traditional elitist outlook.²¹⁹ This tradition was inspired by Ibn-i Khaldun who assessed all civilizational developments as the conflict between settled life and nomadic life. As a result of this outlook, the Ottoman elite defined civilization as the victory of urban life over nomadic life. Moreover, this interpretation accepted all things belonging to nomadic life as inferior.²²⁰ In addition to the influence of the classical Ottoman elitist approach towards nomads, the modernizing Ottoman state considered autonomous nomadic (bedouin) tribes as an obstruction to centralization

²¹⁵ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 166.

²¹⁶ Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: pp. 28-9.

²¹⁷ Kuhn, “Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism”: p. 316.

²¹⁸ Kuhn, “Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism”: pp. 317, 329.

²¹⁹ Keddie, Nikki R., “Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism”, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol.41. No. 1 (1969), pp. 17-28, p. 17.

²²⁰ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 175.

and modernization efforts such as taxation.²²¹ In general, Ottoman political elites, such as Abdülhamid II held a pejorative outlook toward ordinary people (*avam*) based on the assumption that they were unable to understand the refinements of government and politics. Furthermore, censorship was defended on the grounds that the “Ottoman population was ignorant and innocent and so we are compelled to treat them like children, for indeed they are no different from bodily grown-up children”.²²²

In conclusion, the Ottomans considered people in the region as living in bedouinness, brutality and ignorance. In fact, the Ottomans considered them far from understanding the nature of British threat, so the coasts of the Gulf and the state became weak owing to their unconsciousness. Their ignorance resulted in their submissive assumption envisaging Britain as superior and unchallengeable, so they found it appropriate to surrender and go under British protection. Their ignorance made them weak and vulnerable to the complicated intrigues of Britain. In addition, it was assumed that the brutal character of the tribal leaders led to the disquiet among tribes, which made Ottoman rule weak and opened the region to foreign threat. This Ottoman outlook also affected the Ottoman way of ruling people, which had to consider bedouinness, ignorance and wildness in ruling the people. Nevertheless, it should be regarded that this disdainful perspective of the Ottomans did not arise from a colonial perspective towards the people in the Gulf, but it emanated from the sense of a need for the consciousness of people against foreign intervention and subjection to the Ottoman state. In other words, the Ottomans needed the obedience and loyalty of the people which would provide an effective administration in the region and a barrier against British intervention. In addition, the classical Ottoman world view that imbued the periphery with negative connotations was also effective in this Ottoman perspective.

4.2.2. “Loyal”

Ottomans were aware that the loyalty of the local people, including sheikhs, was a critical requirement needed to consolidate the Ottoman presence and

²²¹ Rogan, “Aşiret Mektebi”: p. 84.

²²² Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*: p. 166.

eventually to repel the British encroachment. The Ottomans were convinced that loyalty and allegiance of the people to the Ottoman state would eliminate British threat to the region. In this framework, the Ottomans claimed the people in the Gulf to be the loyal subjects of the Ottoman Empire. This perception of the Ottomans was a kind of wishful thinking. This open claim of loyalty, firstly, might stem from the objective of consolidating its claims over the region. In other words, the Ottomans did not want to weaken their sovereignty over the Persian Gulf by stating the people's lack of loyalty. Secondly, the perception of loyalty might be the consequence of the illusion of the Ottoman officials based on the statements and acceptance of the local leaders accepting and respecting Ottoman suzerainty over their regions. In analyzing how the Ottomans explained British intervention in spite of their assumption or perception of having the loyalty of the people, it is clear that particularly local tribal leaders asserted that misgovernment by some Ottoman officials and ill-conceived centralization policies of previous governors forced people to come under the protection of Britain. Therefore, this outlook led to the conviction that if the misgovernment in the region would be reformed, the bond between people and the Ottoman state would be reinforced, and they would not permit the foreign intervention.

From the Ottoman outlook towards its subjects in the entire Ottoman realm,²²³ Deringil deduces the following: the Ottoman state did not vilify the subjects in its state tradition because it needed their loyalty. This need was felt much more in the era of Abdülhamid II because the threat to the existence of the state increased to a great extent as has been explained earlier. If the subjects were considered as potential insurgents, the state always had to be vigilant against them and had to have a ready army to suppress their upheavals. Therefore, the Ottomans preferred to consider their subjects as loyal.²²⁴ Likewise, the Ottomans considered subjects in the Gulf loyal to the state since it needed their loyalty to obstruct the British penetration and quell the riots of the people. Thus, the Ottomans might be caught by the “illusion of loyalty” easily owing to this state of wishful thinking.²²⁵

²²³ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 82.

²²⁴ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 82.

²²⁵ Çetinsaya, “The Ottoman View”: p. 196.

It has been claimed that this Ottoman inclination, based on not discrediting the subjects, considered the upheavals of the people as the consequence of the provocation of foreigners (*ecnebiler*) and wicked people (*fasidler*) in the region. It was thought that the Yezidis, Armenians and Alevis in Central Anatolia were encouraged and seduced by foreigners.²²⁶ Nevertheless, the Ottoman Empire considered its bureaucrats in the Gulf to be responsible for the British protection over the sheikhdoms, which was highly contradictory with the loyalty of people in the region. It seems that the Ottomans did not want to spoil their wishful thinking.

The report of a religious scholar, Raşid Ibn-i Ali from Necd in 1888 provides a detailed account about the loyalty of people to the Ottoman state as well as their contradictory close relations with Britain. The report depicts ordinary local people in the Persian Gulf as “loyal to the Ottoman Sultan”. This loyalty was to prevent the influence of Britain in the Gulf in spite of its obvious and maintained encroachments. Nevertheless, there was an explicit British intervention and influence in the Persian Gulf, and there were obvious close relations between local sheikhs and Britain. Raşid Ibn-i Ali equated the foreign intervention into the Gulf with the misgovernment by some officials toward local people.²²⁷

A number of examples of misgovernment and misapplication were given by the notables from the Gulf. These examples consolidated the pretexts of being under the protection of Britain. The Ottoman bureaucrats confirmed the assertions of the local notables by stating same accusations with respect to their colleagues; thus the Ottomans accused their own officials because they allowed for British intervention. These accounts show that although people were, or at least were thought to be, loyal to the state, misgovernment and ill-conceived centralist policies estranged people from the state. The accusation of the Ottoman officials implied that a proper administration in the region would heal the relations between the state and local people. It is seen that the statements of the notables stemmed from the aim of justifying the disloyalty of the people. On the other hand, the same accusations of the Ottoman bureaucrats served as a smoke-screen for the Ottomans. As such, they did not impair their “wishful thinking” by ignoring the *de-facto* situation in the region.

²²⁶ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: pp. 82-4.

²²⁷ 20 Cemaziyelahir 1305: BOA, Y.PRK.TKM 11/62.

The return of a seditious man from Qatif named Ahmed Ibn-i Mehdi was given as an example of the misgovernment by Raşid Ibn-i Ali. Ahmed Ibn-i Mehdi was in the Caferi sect, which was a minority in Necd and was hated and labeled as infidels by the majority Wahhabis, and had served the interests of Britain secretly. Ahmed Ibn-i Mehdi had been exiled from Necd because he was involved in a clash between local people and Britain in the time of Sultan Abdülaziz. However, after the unification of Necd with Baghdad, implicitly after the regulations of Midhat Paşa, he returned to Necd. Raşid claimed that Ahmed Ibn-i Mehdi continued to destabilize the region.²²⁸ Raşid implied that the Ottoman administration in the Gulf overlooked his return and subsequent activities. The mishandling of land registration in Basra and Müntefik was also another problem emphasized by Raşid Ibn-i Ali, that might result in the British intervention to the region. In this context, Raşid recalled that the rights of the people who had lands should be respected with an aim of preventing the British threat.²²⁹

The complaints from the notables were verified by the high-level bureaucrats in the region. For instance, the governor of Basra also pointed out the misgovernment of the officials in the Mutasarrıflık of Necd in his report. According to the governor, Casim El-Sani did not receive “kind treatment” (*muamele-i hasene*) from the Ottoman officials. The Mutasarrıf of Necd, Salih Paşa, did not meet the objectives for his appointment to Necd. The Mutasarrıf turned Necd into chaos due to this misgovernment. Moreover, he was not able to prevent plundering and usurpation among the tribes, these events even became ordinary in Necd. He began to act against Casim El-Sani in a hostile manner. Due to Salih Paşa’s animosity, Casim left his official position as the Kaymakam of Qatar. As a result of the absence of a sheikh (Kaymakam) in Qatar, the usurpation, plundering and other illegal acts increased there. The commander of Necd, Şakir Bey came to Qatar from Hasa in order to end this situation. Consequently, Şakir Bey persuaded Casim to return to his post as Kaymakam of Qatar.²³⁰

The governor of Basra emphasized that it was important to win the hearts of the local people. With this aim, it was important to act justly and to apply correctly

²²⁸ 20 Cemaziyelahir 1305: BOA, Y.PRK.TKM 11/62.

²²⁹ 20 Cemaziyelahir 1305: BOA, Y PRK TKM 11/62.

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

(“...icra-ı muamelat-ı adilane ve ittihaz-ı esbab-ı hakimane”). Furthermore, the foreign encroachment in these regions increased the importance of the implementation of these “just and right” policies. However, implementation of policies that were inappropriate for the nature and character of local people resulted in the hatred of the people of Qatar. As the superior of the Mutasarrıf of Necd, the governor of Basra, Nafiz Paşa, suggested the appointment of the Necd Mutasarrıf to another suitable place. Nafiz Paşa proposed, instead, the appointment of Refet Bey, the Kaymakam of Şamiye, which was in the Kaza of Baghdad, to Necd. According to him, Refet Bey was familiar with the culture of the tribes in Necd. Nafiz Paşa added that this appointment would consolidate the security in the region and would promote the allegiance of local people to the state. The Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Vükela*) negotiated the recommendations of the governor of Basra. Consequently, the orders in line with the recommendations of Nafiz Paşa were sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Naval Ministry.²³¹

In an earlier report dated 2 August 1884, the Mutasarrıf of Necd, Said Paşa, was accused of causing the Arabian tribes to hate him because he surrendered the Sheikh of the Dusri tribe, who was under the protection of Ottoman rule, to the Sheikh of Bahrain, who was under British protection. In this regard, his dismissal was proposed. The appointment of a new Mutasarrıf who was familiar with the language and culture of local people, instead of him, was recommended. He would be sued because of his misgovernment according to the criminal code.²³² Removal of Said and Salih Paşas, apparently, did not bring an end to the Ottoman alleged misgovernment. Eleven years later, another Mutasarrıf of Necd was accused of pitting one tribe against another tribe. The Mutasarrıf of Necd together with the tribe of Ajman attacked the tribe of Mutayr, which was under the rule of Ibn-i Reşid. They plundered the goods of people of Mutayr, killing 30 of them. As a result of this attack, the security of the roads eliminated.²³³ There was no further information about whether or not this Mutasarrıf would be sued as was Said Paşa.

Along with Ottoman misgovernment, local sheiks complained about the Ottoman policies of centralization. Nevertheless, it should be noted that they did not

²³¹ 27 Kanun-u Sani 1303: BOA, A. MKT. MHM 496/10.

²³² 21 Temmuz 1300: BOA, DH. MKT 1419/8.

²³³ 10 Mayıs 1311: BOA, DH. MKT 378/28.

complain about the policies of the state directly, but they complained about the regulations of Mithad Paşa, which were brought about after 1871. The sheikhs generally stated that although they had been loyal to the state in an (more) autonomous status, and had paid taxes to the centre, the centralist regulations implemented by Mithad Paşa estranged them from the state and led to the rapprochement with Britain.

Raşid Ibn-i Ali also touched upon “false” centralist policies, especially with respect to Bahrain, in his report sent to Yıldız Palace in 1888. Raşid claimed that the Sheikh of Bahrain gave Raşid’s son a letter in which he declared his allegiance to the Ottoman Sultan. Moreover, Raşid added that he visited Bahrain while he was traveling from Necd to İstanbul. He was asked why he had close relations with Britain. In response, he indicated that Necd had been administrated by a local and loyal governor (sheikh) with a view of preserving Muslims against foreign intrusions before Mithad Paşa. He thought that the people (*ahali*) of Necd had been proud of their loyalty and obedience to the Ottoman state, and they had not given the foreign intrusion any opportunity to succeed. Furthermore, he gave an example that even Britain sent troops to the region, the people resisted, and so British forces had been defeated and obliged to return.²³⁴

However, the Sheikh presented the regulations of Mithad Paşa as the main reason for his close relations with Britain because Bahrain and Necd had been loyal to the Ottoman Empire before Governor Mithad Paşa changed the status of the region. Until Mithad Paşa’s provincial regulation, Bahrain and Muscat had given taxes to the governor in Necd, thus promoting a strong bond between the Ottoman state and Bahrain. The Sheikh implied that the governor (Mithad) did serious damage to the people’s loyalty to the state. Moreover, the Sublime Porte ignored local people’s requests with respect to the protection of Bahrain and preservation of its official status. Because of this administrative transformation and misadministration by Mithad Paşa and the disregard of local requests by the Sublime Porte, the Bahrain Sheikh said that he had been compelled to enter into a protection agreement with Britain.²³⁵

²³⁴ 20 Cemaziyelahir. 1305: BOA, Y.PRK.TKM 11/62.

²³⁵ 20 Cemaziyelahir 1305: BOA, Y PRK TKM 11/62.

This type of accusation was also shared by other notables from the region, such as Sadun, the leader of the Müntefik tribes. He said that the emirates acting independently had been loyal to the state and had given taxes the emir, as did the representative of the Ottoman Empire in Necd, during the time of Sultan Abdülmecid and Sultan Abdülaziz. However, Mithad Paşa, as Governor of Baghdad, ended this practice. As a reaction, the emirates began to declare their independence from the Ottoman state, and they also stopped paying taxes to the Necd Emirate. In this context, when Sultan Abdülaziz realized this situation, he dismissed Mithad Paşa and wanted to appoint an emir from the Necd notables. Nonetheless, no man wanted to be an emir because of the local hatred towards the central regulations created by Mithad Paşa. Sadun recommended that if an emir from the Necd notables be appointed, the loyalty of people to the state would be reinstated, and taxes would be levied.²³⁶ It can be seen that the modern reforms were used as the pretext for declaring independence from the Ottoman Empire or accepting British protection agreements. Moreover, the desire of ruling in a traditional, autonomous style was reflected by showing how the emirates of Necd declared independence because of false centralization policies. This view indicates that if the Ottoman Empire wanted like to continue to hold the Persian Gulf, it needed to apply de-centralized policies, which involved loosening control over the region through the rule of local notables and levying a small amount of tax from the region.

Mithad Paşa was the best choice for a scapegoat because he was dismissed by Abdülhamid II, and he was an undesired figure of the Abdülhamidian era. Blaming the regulations implemented by Mithad Paşa might have been a way for the sheikhs to express the inappropriateness of modern reforms in the region. In addition, accusing Mithad might have been the best pretext for entering into protection agreements with Britain. In fact, the sheikhs justified their close relations with Britain by using the mistakes of the Mithad Paşa as an excuse for challenging the Ottoman central rule.

Contrary to the documents envisaging the local people as being loyal to the Ottoman state, it seems that the statements of the Ottoman officials with regard to the loyalty of the local leaders to the Ottoman state were a result of delusion, meaning that the Ottoman bureaucrats in the region and centre were under the illusion of

²³⁶ 14 Mayıs 1299: BOA, Y. PRK. UM 5/100.

people in the region being loyal to the state. Although the sheikhdoms had close relations with Britain, with some of them even being under British protection, such as Bahrain and Kuwait (1899), the Ottomans accepted them as loyal to the state although some mistakes of the Ottoman officials damaged this loyalty. This view formed Ottoman administrative reforms in the region on the grounds that if people would be governed in an appropriate manner, they would be strongly attached to the state. To sum up, as with means of the British threat to the region, the Ottoman view of people in terms of their level in civilization (bedouinness) and loyalty was shaped under the influence of the British threat, and formed the Ottoman politics for the region.

4.3. The Ottoman View of Religion in the Persian Gulf

Abdülhamid II promoted and applied Pan-Islamism as a world view in an attempt making subjects more loyal to the Ottoman state. After the loss of most of the Balkan lands in 1877-78 Ottoman-Russia War where Christians were the majority, Abdülhamid II assumed that people would rally around Islam. It was expected that people would be loyal to the Ottoman state because of religious imperatives. It is known that the religious indoctrination advocating the legitimacy of the Ottoman sultanate and caliphate, and obedience to the Ottoman Sultan as a religious duty increased during the era of Abdülhamid II. In this framework, Muslims in the Ottoman Empire were considered as loyal subjects of the state. Accordingly, Abdülhamid II and his administration in the Gulf anticipated that people, including sheikhs, would obey the state because of the imperatives of religion. Nevertheless, these suppositions did not correspond with the realities of the region because people and leaders in the Gulf acted according to their interests rather than in support of Muslim fraternity. This religious solidarity was another wishful thought of the Ottomans, which did not correspond with the realities of the region, because the Ottomans appealed to religion to thwart the British threat and bind people to the state. In addition to the influence of religion, the Ottomans hoped for help from the *Nakib-ul Eşrafs*, who were influential religious figures of the region, to impede the British threat.

4.3.1. The Religious Bond between the Gulf and the Ottoman State

In the Abdülhamidian era, there was a belief among the Ottoman administrative elite that as the people of the region were Muslims and therefore the followers of the Sultan-Caliph Abdülhamid II, they would automatically be given to being loyal to the Ottoman state, the head of which was the Caliph himself. However, contact with these co-religionists was hampered by the lack of Ottoman ships along the coasts of the Persian Gulf. The people who came to the centre of Basra Vilayet complained of the lack of ships that would have provided contact with the Ottoman administration.²³⁷ It was accepted by the centre and the administration in the Gulf that the people in the Gulf desired Ottoman rule owing to Islam, and their religious fervor, binding them to the Caliphate, would oust the British threat from the region. Anscombe correctly pointed out that "...Istanbul assumed that the bonds of religious loyalty tying the Arabians [the people in the Gulf] to the Sultan could bear almost any burden".²³⁸ In fact, some Ottoman diplomats informed Abdülhamid II that his moral and spiritual influence among Muslims in the world was the main deterrent to British designs in the Gulf and Arabia.²³⁹ In the era of Abdülhamid II, there was not any opposition questioning such a thought due to impossibility of criticizing the Islamist policies of Abdülhamid II.²⁴⁰

Nevertheless, Abdülhamid II's Pan-Islamist policies in the region were groundless and were not in line with the realities of the region. The events and political relations with foreigners showed that the heads of the tribes in the region did not care religion as an imperative forcing them to attach themselves to the Ottoman centre. Even "orthodox" heads of tribes allied with "infidels", i.e. Britain, against the Ottomans when their interests required. Practical consideration rather than religious fraternity played a significant role in understanding the politics in the Persian Gulf. Moreover, people in the Gulf were not homogenous in terms of Islamic sects, so expecting a monolithic approach towards the state because of religion was groundless.

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

²³⁸ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 90.

²³⁹ Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*: p. 251.

²⁴⁰ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 78.

For instance, Abdūlaziz Ibn-i Saud realized that the politics in the region was based on power and pragmatic considerations of realpolitik rather than religious beliefs and values. Abdūlaziz left traditional confrontationist and expansionist Saudi foreign policy, which was based on the principle that the state existed to spread Wahhabi ideology. He learnt about pragmatic policy during his exile as a child and teenager in Kuwait (1891-1901) where Mübarek El-Sabah hosted and negotiated with several foreigners (infidels) to counter the Ottomans. Therefore, Abdūlaziz revolutionized Saudi foreign policy.²⁴¹ Thanks to this policy, he could control the zeal of Wahhabism in his leadership and implemented the requirements of the realpolitik.²⁴² New Saudi policy was “rather territorial than fanatical”.²⁴³

Another indication of the insignificance of religion in the politics of the Persian Gulf was the submission of the local leaders to the Caliph. If the local leaders acknowledged their submission to the Caliph, i.e. Abdūlhamid II, this was not because of their belief in the religious authority of the Sultan but because of their interests. The submission and compliance of Abdūlaziz Ibn-i Saud to the Ottomans was an ironic example. Indeed, the Saudis as Wahhabis regarded other Muslims, including the Ottomans, as infidels but Abdūlaziz Ibn-i Saud agreed to be a subject of the Ottoman Empire by being, albeit nominally, Kaymakam, therefore, an official of the Ottoman state.²⁴⁴ In reality he, as a Wahhabi, denied the authority of the Caliph.²⁴⁵ Nevertheless, as quoted by Howarth, Abdūlaziz Ibn-i Saud sent a letter declaring his submission to the Sultan and referring to the Sultan as the “Shadow of God”. He wrote in his letter that “I am submissive to every desire and order of the Shadow of God” adding that “I am the obedient servant of our Lord the Great Caliph (God preserve his throne till the Day of Judgment)”.²⁴⁶ Similar attitude towards the caliphate was seen in the letter of another Wahhabi Sheikh, Casim El-Sani.²⁴⁷

²⁴¹ Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p.41; Landen, Robert G., “The Changing Pattern of Political Relations between the Arab Gulf and the Arab Provinces of the Ottoman Empire”, in B.R. Pridham (ed), *The Arab Gulf and the Arab World*, London, Croom Helm, 1988, p. 57.

²⁴² Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: p. 20.

²⁴³ Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*: p. 229.

²⁴⁴ Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 49; Karpas, *The Politicization of Islam*: p. 25.

²⁴⁵ Howarth, *The Desert King*: p. 31; Karpas, *The Politicization of Islam*: p. 25

²⁴⁶ Howarth, *The Desert King*: p. 64.

²⁴⁷ Bostan, “The 1893 Uprising of Qatar”: p. 87.

People in the Gulf were not very much concerned with religion as a political identity binding them to any political unit. For instance, the people of the Jabal Shammar unified on the basis of tribal identity rather than a religious one in spite of the Wahhabi majority in the tribe.²⁴⁸ Furthermore, the people in the Persian Gulf were not homogeneous in terms of religion. There were Sunnis, Shias, Wahhabis and Ibadis in the region. For instance, the Shiites were in the majority in Qatif, a major town of Hasa; on the other hand, the population of Hofuf and Mubarraz included both Shiites and Sunnis. Bahrain was under Sunni rule in spite of having a Shia majority of approximately 70%. Necd, including Qatar, could be considered as Wahhabi. In this environment, religion was not an element unifying the people in the Gulf; on the contrary, it divided society.²⁴⁹

The lack of missionary activities in the region, unlike in the other parts of the Ottoman Empire such as Jordan, led also to lesser influence of religion as a motivation for linking people to the Ottoman state against British intervention. In fact, missionaries were a “catalyst of change” in the society which led to a demand for a “defensive reaction from the government” by the people.²⁵⁰ However, this did not exist in the Persian Gulf. Yapp argues that the European Powers avoided missionary activities in the Persian Gulf. He states that “They [European Powers] preferred that the Gulf should remain in cocooned seclusion”,²⁵¹ possibly because Britain did not want to terrify the people in the Gulf by propagandizing Christianity or western values in line with its policy of “indirect control” applied in the Gulf. The exceptions existed, but they were not important when considering the entire region. For instance, there were activities of the Arabian Mission of the Dutch Reformed Church of America, which especially focused on medicine. Its activities were in Basra, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and Iraq,²⁵² but not in Necd including Qatar. In addition to the lack of need for the state to respond such activities, the people in the

²⁴⁸ Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 48.

²⁴⁹ Commins, David, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2006, p. 75; Peck, *Historical Dictionary*: pp. 24, 170, 217; Yapp, Malcolm, “The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries”, in C. Edmund Bosworth, R. Michael Burrell, Keith McLachlan, and Roger M. Savory (eds), *The Persian Gulf States, A General Survey*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1981, p. 42

²⁵⁰ Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*: p. 19.

²⁵¹ Yapp, “The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the Persian Gulf”: p. 42.

²⁵² Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbors*: p. 144; Peck, *Historical Dictionary*: p. 13; Philby, *Arabia*: p. 164; Wilson, *The Persian Gulf*: p. 248.

Gulf did not need to take refuge in the Ottoman state as a shelter against Christian infiltration.

Although the Ottoman government wanted the loyalty of people because of its religion, it did not struggle so much to infiltrate the hearts and minds of local people with religious propaganda due to the lack of missionary activities.²⁵³ The Ottoman exaggerated expectation from the influence of religion over the politics of the Gulf might stem from the fact that Britain attached great importance to “Islam” in its imperial policy. Some groups in the British administration believed that Britain had to use Islamist policies in order to control the Muslim world.²⁵⁴ Britain also suspected that Abdülhamid II and his administration tried to unite all Muslims around the Caliphate by using Islamist policies. In spite of the insignificance of religion as an element binding the people of the Gulf to the Ottoman state, Britain considered it as a serious challenge to its interests in the region, particularly in India. Britain feared that a Pan-Islamist appeal in the Persian Gulf would have detrimental effects on the loyalties of Muslims in India for the British Empire. The Ottomans might exploit this assumption of Britain and might exaggerate the affiliation of people to the Ottoman state owing to religion in order to gain prestige against Britain for increasing its “diplomatic leverage”.²⁵⁵ Britain attributed great importance to Islam in the Persian Gulf, so this British outlook in return might have affected the Ottoman perspective of religion in the Persian Gulf.

4.3.2. Nakib-ul Eşrafs: Mediators between the State and People

Abdülhamid II and his administration tried to use religious figures in the Arab provinces who mediated between the state and local people in order to promote the loyalty of people of the region to the Ottoman state. These notables were employed both in the center (Yıldız Palace) and the provinces. Sultan Abdülhamid II believed

²⁵³ For the indoctrination of the loyalty as a religious requirement especially by the educational institutions in the era of Abdülhamid II, see Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*; For the Ottoman perception of missionary activities and the threats stemming from them, see, *Deringil, Simgeden Millete*: p. 112-3; Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*: pp. 50-60; Rogan, *Frontier of the State*: pp. 122-59.

²⁵⁴ Öke, *Hilafet Hareketleri*: p. 11.

²⁵⁵ Yapp, “British Policy in the Persian Gulf in the Persian Gulf”: p. 81; Yapp, “The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the Persian Gulf”: p. 42; Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: p. 29.

that these instruments of mediation would consolidate the bond between the state and the subjects in the periphery.²⁵⁶

The *Nakib-ul Eşraf* fulfilled this role of mediation between the local people and the state in the Persian Gulf. *Nakib-ul Eşraf* was the head of the descendants of the Prophet Muhammed in a particular province, such as Basra. The *Nakib-ul Eşraf* were particularly used in the Gulf for advising local leaders in their rebellions against the Ottoman state. Ottoman administrators believed that they could persuade local leaders to dissuade from rebellions against the state. For instance, the *Nakib-ul Eşraf* of Basra was, particularly, used in Casim's rebellion in 1893.

Nakibs were personal emissaries of the sultan employing his Caliphate policy. Thanks to Nakibs, Abdülhamid II interfered personally and used the prestige of the caliphate when bureaucracy could not solve local conflicts. For instance, when Casim El-Sani aimed to attack Kuwait, Abdülhamid II sent Nakibs to persuade Casim not to attack. Casim sent a telegram to the sultan declaring his obedience to the orders of the sultan. Abdülhamid II's mission was successful and Abdülhamid II regarded this as an achievement of his Caliphate policy.²⁵⁷ It should be stated that the *Nakib* of Basra, Said, also went to Kuwait to persuade Mübarek El-Sabah to cooperate with the Ottoman state. The *Nakib* of Basra was not only a notable of Basra but *Nakib* Said was also the close friend of Mübarek El-Sabah.²⁵⁸ Thereby, the *Nakib*'s feature of being from the region was used in establishing relations with the local leaders.

In the context of using *Nakibs* for solving problems between the state and the tribes, the *Nakib* of Basra, Said Efendi was sent to Casim for dissuading him from his uprising in 1893. Following the start of Casim's uprising, the *Nakib-ul Eşraf* of Basra, Said Efendi, went to Qatar to meet with Casim. He also went to the tribes around Qatar and advised them not to participate into the rebellion of Casim. He stated that he was hopeful about the peaceful settlement of this rebellion.²⁵⁹ The events of *Nakibs* in Basra were followed by Ebu'l Hüda, who was in Yıldız Palace. Said Efendi contacted Ebu'l Hüda, one of the prominent Arab advisers of Sultan

²⁵⁶ Abu-Manneh B., "Sultan Abdülhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda Al-Sayyidi", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 15. No. 2 (1979), pp. 131-153, p. 138.

²⁵⁷ Kurşun, *The Ottomans in Qatar*: p. 168.

²⁵⁸ Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*: p. 196.

²⁵⁹ 30 Mart 1309: BOA, Y. MTV 76/133.

Abdülhamid II. Said Efendi renewed his hopes regarding the peaceful resolution of Casim's uprising.²⁶⁰

Although Ottomans accepted religion as an important factor binding people to the Ottoman Empire, the realities on the ground did not verify this assumption, and showed that religion was not so effective in ensuring the loyalty of the people to the state. This insignificance of religion in the region was due to several reasons. Firstly, the sheikhs in the region acted according to their own interests rather than to their beliefs. Secondly, the people in the region were not homogenous in terms of Islamic sects, so a monolithic political attitude towards the state could not be expected from them. Thirdly, religion did not shape the political attitudes of the people of tribal people. Lastly, people did not need to take shelter from the state because of the lack of missionary activities. In this regard, although the Ottomans considered religion as the reason for the loyalty of the people, this assumption was only wishful thinking. Furthermore, the Ottomans wanted the assistance of *Nakib-ul Eşrafs*, local religious notables, to ensure the obedience of the people to the Ottoman Empire for resisting against the British threat.

4.4 The Ottoman View of its Sovereignty over the Persian Gulf

The Ottoman Empire accepted itself as sovereign over the Persian Gulf. Although the Ottoman government claimed full sovereignty in the region and was apparently backed by historical, legal and geographical arguments, yet, this could not go beyond being a mere claim, as the Ottoman government did not have capacity to prove this claim of sovereignty by its deeds. In this regard, it refrained from direct military confrontation with Britain, which could have had disastrous effects on Ottoman rule in the region. The Ottomans even restrained the local sheikhs in facing off with Britain or other sheikhs under British protection. The Ottomans also evaluated the British claims, based on, similarly, history, geography and international law, which opposed and weakened Ottoman sovereignty claims. The Ottoman claims of sovereignty ensured legitimacy for the Ottomans in generating their responses against Britain. As the sovereign of the region, the Ottoman government demanded from Britain to leave the region.

²⁶⁰ 31 Mart 1309: BOA, Y. PRK. ASK 89/75.

4.4.1. Ottoman Sovereignty Claims for the Persian Gulf

In the Abdülhamidian era, the Ottoman political elite was aware of the fact that it could not defend Ottoman boundaries with military power against the Great Powers.²⁶¹ Therefore, the Ottomans produced sovereignty claims based on international law, history and geography. It was believed by the Ottomans that “being silent” and “not-producing arguments for the defense of the sovereignty” of the Ottoman state in the region would only encourage Britain to be more ambitious to expand its influence in the Persian Gulf. Ottoman statesmen thought that their silence and only watching the occupation of its territories by Britain might be used as a precedent (*emsal*) in similar, future events. In this regard, it was hoped that producing sovereignty assertions and being awakened against the encroachments might deter Britain from infringing upon the Ottoman territories.²⁶² The Ottomans did not want to be a victim of the British *fait accompli* to gain hold of the region, so the Ottoman government tried to prove itself as the sovereign of the Persian Gulf. For this reason, Ottomans attempted to display its sovereignty over the region by generating several arguments based on history, geography and international law. Furthermore, the last decades of the 19th century was the time witnessing the promotion of international law according to the new international system based on sovereign nation states. Therefore, the notion of sovereignty gained salient importance, in international politics in the era of Abdülhamid II. With an aim of proving the sovereignty over the Persian Gulf, several examples were put forward by the Ottoman officials. For instance, a mosque dated 1047A.H. (1637-1638) in Qatar was used in an argument showing the region had been a part of the empire for ages.²⁶³ The years under the rule of Mehmed Ali and Wahhabis was also used as an argument with an aim of proving Ottoman sovereignty over the Gulf.²⁶⁴ The same attitude based on generating arguments based on history, geography and international law was applied for each sheikhdom separately and the region as a whole.

²⁶¹ Bostan, İdris, “Orta Afrika’da Nüfuz Mücadelesi ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu” (1893-1895), *Bellekten*, Vol. 54. No. 210 (1990), pp. 665-697, p. 688.

²⁶² Bostan, “Orta Afrika’da Nüfuz Mücadelesi”: pp. 683-4, 688.

²⁶³ Babuçoğlu, Eroğlu and Özdil, *Osmanlı Vilayet Salnamelerinde Basra*: p. 115.

²⁶⁴ Wilson, *The Persian Gulf*: p. 246.

The Ottomans might have hoped that their assertions of sovereignty would have hindered the British intervention on the grounds that firstly, Britain might respect the Ottoman right of sovereignty because of the rise in the respect for sovereignty. For instance, Ottoman territorial integrity was guaranteed by the members of the Concert of Europe in the Paris Treaty in 1856, or the states guaranteed not to attack to the territories in Africa under the sovereignty of another state. The Ottoman Empire was included in this (Berlin) treaty as well.²⁶⁵ With hope for the respect for its territorial integrity, Ottomans brought forward its sovereignty over the Persian Gulf.

These geographical, historical and legal assertions were set forth even for a sheikhdom such as Bahrain which was, explicitly, not under the Ottoman rule. Yet, the Ottomans claimed that they had always had sovereignty over Bahrain in spite of explicit British domination there. On the European maps, Bahrain was shown as belonging to Britain, but on the Ottoman maps, it was denoted within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire did not denounce its rights of sovereignty even for Bahrain and generated some claims of sovereignty, as it did for other regions.²⁶⁶ A member of the Basra Municipal Council reflected the sovereignty arguments of the Ottoman Empire for Bahrain in his *jurnal* sent to Yıldız Palace in 1894. With respect to geographical position of Bahrain, the Ottomans argued that Bahrain was an obvious natural extension of Necd. Historically, Britain argued that Bahrain had been part of Iran but not the Ottoman Empire before British protection, while the Ottomans propounded that Bahrain's relations with the Ottoman Empire had gone back to the era of the Süleyman I, and could be supported by historical documents. Bahrain had, indeed, been a part of the Ottoman administration in Necd. For instance, it had been administrated together with Hasa and Katif due to its proximity to the coasts of Hasa. As a matter of fact, when the Bahrain Vilayet was declared, it included Bahrain Island, Hasa and Katif. On the other hand, when the Vilayet of Hasa was declared, it indicated both the littoral of Necd and Bahrain.²⁶⁷

Ottoman arguments dated back to the times of Karamites which was a heterodox sect that founded a state in Bahrain. According to this perspective, Bahrain

²⁶⁵ See: Bostan, "Orta Afrika'da Nüfuz Mücadelesi".

²⁶⁶ Kurşun, *The Ottomans in Qatar*: p. 172.

²⁶⁷ 1 Muharrem 1309: BOA, Y.PRK.AZJ 20/2.

had been administrated together with Hasa and Katif for ages from the times of the Karamites. However, Bahrain became independent like many Arab sheikhdoms in later ages. Although Süleyman I conquered Basra and Hasa, Bahrain continued to be under the rule of a local sheikh. On the other hand, Portugal began to invade Muscat and Oman and controlled the Hürmüz Strait in the same years. As a result, the ruler of Bahrain, Murad Khan, wanted the protection of the Ottoman Empire. In 970 A.H (1562-1563), the administration of Bahrain was left to the family of Murad Khan with an imperial edict, so, the member of the Municipal Council pointed out that Bahrain had been under the suzerainty of the Ottomans since then. In later years, Arabs expelled the Portuguese navy for attacking Qatar, Necd and Bahrain. In fact, various sheikhdoms emerged in the interior of Necd and Hasa because the Ottoman state could not control these places. In the 17th century, Nadir Shah of Iran invaded Bahrain in his expedition to Baghdad but the Iranians, as were the Portuguese, were expelled by the local people. As a result, the Ottomans claimed that Iranian sovereignty claims over Bahrain were historically baseless. It was also added that the Iranian invasion of Bahrain could not affect the Ottoman sovereignty rights over Bahrain because the Iranian invasion had not been recognized by the Ottomans.²⁶⁸

The document continued to relate the history of the region in relation to the Ottoman existence there. Accordingly, the ruling family of Bahrain, the descendants of Murad Khan, ruled Bahrain for years, and then the political power passed to different Arab families. The Kuwaitis, who had immigrated to Bahrain and gained the favor of the Ottomans from the beginning, began to rule Bahrain. From the Kuwaitis, Muhammed Ibn-i Halife emerged as the Sheikh of Bahrain. He applied for the suzerainty of the Ottomans, but the Shiite tribes objected to this, and a conflict emerged between Sheikh Muhammed and the Shiite tribes. The British Consul in Busehr interfered and replaced Sheikh Muhammed with Ali. However, Muhammed Ibn-i Halife went to Kuwait, to his cousin Muhammed Ibn-i Abdullah, and they returned Bahrain, and fought with and, consequently, killed Ali. Ali's son escaped to Britain, and British ships in the Persian Gulf interferred into Kuwait, making Isa the Sheikh of the emirate. British officers arrested Muhammed Ibn-i Halife and took him

²⁶⁸ 1 Muharrem 1309: BOA, Y.PRK. AZJ 20/2.

under house arrest in Bombay until Sultan Abdülhamid freed him through diplomatic channels.²⁶⁹

In this report, a member of the Municipal Council indicated that although Necd and Hasa were ruled by an appointed governor, and that Bahrain had been administrated by the family of Murad Khan through the permission granted by the Ottoman Empire in the time of Süleyman I and later years, this could not be maintained. Therefore, Bahrain and Necd entered under the rule of local sheikhs. The member of Basra Municipal Council insisted that the Ottoman rights of sovereignty over Bahrain could not be opposed because of this rupture in the rule of Bahrain.²⁷⁰

Ottomans, interestingly, based their sovereignty claims over Bahrain on the former years of Necd under Saudi rule. It was stated in the report of the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Bahrain had been the center of the administration including Hasa and Bahrain. The author of the report added that Wahhabi-Saudi rulers of Necd had levied taxes (9,000 riyal) from Bahrain. The author concluded his report by insisting that Qatar, Zibare and Bahrain were parts of the Ottoman Empire, and the local people were the subjects of the Ottoman Sultan.²⁷¹ The Governor of Basra, Nafiz Paşa, used the history of the Wahhabi control in the region as evidence of how the Ottomans were the legal sovereign power. He stated that Saudi sheikhs received taxes from Bahrain before the Ottomans re-conquered the region in 1871.²⁷² In conclusion, Ottomans used the Saudis' (Necd) collection of taxes from Bahrain and other sheikhdoms as evidence to prove that the ruler of Necd was also the sovereign of Bahrain. Hence, Bahrain was an inseparable part of the Gulf inner lands, Necd.²⁷³

The status of Kuwait was not a problem until the mid-1890s. This sheikhdom was recognized as being under Ottoman rule, albeit nominally. For instance, the British ambassador in İstanbul in 1893 declared that "the British Government admitted the existence of an Ottoman sovereignty along the coast from Basra to Qatif". This statement obviously included Kuwait.²⁷⁴ However, Kuwait began to be a

²⁶⁹ 1 Muharrem 1309: BOA, Y.PRK. AZJ 20/2.

²⁷⁰ 1 Muharrem 1309: BOA, Y.PRK. AZJ 20/2.

²⁷¹ 16 Ocak 1906: BOA, HR. SYS 108/12.

²⁷² Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 154.

²⁷³ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 241.

²⁷⁴ Albaharna, *The Legal Status of the Arabian Gulf States*: p. 41.

challenge for Ottoman sovereignty with the ascendancy of Mübarek El-Sabah in 1896, which was coupled with international projects such as the Berlin-Baghdad Railway.²⁷⁵

In the discussion of the status of Kuwait, the Ottoman government followed a route that was similar to the case of Bahrain. According to a document sent to the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vefik Paşa, to the Yıldız Palace in 1901, Kuwait, historically, had been a part of the Ottoman Empire and the Kuwaiti Sheikh was an Ottoman Kaymakam, i.e. an Ottoman official; therefore, the British did not have any right to sign a “protection agreement” with Kuwait and its Ottoman appointed sheikh-Kaymakam.²⁷⁶ Ottoman sovereignty rights and assertions over Kuwait were not only based on history, geography but also, and perhaps more importantly, on international law such as agreements assuring Ottoman territorial integrity.²⁷⁷

These claims of sovereignty by the Ottoman Empire in the region were also transmitted to Britain on several occasions. In these declarations, international law based on the principle of respect for sovereignty and international agreements were used as arguments in defending Ottoman sovereignty over Kuwait. The Ottoman ambassador in London met with the British Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1901, and reminded him of the international law, declaring that the British encroachments toward the Gulf violated Ottoman sovereignty rights (“*Padişahımız Efendimiz Hazretlerinin gayr-ı kabil-i itiraz olan hukuk-u hümayunlarına*”). He further added that these violations were also against the current international agreements (“*muahedat-ı mevcude ahkamına mugayir olan*”).²⁷⁸

One day later, similar arguments were repeated in the direction sent by the Ottoman ministry of foreign affairs to the ambassador in London. It was reiterated that the Ottoman Empire could not accept an agreement between Britain and Mübarek El-Sabah as if Kuwait was a sovereign-independent state since Mübarek was a subject of the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, in his ordinary official communications with the Mutasarrıf of Necd, Mübarek acknowledged his loyalty to

²⁷⁵ Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: p. 8.

²⁷⁶ 16 Ağustos 1317: BOA, Y. PRK. BŞK 65/21.

²⁷⁷ For using international law in the assertions of the Ottoman sovereignty in various geographies, see Bostan, “Orta Afrika’da Nüfuz Mücadelesi”.

²⁷⁸ 22 Ağustos 1317: BOA, Y. PRK. BŞK 65/21.

the Sultan on several occasions. Hence, his official relations with the state could not be rejected by any state. It was added that there were rumors concerning an agreement between Britain and the Kaymakam of Kuwait. If an agreement were to be signed with regard to the security of commercial ships in the littoral of Necd, it could be done only with the Ottoman state, not with a local sheikh. Such an agreement made between the Kaymakam and Britain would not be recognized.²⁷⁹

The ministry of foreign affairs also emphasized the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Ottomans referred to international law, and, accordingly, the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, which was guaranteed by the international agreements to which Britain was part of. In this regard, Kuwait was in the Ottoman territories so the encroachments of the foreign powers could not be accepted.²⁸⁰ Ottomans produced sovereignty arguments countering British threat, For instance, Tahsin Paşa, as the most prominent official of the Mabeyn of Yıldız Palace, sent the comments of the Palace about Kuwait to the Sadaret one day later. Tahsin Paşa argued that there was a possibility that Mübarek El-Sabah might enter into protection agreement with Britain. As a result of this possibility, Ottomans argued that this treaty would concern only him not the people as subjects or Kuwait as a territory.²⁸¹ It should be stated that some Ottoman bureaucrats evaluated these Ottoman sovereignty claims over the Gulf another example of “wishful thinking” which were the assumptions brought forward and listened by the only Ottomans.²⁸² However, as explained above, these claims gave legitimacy to the Ottoman statesmen to renew their attempts to consolidate the Ottoman existence in the region.

4.4.2. Ottoman Realization of the Limit of Its Sovereignty

Although the Ottoman government produced claims of sovereignty in the Gulf based on geography, history and international law, it was very well aware that the status-quo in the region was such that Britain had the *de-facto* supremacy and the sheikhdoms were autonomous and under British protection. This awareness relied

²⁷⁹ 23 Ağustos 1317: BOA, Y. PRK. BŞK 65/21.

²⁸⁰ 23 Ağustos 1317: BOA, Y. PRK. BŞK 65/21.

²⁸¹ 24 Ağustos 1317 (22 Cemaziyelevvel 1319): BOA, Y. PRK. BŞK 65/21.

²⁸² Mahmut Nedim Bey, *Arabistan'da Bir Ömür, Son Yemen Valisinin Hatıraları veya Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Arabistan'da Nasıl Yıkıldı*, (ed.) Ali Birinci, İstanbul, İsis Yayıncılık, 2001, p. 97.

on the reflection of the serious and continued British opposition to the Ottoman sovereignty assertions in the reports of the Ottoman officials that showed the realities of the region such as the independence of Bahrain, the relations between Kuwait and Britain and so on. Therefore, the Ottomans were aware of the fact that although the Ottoman state had the rights over the territories causing debate between Britain and the Sublime Porte, Britain opposed these claims by its own arguments, but more importantly by its “power” in the region.

British opposition to the Ottoman claims led to the Ottoman realization of how Britain considered the Ottoman sovereignty there. British objection to the Ottoman sovereignty appeared through several ways. Firstly, Britain based its assertions upon history. Secondly, Britain declared clearly its agreements with tribal heads. Thirdly, Britain did not allow the entry of the Ottoman ships into the Persian Gulf ports and recruitment of soldiers for the Ottoman army from the region.

British opposition to the Ottoman sovereignty appeared with several events. For instance, the Ottomans did not accept the removal of the Sheikh of Bahrain by Britain, and declared Ottoman objection to Britain. The Ottomans stated that Bahrain was part of the Ottoman Empire. In response, Britain stated that Bahrain had never been a part of the Ottoman Empire, for it had been independent. British authorities asserted that although the Wahhabis and Iranians had ruled Bahrain for a particular time in earlier times, the Ottomans had not, and Britain recognized Bahrain as an independent emirate. On the grounds of the recognition of the independence of Bahrain, Britain signed a protection agreement with Bahrain in 1861. As a result of this agreement, Britain provided protection for Bahrain. For instance, British ships along the coast of Bahrain did not allow the entry of an Ottoman ship, “Asur”, into Bahrain. Moreover, Britain objected to the recruitment of Bahraini subjects accommodating in Basra into the Ottoman army because of the independence of Bahrain under the British auspices.²⁸³

One of the Ottoman statesmen who did not avoid to face with the realities in the region was the commander of the Sixth Army; Süleyman Paşa. He told his views about the status of Bahrain to the centre in his report sent in 1905. He pointed out the autonomy of the sheikhdoms and stated that although Bahrain was an obvious part of the Ottoman Empire, it had been ruled by local rulers as independent under the

²⁸³ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR. SYS 104/10

protection of Britain since the 16th century, and the Ottomans had not done anything to change this situation by then.²⁸⁴

A similar view was raised for Kuwait by the governor of Basra in 1893. He underlined that Kuwait had not been under the direct administration of the Ottoman state. It had been ruled by the El-Sabah family and they took a particular-symbolic amount of dates (hurma) from the state as salary.²⁸⁵ The Basra governor wanted to indicate the nominal status of the Ottoman sovereignty over Kuwait. The yearbooks, *Salnames*, also pointed out the status of Kaymakam of Kuwait as “honorary” (*fahri*).²⁸⁶ It was indicated that the title of Kaymakam given to the Sheikh of Kuwait, Muhammed El-Sabah, was only nominal. In this context, the Sheikhs of Kuwait did not allow for the abolishment of their autonomy by the establishment of direct Ottoman rule over Kuwait.²⁸⁷

A document dating from 1905, underlined all these points. Although the Ottoman government did not denounce its sovereignty rights over Kuwait, declaring it as a part of the Empire, it was aware of the fact that application of its sovereignty rights would be obstructed by Britain. It was pointed out that Kuwait had not been taken under the direct, actual rule of the Ottoman Empire, and Kuwait had been ruled by local sheikhs for years (“*tul-u müddet meşayih-i mahalliye ile idare edildiği*”). In spite of the fact that the Ottomans appointed Mübarek El-Sabah as Kaymakam, and paid an appropriate amount of salary, this was only nominal. For instance, when the Zühaf corvette went to Kuwait to intervene in an internal dispute, it was hindered by a British ship.²⁸⁸

As discussed above, the Ottoman state expected respect from Britain for its sovereignty claims over the Persian Gulf, as international agreements guaranteed the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Nonetheless, Britain opposed this and implied that it did not consider Necd as a part of the Ottoman territorial integrity because it was annexed by the Ottoman Empire after the Treaty of Paris in 1856, which guaranteed the Ottoman territorial integrity as in the case of other European

²⁸⁴ 7 Mart 1321: BOA, HR. SYS 93/34

²⁸⁵ 25 Mayıs 1309: BOA, Y. MTV 78/178.

²⁸⁶ Babuçoğlu, Eroğlu and Özdil, *Osmanlı Vilayet Salnamelerinde Basra*: p. 96.

²⁸⁷ Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West*: p. 169.

²⁸⁸ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR. SYS 104/10.

states.²⁸⁹ In spite of this British commitment, it objected to the establishment of the directorates (*müdüriyet*) in Zibare and Adid which were across from Bahrain. Britain argued that these places were under the rule of the Omani Sheikh who sought a protection agreement with Britain on 5 May 1853 [sic]. This agreement stipulated that all disputes between sheikhs of tribes under British protection would be settled by Britain. In line with this British policy, as explained earlier, Britain bombarded Zibare, removed Bahraini refugees in Zibare and later forced Ottomans to discharge the directorates appointed to Zibare and Adid.²⁹⁰

Nafiz Paşa offered an event as an example to show to what extent Britain internalized these areas as its own territories.²⁹¹ The British consul in Basra asked for the debt of Bahrain Sheikh's brother in the hands of a Qatif merchant. Ottoman officials in Basra wrote to the consul that both men were Ottoman subjects, and Bahrain was part of the Ottoman administration in Hasa. In response to that, British consul wrote that due to British protection agreements with Bahrain, the island was not under the Ottoman rule or part of Hasa, but Bahrain was an independent state that had close relations with Britain. Thereby, Britain had rights and obligations over Bahrain stemming from the protection agreements.²⁹²

4.4.3. Refraining from Direct Confrontation with Britain

Britain did not oppose the Ottoman sovereignty claims by relying on rhetoric or the expression of discontent, but it challenged the Ottoman attempts in the region with its paramount military power, which always forced the Ottomans to step back. In the context of this opposition, although the Ottoman state, albeit nominally, claimed its sovereignty over the Persian Gulf, and it did not recognize the independence of the sheikhdoms and their relations with Britain, it refrained from military confrontation with Britain in several cases. Abdülhamid II and his administration adhered to a principle based on not taking risks to defend an authority

²⁸⁹ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR. SYS 104/10.

²⁹⁰ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR. SYS 104/10.

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

²⁹² 10 Kanun-u Sani 1303: BOA, A.MKT. MHM 496/16.

that was nominal.²⁹³ This Ottoman policy was based on the assumption and prediction that the consequences of this conflict would be highly detrimental for the Ottoman existence in the region and would serve for the intensification of British intervention in the region. Furthermore, it should be taken into consideration that the Ottomans did not have enough resources and means to sustain directly confrontationist policies, so it usually tried to preserve the status-quo which often meant *de-facto* British supremacy over the region and the autonomy of the sheikhdoms. The Ottomans did not want to give the British a pretext for the transformation of its *de-facto* supremacy over the Persian Gulf into *de-jure* existence by asserting the protection of the local sheikhdoms against the Ottomans.

In the report of the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1905, it was found impossible to change the independent status of Bahrain. In this context, the only thing that the Ottomans could have done was not to recognize the *de-facto* situation and its effects on Bahrain-Ottoman relations (“*Bahreyn’in hali hazır siyasisini tağyir adem-ul imkan bulunmuş ve yalnız devletçe bunun tasdik cihetine gidilmemesi ve işbu himayetin tesiratını kabul olunmaması suretinden başka bir muameleye mahal kalmamıştır*”) This consideration recognized that the status-quo emanated from the Ottoman acceptance of its incapacity to maintain the dependency of Bahrain upon the Empire. Bahrain had been independent for ages. Furthermore, Bahrain had been under the protection of Britain for 44 years.²⁹⁴ In regulations sent to the Basra Governor (*Vali*); Hidayet Paşa, and the Mutasarrıf of Necd, Akif Paşa, it was emphasized that the Bahrain Sheikh was pro-Britain and Bahrain was protected by British corvettes. As a result, it was considered impossible to dethrone the Sheikh. Furthermore, the Ottoman government did not want to weaken its relations with Britain because of Bahrain. As a result, it was recommended to find measures to reinforce the Ottoman relations with Bahrain in the given context.²⁹⁵ In the report regarding the measures that should be taken in the Gulf, the impossibility of removing the Bahraini Sheikh was pointed out as well.²⁹⁶

It was said for Kuwait that it had been an Ottoman territory but it had been ruled by local Sheikhs. Mübarek El-Sabah became, albeit nominally, an Ottoman

²⁹³ Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: p. 42.

²⁹⁴ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR.SYS 104/10.

²⁹⁵ 25 Kanun-u Sani 1304: BOA, DH.MKT 1613/19.

²⁹⁶ 6 Şubat 1305: BOA, DH. MKT 1700/33.

Kaymakam. However, in the rebellion against Mübarek El-Sabah in 1901, the Zühaf corvette entered into the region to interfere, and British warships arrived to block this potential intervention. The Ottomans experienced British opposition in this Ottoman attempt of landing soldiers in Kuwait. As the British warships obstructed this, a “Preservation of Status-quo” agreement was concluded between Britain and the Ottomans in 1901. Therefore, the actual, *de-facto* situation was recognized, and it became *de-jure* by an agreement. As a result of this event, Ottoman and British authorities came to an understanding. The terms of the agreement stated that the Ottomans would not occupy Bahrain and change status-quo, and in return, Britain would not occupy Kuwait and would not take Kuwait under its protection.²⁹⁷ This meant that the Ottomans were forced to sign a treaty of “preservation of the status-quo” in the face of this *fait accompli*.²⁹⁸ Safran asserts that the status-quo meant “nominal Turkish sovereignty” and “*de-facto* Kuwaiti independence” under British protection.²⁹⁹

These “nominal Turkish sovereignty” and “*de-facto* Kuwaiti independence” led to different Ottoman and British perceptions of the “status-quo”. The Ottoman Empire understood from “status-quo” that Kuwait was part of the Ottoman Empire, and Mübarek El-Sabah “*Mübarek Paşa*” was a Kaymakam, official, of the Ottoman state. On the other hand, Britain understood “status-quo” as the independence of Kuwait.

“Ma’mafih Devlet-i Aliye’nin nokta-i nazarınca Kuveyt’in Basra Vilayet’ine mulhik bir kaza ve Mübarek El-Sabah Paşa’nın orada kaymakam olmasından ibaret bulunan istatuko, İngiltere Devleti’nin fikrinde Kuveyt’in müstakil kalmasından kinayet olmakla.”

The Ottomans believed that these different considerations could not be corrected through negotiations because Britain gave priority to Kuwait. In fact, with the opening of the Russian Consulate in Basra, this consulate’s relations with Ibn-i

²⁹⁷ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR.SYS 104/10. For the same event, see Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: pp. 140-1.

²⁹⁸ Kurşun, *The Ottomans in Qatar*: p.109; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: p. 20.

²⁹⁹ Safran, Nadav, *Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, London, Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 29.

Reşid and, more importantly, the German projects with respect to Kuwait as the terminus of the Berlin-Baghdad Railway increased, to a great extent, the political importance of Kuwait for Britain.³⁰⁰

Rather than conflict, diplomatic channels were suggested to solve the problems with regard to the status of Kuwait as the Ottoman state was not in a position to use military means.³⁰¹ The extension of Ottoman sovereignty over Kuwait was not considered possible, but it had to be considered that Britain would not establish formal protection over Kuwait.

*“Kuveyt hakkındaki işbu muamelat ve muhaberata nazaran el-yevm orada nüfuz-u Hükümet-i Seniyye'nin tevsi'i yolunda şimdilik teşebbüs ve muameleye imkan olmayıp ancak İngiltere'nin himaye-i resmiye tesis etmesine ve yerleşmesine dikkat etmekten başka yapacak bir şey olmadığı varest-i arz ve izah görülmüştür”.*³⁰²

Diplomatic channels were also suggested for Bahrain as well. A member of the Basra Municipal Council, proposed an interesting diplomatic solution for the solution of the status of Bahrain. He offered that the dispute over Bahrain might be settled in such a diplomatic way that no state could reject the proposal. He pointed out that both states would not accept the rule of each other over disputed Bahrain, so this territory might be placed under the joint administration of both states. He claimed that this way is applied to all disputed lands all over the world. He also presented the idea of going to court to resolve the issue of the sovereignty over Bahrain as a convenient way for the Ottomans to re-establish Ottoman sovereignty over Bahrain. He was highly confident about the positive outcome of such a trial for the Ottoman Empire, which would not allow Bahrain to be left to Britain.³⁰³

In addition to the Ottoman reports that advised to avoid confrontations because of the general conditions in the region, the Ottomans stepped back in several events in which they faced with Britain. For instance, the Ottomans occupied the small island of Zakhnuniyah, a dependency of Bahrain, in 1893 but subsequently

³⁰⁰ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR.SYS 104/10.

³⁰¹ 16 Ağustos 1317: BOA, Y. PRK. BŞK 65/21.

³⁰² 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR.SYS 104/10.

³⁰³ 1 Muharrem 1309: BOA, Y.PRK. AZJ 20/2.

evacuated it after a British protest.³⁰⁴ In this regard, the events showed that the Ottomans preferred to refrain from confrontation with Britain.

Upon the news in the Ottoman newspapers indicating that the Ottoman state would appoint administrators to Zibare, Wakrah and Obeid, the Sublime Porte was forced to give assurances to Britain with respect to this issue. In other words, the Sublime Porte applied an appeasement policy towards Britain.³⁰⁵ Although Britain did not have any right of intervention in these regions, the Sublime Porte stepped back as it had done in the above mentioned Zibare Incident. It appointed local sheikhs rather than ordinary administrators of the state. Moreover, it declared that it postponed the date of the appointment of the administrators.³⁰⁶

Another event demonstrating the Ottoman policy of conflict avoidance with Britain occurred with regard to Bahraini people living in Ottoman lands such as Basra. Until 1892, Ottoman authorities treated the Bahrainis who visited Ottoman lands as Ottoman subjects, but Britain warned the Ottoman authorities that it would not accept the interference of any power with the people of this island because Bahrain was under the protection of Britain since the treaty of the non-alienation bond was signed in 1892. While the Porte objected to this claim by declaring Bahrain was an Ottoman territory, it also tried to ease the tension by assuring that it had no intention of attacking Bahrain. Nonetheless, the Ottoman Kaymakam of Qatif declared in January 1893 that all Bahraini ships visiting the Ottoman ports had to fly the Ottoman flag. In response to the British diplomatic protests in Istanbul, the Porte said that it did not have any knowledge with respect to this event, and later, the Ottomans informed Britain that it had sent orders to the Governor of Basra ordering him not to intervene in the affairs of Bahrain.³⁰⁷

Ordinary small events were also a part of the struggle for influence between the Ottoman Empire and Britain in the Persian Gulf. For instance, in an Ottoman Foreign Ministry report dated 1908 regarding Bahrain, the same Ottoman tendency, which was based on avoiding direct confrontation with Britain, can be observed. Britain wanted to free a Bahraini (Halil Ibn-i Ibrahim) from military service in the Ottoman army. The British Basra Consul claimed that Bahrain was not under

³⁰⁴ Adamiyat, *Bahrain Islands*: p. 185.

³⁰⁵ Kurşun, *The Ottomans in Qatar*: p. 112.

³⁰⁶ Kurşun, *The Ottomans in Qatar*: pp. 112-3.

³⁰⁷ Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*: p. 28; Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 137.

Ottoman sovereignty. Ottoman bureaucrats firstly opposed this claim, stating that he was a person living in Ebu'l Hatib and Ottomans has applied Ottoman law and regulations on Bahrainis visiting Basra. However, the British consul insisted on asserting that a Bahraini could not be an Ottoman soldier. Consequently, it was ordered that although declaring Ottoman suzerainty over Bahrain was to be avoided, implying that Bahrain was not under Ottoman sovereignty, instead being under British protection was also to be avoided. In the document, it was advised not to deteriorate current existing relations with Britain because of the problems in the Gulf.³⁰⁸

In conclusion, although the Ottomans did not accept British protection over the sheikhdoms in the Gulf, and it asserted its own sovereignty over these territories, it avoided the direct military confrontation to protect its sovereignty. This indicates that Britain was strongly entrenched in the region and it was highly determined to thwart the incursions to its area of interest. Thereby, Britain contained the Ottoman Empire from interfering to the sheikhdom under its protection.

4.4.4. Precluding the Local Sheikhs from Attacking Britain and British Interests

Although the Ottomans took various measures to obstruct British intervention in the Gulf, it strove for control of the officials, local sheikhs and people with the aim of deterring them from undertaking activities that might give Britain the pretext for intervention. For instance, the Ottomans banned all actions of the sheikhs that would result in any intervention of Britain.³⁰⁹ The reason for this control was because the Ottomans did not want inciting a conflict in the region that might negatively affect Anglo-Ottoman relations in general. The Ottomans were aware of the fact that the actions of quasi-independent local sheikhdoms under its rule had the potential of bringing Britain and the Ottoman Empire into conflict. Therefore, it can be said that Ottomans tried to establish a kind of control over tribal leaders, under the control of the Ottoman government, in order to prevent confrontation with Britain.

The Ottomans, at first, encouraged Ibn-i Reşid to attack Kuwait in 1901 in order to remove Mübarek El-Sabah who had entered into a protection agreement

³⁰⁸ 9 Ocak 1908: BOA, HR.SYS. 108/32.

³⁰⁹ Kurşun, *The Ottomans in Qatar*: pp. 91, 170.

with Britain in 1899. It was announced after the victory of Ibn-i Reşid over Mübarek El-Sabah in 1901 at the battle of Sarif that Britain would offer protection over Kuwait. In this regard, the Ottomans stepped back and forced Ibn-i Reşid to withdraw from Kuwait, as the Ottomans were worried about the repercussions of this attack which likely would affect general Anglo-Ottoman relations and the Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf to a great extent.³¹⁰

After that event in 1901, the Ottomans controlled Ibn-i Reşid in order not to give Britain a pretext for further interventions into the region. As a consequence of such an attack by Britain, it was thought that Britain might extend its auspices over the tribes of the region. Furthermore, the Ottomans thought that there was the possibility that Britain might even reconcile with Ibn-i Reşid and could take him under its protection as Britain had done with other tribal leaders. In this framework, the consequence might be highly detrimental for the Ottoman existence.³¹¹ The Ottomans also evaluated the repercussions of the attack of Ibn-i Reşid with regard to the Berlin-Baghdad Railway that planned for Kuwait to be the railway's terminus. The Ottomans thought that Ibn-i Reşid's attack upon Mübarek and Ibn-i Saud might provoke active intervention by Britain. This, obviously, might then derail the Ottoman negotiations with Germany with regard to the plans over the Berlin-Baghdad Railway,³¹² which had the potential to strengthen Ottoman rule over the Gulf. In fact, any intervention by Britain would imply that the Ottomans could not effectively rule over the Gulf region, so the railway plan would fail.

Yıldız Palace was advised to send troops to contain Ibn-i Reşid if he would attack Kuwait.³¹³ The Ottomans considered that it was also necessary to hinder the attack of Mübarek El-Sabah against Ibn-i Reşid with an aim of averting subsequent plans for revenge by Ibn-i Reşid. Ottomans were highly convinced that in such disquiet, whomever started it, in the Gulf might give Britain a pretext for intervening in the region,³¹⁴ which would allow for the establishment of supremacy of Britain around Kuwait and Necd.

³¹⁰ Al-Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*: p. 211.

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

³¹² Philby, *Arabia*: p. 170.

³¹³ 6 Eylül 1317: BOA, Y.PRK. HR 31/52.

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

The Ottomans also controlled Qatari Sheikh, Casim El-Sani, in the attack against Bahrain in the Zibare event whereby the British Ebu Şehr consul and his men attacked Bahrainis who had taken refuge in Qatar, Zibare. The Ottomans even ordered sending a corvette to the coast of Qatar in order to obstruct a conflict between the Qataris and British.³¹⁵ Although the Ottomans did not recognize the claims of Britain in the Zibare event, they did not take strong measures against British intervention, as was expressed with the following words “*Hükümet-i Seniyyece, İngiltere’nin müddeiyat-ı mezkuresi kabul ve tasdik olunmamakla beraber bu babda tedabir-i fiiliyeden bi-ictinab edilmiş*”).³¹⁶ The Ottomans approached this incident in the general framework of the Anglo-Ottoman relations and did not want the event to turn into a general “Qatar” problem. Sheikh Casim was not content with the passive Ottoman approach based on only diplomatic means such as protesting to Britain. Although Casim demonstrated his displeasure with the state policy through several communications with the Ottoman state, in the end, he was forced to obey the state’s policy.³¹⁷

Before the Zibare event, the Ottomans averted another of Casim’s attack on Bahrain in 1892. When Britain complained to the Basra governor that Casim El-Sani and Nasser El-Mübarek planned to attack Bahrain in 1892, the Basra governor reported the event to the Sublime Porte, stating that he had given the necessary imperatives to the ship captains in the sea and the Mutasarrıf of Necd to avoid all aggressions toward Bahrain. More importantly, he stated that he had warned Casim and Nasser not to attack Bahrain. Abdülhamid II was informed about the issue and he commanded that serious measures be taken to obstruct any disorder caused by the local leaders under Ottoman rule.³¹⁸ In 1897, Casim was also notified not to attack Kuwait together with Yusuf El-İbrahim, who was an ardent enemy of Mübarek El-Sabah.³¹⁹

Ottomans struggled to protect its sovereignty as much as possible. They generated sovereignty claims in order to preempt British claims over the region. However, the realities on the ground did not correspond with the Ottoman hopes on

³¹⁵ 17 Ağustos 1311: BOA, DH.MKT 408/19.

³¹⁶ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR.SYS 104/10.

³¹⁷ Kurşun, *The Ottomans in Qatar*: p. 162.

³¹⁸ Kurşun, *The Ottomans in Qatar*: p. 91.

³¹⁹ Kurşun, *The Ottomans in Qatar*: p. 165.

the issue of asserting its sovereignty. Britain did not respect the Ottoman claims of sovereignty in the Persian Gulf region. Furthermore, Britain had forced the Ottoman Empire to step back when its interests required. The Ottomans were aware of the British attitude, thus they avoided confrontation with Britain. They also controlled the local sheikhs under its rule, warning them not to harm British interests by attacking the sheikhdoms under British protection.

In conclusion, the Ottoman stance generated the sovereignty assertions with respect to history, geography and international law in order to avert further British incursions into the region and consolidate its rule. Although these assertions gave hope to the Ottoman government to renew its attempts for the consolidation of its rule, it avoided conflict with Britain in this policy. In this regard, the Ottomans struggled to impede the British threats by using its claims of sovereignty over the region but it was not successful because of the British resoluteness to protect its interests and, in the end, it was often forced to step back when confronted with the British threat.

The views with regard to several issues of the region were shaped by threat. For instance, the tools of Britain in penetrating into the Gulf region were so influential, making the region weak against the British threat. The Ottoman outlook towards the local people's position was also formed under the effect of the British threat because Ottomans evaluated people's level in civilization according to their comprehension of the British threat. Furthermore, the loyalty of the local people was appreciated, and the people were considered to have resisted the British threat because of their loyalty. Religion was considered as a means motivating people against the British threat. Lastly, the Ottoman state generated sovereignty arguments to demonstrate its rights over the region.

Furthermore, all of the dimensions of the Ottoman view with regard to the region shaped the Ottoman policies for the consolidation of the Ottoman rule in the region, and this view shaped the measures against the British threat. The Ottoman Empire had hopes with regard to its existence in the region. For instance, it considered local people and the heads of tribes as loyal to the state, and it wished that religion would be an influential factor in binding the people to the Ottoman state. Furthermore, it hoped that its sovereignty rights over the Persian Gulf would lead to the British respect for its sovereignty. Nevertheless, all of these wishful thoughts did not correspond with the realities in the region. The policies for the region and

measures against the British threat stemmed from this outlook, but the dominant British threat made these measures ineffective.

CHAPTER 5

OTTOMANS-SHEIKHS-BRITAIN:

TRIBAL MANIPULATION OF THE OTTOMAN AND BRITISH POWERS

The previous chapters have analyzed how Britain interfered in the Persian Gulf through its extensive influence over the local tribes, resulted in local leaders becoming British protégés. The autonomy of the tribes made this relationship possible. The various means of British interference in the region, such as incitement of upheavals, gun smuggling, and coercion would not have been possible without the autonomy of the sheikhs. On the other hand, religion and Ottoman sovereignty over the region would have been more influential like in the other regions of the Ottoman Empire if a more sound authority had been established in which the state could directly enter into relations with the individuals by bypassing the local leaders. Although these tribes were under Ottoman rule, yet not effectively, they could enter into direct relations with Britain whenever they thought that such an arrangement would maximize their benefits; thus this situation made the region vulnerable and open to British intervention. This chapter analyzes how the autonomous tribes manipulated both the Ottomans and the British while benefiting from this manipulation. In this framework, Ottoman relations with local leaders were shaped in the shadow of the British threat, and presence in the Persian Gulf region.

The Tanzimat reforms had succeeded in eliminating autonomy of the local leaders in the provincial centers of the Ottoman Empire (such as Basra) until the 1850s. Nevertheless, Ottoman authority did not reach beyond the provincial centers of the state (such as south of Basra in the Persian Gulf).³²⁰ The autonomous tribes had great autonomy and they could collect taxes; they also had a system of arbitration and justice for the members of tribe in the peripheral regions of the Arab Peninsula. Rogan asserted that the tribes shared the sovereignty with the state in these regions.³²¹

³²⁰ Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*: p. 5.

³²¹ Rogan, "Aşiret Mektebi": p. 84.

The Persian Gulf came under the centralist rule of the Ottoman state in 1871, which was a very late date for establishing a powerful centralist administration that could have both abolished the autonomy of the tribes and inhibited British intervention. The remaining years were not enough because “the institutions which the Ottoman government sought to establish took time to become effective and gain acceptance. There were no ‘quick’ solutions to the problem of extending the state’s sovereignty to peripheral zones”.³²² In following last four decades of the Ottoman Empire, it faced challenges in the region, which were explained in previous chapters that were incomparable with previous decades of the Tanzimat. Therefore, applying centralist policies were very difficult in the weakened and challenged position of the Ottoman state. Local leaders continued to be autonomous in the Gulf because the Ottomans could not change the “realities on the ground” in the region such as extension of the settlement and cultivation and “eliminating feudality” thus the Ottomans could not manage to rule the Gulf as a supreme authority.³²³ Due to their autonomy, the sheikhs were able to challenge the Ottoman state through forming relations with Britain and leading insurgencies against Ottoman control. To better understand this dynamic, this chapter examines the influence of the autonomous tribal sheikhs in the Ottoman struggle to prevent British intervention and to form a strong administration in the Persian Gulf.

Although these tribal sheikhs were, Kaymakams of the Ottoman Empire and subjects of the Sultan, they possessed a great freedom which allowed them to enter into relations with Britain when their interests required. This situation increased the vulnerability of the region to the British threat. However, under these conditions, the Ottomans attempted to gain the support and allegiance of the tribal heads to consolidate Ottoman rule by making reforms; the heads of tribes did not want their autonomy eliminated by allowing for centralist-bureaucratic reforms. In addition to British intervention owing to the autonomy of tribes, the Ottomans always sought to establish a balance of power between local powers because the dominance of one of them would be a menace for Ottoman rule, whether a dominant tribe was backed by Britain or not. In this framework, the Ottoman relations with local leaders were important components in understanding how the Ottoman-British competition over

³²² Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*: p. 15.

³²³ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: pp. 2, 55; Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*: p. 45.

the supremacy in the Gulf was realized. In fact, the leaders of the Gulf sheikhdoms were not only the objects of the showdown between Britain and the Ottomans; they were also subjects (actors) who could even determine the outcome of this struggle.

To better understand the extent of the autonomy of the sheikhdoms, it is useful to compare the status of the Gulf and the Hejaz region *vis a vis* the Ottoman centre. In spite of the well known autonomy and privileges of the Sherifs of Mecca that had existed for ages, Abdülhamid II could change the Sherifs and exile members of their families, such as the case with Sherif Hüseyin, who was exiled to İstanbul.³²⁴ Nevertheless, similar policy implementations in the Persian Gulf were not feasible. For instance, the Ottomans were not able to exile Mübarek El-Sabah to İstanbul despite their desire.³²⁵

Another aspect of the British penetration to the Gulf region should be kept in mind: though there was British penetration in the Persian Gulf, the Ottoman struggle with local Gulf leaders did not stem from Arabist-separatist inspirations that took place in other parts of the Ottoman Empire, including several areas of Arabia such as Syria and Lebanon.³²⁶ The Ottomans had to deal with the autonomy, “fierce independence” and belligerence of the desert tribesmen³²⁷ rather than the ethnic-ideological objectives of the people in the Persian Gulf.

Given the autonomy of the local Gulf leaders, the Ottomans did not establish an influential rule over the Gulf as much as they were able to in other parts of the empire. A factor contributing to this situation was that the autonomy of the local leaders was backed by Britain. In this framework, the Ottoman relations with the local leaders were shaped by their autonomy, which was under the auspices of the Great Britain. The autonomy under the British auspices made the British threat possible to the region. In this part of the study, autonomous two Sheiks; Ibn-i Reşid and Casim El-Sani, will be analyzed as case studies.

5.1. Ibn-i Reşid: Unreliable Ally

³²⁴ See Kral Abdullah, *Biz Osmanlı'ya Neden İsyân Ettik*.

³²⁵ Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*: p. 139.

³²⁶ For separatist movements in other Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire, see, Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*.

³²⁷ Almana, *Arabia Unified*: p. 55.

In spite of the support given to Ibn-i Reşid, he was considered to be an unreliable, ambitious and unpredictable man in the reports of the Ottoman officials and by the heads of rival tribes. Thus, as an unreliable ally, Ibn-i Reşid was viewed with suspicion by the Ottomans, especially due to the fact that he had close relations with the British, being source of disorder among tribes and his ambition of being independent. Moreover, the events which can be considered as betrayal of Ibn-i Reşid were the confirmation of the Ottoman suspicions with respect to him. Moreover, the Ottomans did not want Ibn-i Reşid to establish dominance over the Gulf and Arabia, for the Ottomans thought that any single local power might challenge the Ottoman rule in Arabia in general and in the Persian Gulf in particular.

Britain had supported, allied with and used the local sheikhdoms. The Ottoman government, too, followed a similar strategy and perceived Ibn-i Reşid as an ally to use against the other local sheikhdoms backed by the British. Therefore, British intervention to the region and its protection over other Sheikhdoms was the main factor in the Ottoman backing of Ibn-i Reşid. For instance, as he was seen as an ally by the Ottoman Empire, he received support when Abdulaziz Ibn-i Saud emerged in the Persian Gulf because the Saudis were accepted as a salient threat to the Ottoman existence in Arabia but particularly in Hejaz. Ibn-i Reşid was considered as a check against Ibn-i Saud. The proximity of the Saudi controlled lands, such as Qasim, to Medina intimidated the Ottomans. It was thought that the Saudis were under the influence of Britain due to their close relations with Mübarek El-Sabah.³²⁸ Apparently, the Ottoman perception of Ibn-i Saud as a threat was not groundless, as Al-Rasheed asserts that the British government and its representatives in the region gave their approval and support to Ibn-i Saud's activities.³²⁹

Goldberg correctly points out that Ibn-i Reşid was aware of the British factor in the Ottoman support for him. In fact, the Ottomans would not make a move because of a mere Saudi success in the region but the Saudi-British relations might motivate the Ottomans to act against Ibn-i Saud and support Ibn-i Reşid.³³⁰ In this regard, Ibn-i Reşid justified his request for help by charging that the British were helping Ibn-i Saud, through Mübarek El-Sabah against him.³³¹ It should be kept in

³²⁸ 20 Mart 1320: BOA, MV 109/15.

³²⁹ Al-Rasheed, *The Politics in Arabian Oasis*: p. 156.

³³⁰ Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p.49.

³³¹ Howarth, *The Desert King*: p. 55.

mind that the charge might have been untrue, but the circumstances of the time, such as the protection agreement between Mübarek and Britain, and the Berlin-Baghdad Railway, made it highly credible.³³² In other words, the prevailing atmosphere in the Anglo-Ottoman relations helped Ibn-i Reşid to obtain assistance from the Ottomans.³³³

In addition to the function of a check against the British threat, Ibn-i Reşid served some other functions that were beneficial for the Ottomans. First of all, Ibn-i Reşid played the role of mediator between the Ottoman state and the tribes in the Gulf.³³⁴ Secondly, the Ottomans could not establish direct control over Necd; they could do this only through the influence of Ibn-i Reşid.³³⁵ In conclusion, Ibn-i Reşid continued to be one of the prime representatives of Ottoman interests in Central Arabia until the withdrawal of the Ottomans from the region in World War I.³³⁶

Ibn-i Reşid was accused of having close relations with Britain in the reports sent by the bureaucrats and his rivals in the region to Yıldız Palace. Although the Sublime Porte allied with Ibn-i Reşid against Britain and its local allies, he was considered as a ‘possible ally’ of Britain because of his contact with Britain, including an application for protection and purchase of British weapons.

The Honorary Inspector of the 6th Army, Nusret Paşa indicated in his report sent to Yıldız Palace in 1893 that Ibn-i Reşid received the British assistance such as arms. The inspector pointed out that Ibn-i Reşid had an aim of establishing an independent Arab government in Necd with the assistance of foreign powers: “... a great quantity of aid, moral and material, has been given by foreigners [British] for this [objective]”.³³⁷ In the report sent by the Medina Muhafızlığı to the General Commandership, Seraskerlik, it was stated that 15 British soldiers visited Ibn-i Reşid and gave him nine boxes of Martini rifles and two silver saddles. Furthermore, they took the map of the roads and wells of the region, and registered the names of the

³³² Al-Rasheed, *The Politics in an Arabian Oasis*: p. 155; Safran, *Saudi Arabia*: p. 31.

³³³ Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: p. 21.

³³⁴ 21 Teşrin-i Evvel 1311: BOA, Y. PRK. ASK 107/85.

³³⁵ Yapp, “The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries”: p. 51.

³³⁶ Landen, “The Changing Pattern of Political Relations”: p. 57.

³³⁷ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 135.

tribes in the region.³³⁸ As a result of similar cooperation, Ibn-i Reşid could obtain a large stockpile of weapons.³³⁹

Ibn-i Reşid's relations with the British was not limited to receiving British weapons and providing intelligence to them; he even asked for British protection several times.³⁴⁰ For instance, when the Ottomans tried to establish good relations with Mübarek El-Sabah in 1901, Ibn-i Reşid applied to Britain for protection, stating that if the application was accepted, he would give Britain the right of control over Kuwait.³⁴¹ Another example was that Ibn-i Reşid participated in a coalition against the Ottomans when Mübarek killed his own brothers because of their refusal to join this coalition in 1896.³⁴²

Ibn-i Reşid's relation with Britain was not only reported by the Ottoman officials; but his rivals were keen to report such activities to the Ottoman capital, as Muhammed Emir El-Sadun did in 1883. El-Sadun maintained that British officials went to Ibn-i Reşid as pretended travelers, staying a long while in his camp.³⁴³ Besides, the British travelers went to suppress the uprising of the tribes under the control of Ibn-i Reşid along with him. Sadun asserted that these British officials told Ibn-i Reşid that no European state other than Britain could help him. They also offered to help Ibn-i Reşid establish a new army and buy new weapons. Sadun claimed that Ibn-i Reşid bought new weapons from Basra and Damascus, and escaped Ottoman soldiers in Yemen and Hejaz went to Ibn-i Reşid (“...*Ve Yemen ve Hicaz taraflarından firar eden asakir-i nizamiye dahi ona giderler*”). In conclusion, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Sadun depicted Ibn-i Reşid as a threat to the Ottoman existence in the Persian Gulf from the North.³⁴⁴

Eight years later, another criticism of Ibn-i Reşid's relations with Britain was raised by a member of Basra Municipal Council. He complained that although he alerted the Ottoman state in several times that Muhammed Ibn-i Reşid had a serious inclination towards Britain, his reports with respect to Ibn-i Reşid had been ignored

³³⁸ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 148.

³³⁹ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 154.

³⁴⁰ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 140.

³⁴¹ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 166.

³⁴² Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf*: p. 138.

³⁴³ For foreign contact with Ibn-i Reşid, see Buzpınar, “Opposition to the Ottoman Caliphate”.

³⁴⁴ 14 Mayıs 1299: BOA, Y.PRK.UM 5/100.

by the Ottoman authorities. He concluded that if Ibn-i Reşid's relations with Britain would continue, Ottoman rule in the Gulf would be eliminated.³⁴⁵

Ibn-i Reşid was also considered to have a potential of rising up against the Ottoman state. Although he had not risen up until the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, he was always under suspicion as a potential rebel. The complaints and accusations with respect to Ibn-i Reşid began with the rule of Abdülhamid II. The governor of Hejaz and the Emir of Mecca complained about Ibn-i Reşid in their common report submitted to the *Sadaret* in 1878. They stated that Ibn-i Reşid caused disorder in the region by changing his loyal attitude toward the Ottoman state in the context of the Ottoman-Russian War. He did not pay his annual duty to the state while also encouraging Hayber and Qasim sheikhdoms not to pay their annual tribute as well. In addition, he provoked the head of Humeysdat tribe to rise up against the state. As such, he aimed to benefit from the disorder in the region. The governor and Emir pointed out that if Ibn-i Reşid was not suppressed before he consolidated his rule, new trouble, similar to the Wahhabi problem would emerge.³⁴⁶

Former Basra Mutasarrıf Mehmed Ali also warned the state with respect to Ibn-i Reşid in 1889. He claimed that although Ibn-i Reşid had not risen up against the state yet, he should be regarded as a potential troublemaker because of his previous activities and methods among tribes.³⁴⁷ Mehmed Ali pointed out that although Ibn-i Reşid did not have enough courage to rise up against the state, he would do so in a troubled time; thus he should be regarded as a political enemy of the state.³⁴⁸

Some actions of Ibn-i Reşid, which can be evaluated as "betrayal" also consolidated the Ottoman suspicions about him. For instance, Howarth, using British sources, reports that Ibn-i Reşid had killed an Ottoman commander because the commander refused to lead an attack on Ibn-i Saud. It was added that Ibn-i Reşid's bedouins turned against the Ottomans in mid of the battle, slaughtering them. Howarth claims that it was possible that the Ottoman soldiers were disliked by Ibn-i Reşid's soldiers as much as Ibn-i Saud's men. Howarth describes the situation as "anything could happen in Arabia, where loyalties, like the desert pastures, grew and

³⁴⁵ 1 Muharrem 1309: BOA, Y.PRK.AZJ 20/2.

³⁴⁶ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 135.

³⁴⁷ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 133.

³⁴⁸ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 140.

withered quickly”.³⁴⁹ Although this event was not verified by Ottoman sources, the Ottomans complained about Ibn-i Reşid’s other actions. For instance, although the transportation of provisions was the responsibility of Ibn-i Reşid in the military operations in Necd, he did not do anything and he even plundered the provision sent by Medina to the troops in Necd. In addition, he sacked the tribes, which were under Ottoman rule, and their caravans.³⁵⁰ It was clear that all of these actions contributed to the disorder in the region.

This environment of mistrust stemming from Ibn-i Reşid’s relations with Britain and his role in the provocation of tribes against the Ottoman state affected the perception of the Ottoman officials with regard to Ibn-i Reşid. They considered him as dangerous as Ibn-i Saud for Ottoman sovereignty.³⁵¹ As a result of this distrust, the Ottomans could not establish an effective resistance against the British threat through an alliance with Ibn-i Reşid and consolidating him in opposition to the British intervention. What is more, Ibn-i Reşid was even considered as a possible cause of the British intervention due to his close relations with Britain.

This distrust stemmed from the autonomy of Ibn-i Reşid. He was an “autonomous” tribal leader in the Gulf who had a different agenda based on the maintenance of his “autonomy” and promotion of his interests. Hence, a clash of interests between the Sublime Porte and Ibn-i Reşid was inevitable as long as Ibn-i Reşid was an autonomous ruler. For instance, Ibn-i Reşid wanted to incorporate Hasa under his jurisdiction while the Ottomans viewed it as an important base for Ottoman rule in the Gulf region. On the other hand, the Ottomans wanted to establish direct rule as much as possible in the interior of Arabia, including Necd, which was under the rule of Ibn-i Reşid.³⁵²

Though the Porte openly continued to support Ibn-i Reşid, it always evaluated other possibilities and maintained private contacts with his rivals.³⁵³ For instance, Abdülhamid II accepted the delegation of Ibn-i Reşid and respected them to a great extent. Yet, interestingly, he sent a jeweled green robe of honour and the top ranking Majidean (*Mecidi*) decoration to Ibn-i Saud on the eve of his acceptance of Ibn-i

³⁴⁹ Howarth, *The Desert King*: p. 64.

³⁵⁰ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa’da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 178.

³⁵¹ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa’da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 181.

³⁵² Al-Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*: p. 207.

³⁵³ Al-Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*: p. 207; Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf*: p. 206.

Reşid's representatives.³⁵⁴ In other words, the Ottomans might leave Ibn-i Reşid when their interests required, so he always had to consider this possibility of quitting the alliance and could not be unquestionably loyal to the Ottomans. In other words, the Ottomans were the 'unreliable ally' of Ibn-i Reşid. In fact, relations were reciprocal, so Ibn-i Reşid could not be a reliable Ottoman ally on this shifty ground.

In addition to different, and at times conflicting plans and interests of the Ottomans and Ibn-i Reşid, the Ottoman strategy towards Arabia, as a whole, affected the Ottoman attitude towards Ibn-i Reşid. According to this strategy, the Ottomans interpreted the rise of any single power, even a very loyal but autonomous power, might threaten its rule in the Gulf and eventually other Asian parts of the Empire such as Syria, Iraq and, particularly and more importantly, Hejaz because that autonomous power might not obey the state on a whim. The Ottomans believed that separate small tribes would not challenge its sovereignty in the region, but a greater-single unit could challenge Ottoman superiority in the context of the inexistence of the rivals. Therefore, Ottoman policy was based on the principle of 'divide and rule' in the Persian Gulf.

The rise of the Saudi-Wahhabi movement at the beginning of the 19th century was highly dramatic and depressive precedent for the Ottomans because the Wahhabis had reached Karbala and Hejaz, plundering and destroying the sacred sites of the Muslim world. Therefore, the Ottoman prestige in the Islamic world had been highly shaken by the rise of the Wahhabis in the early 19th century.³⁵⁵ The Ottoman strategy and historical experience in Arabia shaped the Ottoman policy towards Ibn-i Reşid, so the Ottomans did not want Ibn-i Reşid to strengthen his rule to the extent that the Saudis had done.³⁵⁶

The Ottomans, therefore, did not support Ibn-i Reşid excessively. The state always tried to keep his strength limited. For instance, when awarding a robe of honour to Ibn-i Reşid was discussed, the idea was rejected by prominent Ottoman statesmen, such as Said Paşa. They argued that being rewarded Ibn-i Reşid by the Sublime Porte without intermediaries such as the Governors of Hejaz or Sherif of

³⁵⁴ Akarlı, "Abdülhamid's Islamist Policy": p. 56.

³⁵⁵ Al-Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*: pp. 202-3, 209.

³⁵⁶ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 242.

Mecca would imply recognition of Ibn-i Reşid's might and interpreted as "the state was obliged to Ibn-i Reşid".³⁵⁷

Although the Ottomans considered Ibn-i Reşid as a check against Ibn-i Saud in the region at the beginning of the emergence of Reşidi power in the mid 19th century, Ibn-i Reşid began to be accepted as a potential threat because of the elimination of the Saudis in the late decades of the 19th century and the ascendance of Muhammed Ibn-i Reşid who had ambitions for a broader region.³⁵⁸ The Ottomans began to feel threatened by the supremacy of Ibn-i Reşid, whose aim of dominating all of Arabia was reflected in the reports sent to Yıldız Palace: Ibn-i Reşid was depicted as a man having a dream of holding all of Necd under his rule.³⁵⁹ The Ottomans were convinced that Ibn-i Reşid's ambition of being dominant had led to troubles in the region that might make the region vulnerable to foreign intervention. In the report sent to Yıldız Palace by Abdullah El- Muğire in 1890, it was stated that the Sheikh of Jabal Shammar, Ibn-i Reşid, had an aim of getting all of the heads of the tribes in Necd under his influence. However, these tribal leaders refused his offer. Thus, he attacked one of these refusing tribes, El-Salih and plundered the goods of this tribe in the sacred month of Ramadan. Abdullah El-Muğire charged that Ibn-i Reşid's ambition of dominating Necd and his eventual attacks upon the tribes had negative influences over the people in such a current case of foreign intervention to the region.³⁶⁰

In this framework, the Ottomans found the capture of Riyadh by Ibn-i Reşid in 1891, and the total defeat of the Saudis as unsuitable for their interests in the Persian Gulf. In this regard, the elimination of the Saudis from the region and the establishment of Reşidi hegemony in the region, which occurred in 1891 by the capture of Riyadh by Reşidis, was not in line with the Ottoman strategy. Ottomans found the extension and dominance of Reşidi rule to Palmyra (today in Jordan), Al Jauf to the north, and Teima and Kheibar to the west as harmful for its rule in the Gulf, in particular, and in Arabia, in general. The consolidation of Ibn-i Reşid's rule was also considered a threat to Hejaz because of the Ottoman strategic outlook explained in Chapter 2. For this reason, the Ottomans even proposed to help the

³⁵⁷ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 77.

³⁵⁸ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanli Hakimiyeti*: p. 135.

³⁵⁹ 1 Mayıs 1310: BOA, Y. PRK. ASK 98/43.

³⁶⁰ 30.Z.1307: BOA, Y. PRK. UM 17/144.

Saudis in re-taking Riyadh, and gave a monthly pension to the exiled Saudi family in Kuwait.³⁶¹

Similarly, the Ottomans evaluated the 1901 recapture of Riyadh by the Saudis with the same perspective. The Ottomans thought that the local rivals would continue to recognize the sovereignty and supremacy of the Ottomans as long as the power was divided among them. As a result, the Ottomans rejected Ibn-i Reşid's request for assistance in recapturing Riyadh from the hands of the Saudis. In this framework, though Ibn-i Reşid was much disrupted with the rise of Saudis in the Persian Gulf, the Ottomans considered that the Saudis would be a balance against the possible dominance of Ibn-i Reşid in the region,³⁶² for Ibn-i Saud was considered by the Ottomans, to be a tool for limiting Ibn-i Reşid.³⁶³ As a result of the lack of the Ottoman assistance, Ibn-i Reşid could not attack the Saudis after the fall of Riyadh.³⁶⁴ The Ottomans recognized Ibn-i Saud and Ibn-i Reşid as the Kaymakams of Riyadh and Shammar, respectively. The Ottomans aimed at balancing Ibn-i Reşid and Ibn-i Saud in the region by taking such measures.³⁶⁵ In fact, the Ottomans were alarmed and anxious by the continued, extended and uncontrolled successes of Ibn-i Saud in the Persian Gulf after his recapture of Riyadh in 1901. The Ottomans were worried that the Saudis began to gain supremacy in the Gulf as Ibn-i Reşid previously had done. Thus, their policy of "divide and rule" was in danger.³⁶⁶

It has been argued that the Ottomans tried to establish a kind of balance of power between Ibn-i Reşid and Ibn-i Saud in order to maintain status-quo. If the political atmosphere turned out to be more advantageous for one of the parties, the Ottoman government would immediately interfere through military aid and subsidies to balance the situation for the continuation of the rivalry between the two powers which was much more beneficial for Ottoman rule in the region.³⁶⁷

³⁶¹ Almana, *Arabia Unified*: p. 30; Al-Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*: pp. 61, 207; Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 31; Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 146.

³⁶² Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 49; Safran, *Saudi Arabia*: p. 33.

³⁶³ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 154.

³⁶⁴ Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: p. 21.

³⁶⁵ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 243.

³⁶⁶ Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 55.

³⁶⁷ Al-Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*: p. 209.

To sum up, the Ottomans did not trust Ibn-i Reşid to establish an influential alliance with it against British backed local tribes. It was predicted that he might ally with Britain when his interest would be maximized. This assumption was based on the reports of the Ottoman bureaucrats and local leaders who accused Ibn-i Reşid of betraying the Ottomans in several events. Last but not least, the Ottoman administration in the Gulf tried to impede the dominance of any single power because of its possible threat to Ottoman rule in the Gulf and other parts of Arabia, especially Hejaz.

5.2. Casim El-Sani

In addition to the dominance of a tribe in the region, the tribal leaders disturbed the Ottomans because they might easily prefer to ally with Britain in order to maintain their autonomy and maximize their benefits. It is obvious that this policy based on playing two powers off each other opened the region to foreign intervention. It can be claimed that the policy of local heads was based on attaining the protection of Britain while avoiding direct confrontation with the Ottomans. They used both powers against each other in maintaining their independence. Although they rose up against the Ottoman state, such as the case of up- rising led by Casim El-Sani, the head of Qatar, in 1893, they continued to be Kaymakams of the Porte, while also maintaining their contact with Britain as a counter balance to the Ottomans. Indeed, the autonomous actors in the Gulf sought to protect their autonomy through a balance between the Ottomans and British. In fact, the presence of the British and the Ottomans provided “an area of maneuver” for the local leaders, where they could play the two imperial powers off each other.³⁶⁸ Nonetheless, for the Ottomans, this ‘area of maneuver’, ‘balancing’ or ‘playing off’ by local leaders meant an invitation to British intervention.

Modern writers from the West such as Goldberg have appreciated this feature of the local leaders, stating that “[They] were tribal leaders in the desert” who were seen as highly alienated from the outside world, but they could manage to understand the intricacies of international politics. Therefore, they could use Britain and

³⁶⁸ Al-Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*: p. 221.

occasionally other Great Powers to balance the Ottomans.³⁶⁹ Along the same lines of thinking, a well-known traveler at the beginning of the 20th century, Philby, called them “student[s] of world politics”.³⁷⁰

One of the “students of world politics”, Casim El-Sani, is analyzed as a case study because he was achieved in setting the two imperial powers, the Ottomans and British, against each other. Zahlan claims that Casim El-Sani rose to a far more powerful position than the one he had inherited from his father through manipulating the two powers in the region and playing off each other.³⁷¹ Despite the fact that he was the head of a small sheikhdom, Casim El-Sani held the entire Qatari peninsula and made Qatar into one of the leading sheikhdoms in Gulf politics on the eve of World War I.³⁷²

Casim had a Janus-faced “balancing” policy. On the one hand, Casim claimed to the Ottomans that the British Consul in Bender Busehr offered British protection for Qatar after his rebellion, but he refused the offer because of his loyalty to the Ottoman state.³⁷³ On the other hand, he had, in reality, applied to Britain and wanted protection for Qatar.³⁷⁴ This section analyzes Casim El-Sani’s “balancing” policy of Casim El-Sani from two dimensions.

On the one hand, Casim realized that he could not obtain his independence from the Ottomans through military means, so he avoided military conflict as much as possible. In this framework, he acknowledged his loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan, accepted the Ottoman titles given to him, recognized Ottoman sovereignty and worked together with the Ottoman officials in Qatar such as the Deputy Kaymakam (*Kaymakam vekili*).³⁷⁵ In return, the Ottomans did not restrict Casim’s power. The Ottomans only tried to forestall Casim in signing a protection agreement with Britain. It is obvious that Casim manipulated and benefited from this Ottoman anxiety.³⁷⁶ For instance, after the seizure of guns from a ship of pirates, he threatened

³⁶⁹ Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 174; Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*: p. 15.

³⁷⁰ Philby, *Arabia*: p. 157.

³⁷¹ Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*: p. 47.

³⁷² Kurşun, *The Ottomans in Qatar*: p. 162.

³⁷³ 11 Ağustos 1309: BOA, DH. MKT 117/42; Bostan, “The 1893 Uprising in Qatar”: p. 87.

³⁷⁴ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa’da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 163.

³⁷⁵ Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 40; Kurşun, *The Ottomans in Qatar*: p. 162.

³⁷⁶ Kurşun, *The Ottomans in Qatar*: p. 163.

the Ottoman government that the Qataris would turn to Britain if the arms were not given to Qataris.³⁷⁷ In fact, holding Ottoman titles gave him a certain prestige within his own tribe and in his relations with other tribes. Moreover, Casim extended the authority of his family throughout the peninsula of Qatar in the time of the Ottomans.³⁷⁸ Casim could receive support for actions that coincided with Ottoman goals as well, notably in problems with Britain and the sheikhdoms under British protection.³⁷⁹ For instance, accepting Ottoman suzerainty and being Ottoman Kaymakam of Qatar provided for Casim El-Sani with power against El- Khalifa dynasty of Bahrain who had originally occupied Qatar and continued to claim it.³⁸⁰

Casim also realized the undefiable supremacy of Britain in the Persian Gulf. Other Great Powers, including the Ottomans, withdrew when they encountered Britain in the Persian Gulf, so he tried to use Britain as a counter balance against the Ottomans. He played Britain against the Ottomans because Britain considered the Ottoman intervention into the Gulf as a menace to its interests in the Gulf and India.³⁸¹

The rebellion led by Casim El-Sani in 1893 reflects how relations of an autonomous sheikh with Britain and the Ottoman Empire were realized.³⁸² Ottoman officials in the region had doubts with regard to Casim before his uprising against the Ottoman state. For instance, they understood that he incited intertribal clashes in the region,³⁸³ all while plundering the caravans in the Ottoman territories.³⁸⁴ It was also known by the Ottoman authorities that Casim was frustrated by the most recent Ottoman regulations that strengthened the Ottoman administration in Qatar.³⁸⁵ When the Governor of Basra, Hafız Mehmed Paşa, visited Qatar in 1893, Casim left the town and did not visit the governor on the pretext of being ill. Hence, he

³⁷⁷ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: pp. 145, 172.

³⁷⁸ Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*: p. 47.

³⁷⁹ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: pp. 146, 149.

³⁸⁰ Abu Hakima, *Kuwait*: p. 86; Peck, *Historical Dictionary*: p. 104.

³⁸¹ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 78; Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: pp. 40, 166; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*: p. 8; Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*: p. 46.

³⁸² For a specific study analyzing the uprising of Casim, see Bostan, "The 1893 Uprising in Qatar".

³⁸³ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 136.

³⁸⁴ Bostan, "The 1893 Uprising in Qatar": p. 83.

³⁸⁵ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 87.

demonstrated his obvious disrespect for the authority of Hafız Mehmed Paşa.³⁸⁶ The governor decided to punish Casim El-Sani after waiting for a month. However, Casim resisted with his people. In the end, the Ottomans were defeated and took shelter in the castle of Qatar. Indeed, this was a great humiliation for the Ottomans to have been defeated by a local tribe.³⁸⁷

Casim's rebellion reflects all dimensions of the Ottoman perception with respect to the relationship between Britain and local leaders on the issue of the penetration of Britain to the Gulf region. The Ottomans believed that Casim El-Sani rose up due to the assistance and provocation of Britain.³⁸⁸ In report written by Müşir Said Paşa, he noted that Casim had smuggled guns and ammunitions from Bahrain, which was under the protection of Britain. Ottoman officials did not doubt that when a British ship came to Qatar, the officials on it talked with and gave gifts to Casim.³⁸⁹ Two years after Casim's rebellion, the Ottomans lost their trust in him. Serasker Rıza Paşa stated in 1895 that Casim was exposed to harm because of the bombardment of Zibare by Britain in 1893. He said that if his deficit owing to this bombardment would not be compensated by the Ottoman government, he would plan to rebel against the Ottoman state with the help of Britain.³⁹⁰

In addition to the Ottoman loss of faith in Casim El-Sani, the uprising led by Casim El-Sani and the subsequent defeat of the Ottomans had significant effects for Ottoman rule in Qatar, in particular, and the Gulf, in general. Firstly, Casim secured *de-facto* independence of Qatar in spite of *de-jure* Ottoman rule until World War I.³⁹¹ Secondly, other leaders in the Gulf realized that they also could challenge and defeat the Ottomans. The Ottomans were forced to grant a full pardon to Casim because of their incapacity to punish him. In this regard, the ambitions of other local leaders for autonomy increased to a great extent.³⁹²

³⁸⁶ Peck, *Historical Dictionary*: p. 104.

³⁸⁷ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 136; Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*: p. 54.

³⁸⁸ 30 Mart 1309: BOA, Y.PRK. ASK. 89/67.

³⁸⁹ 6 Mayıs 1309: BOA, Y. PRK. SRN 3/89.

³⁹⁰ 21 Teşrin-i Evvel 1311: BOA, Y. PRK. ASK. 107/85.

³⁹¹ Peck, *Historical Dictionary*: p. 104.

³⁹² Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 90; Bostan, "The 1893 Uprising in Qatar": p. 87; Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*: p. 54.

Consequently, Casim emerged as an autonomous leader who could use international powers, such as the British and the Ottomans, against each other. The presence of both the Ottomans and Britain provided an area of maneuver and autonomy for him.³⁹³ Therefore, the interaction among Casim, the Ottomans and the British was the main component in the emergence of modern Qatar.³⁹⁴ Although Casim could maintain his autonomy against the Ottomans and other local entities such as Bahrain, the consequence of this policy based on balancing and manipulating was highly detrimental for the Ottomans, for it resulted in leaving the Persian Gulf coasts open to British intervention.

Pragmatic diplomacy exercised by the local sheikhs in their relations with the Ottomans and the British ensured durable dynastic states, which have been maintained until today.³⁹⁵ In conclusion, autonomy of the local leaders had significant results for the Ottomans in the Persian Gulf, for autonomy of the local leaders firstly impeded Ottoman power against the British threat because the leaders' autonomy was reinforced by British support. In fact, Britain supported local leaders in undermining Ottoman rule. In the end, the local leaders became the protégés of Britain due to this support. Secondly, the local leaders were independent subjects whose dominance could have negative effects on Ottoman rule in the Gulf and Arabia, so the Ottomans tried to prevent the local sheikhs from consolidating any form of substantial power.

³⁹³ Kurşun, *The Ottomans in Qatar*: p. 161.

³⁹⁴ Yapp, "The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries": p. 69.

³⁹⁵ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: pp. ix, 172.

CHAPTER 6

OTTOMAN RESPONSES to the BRITISH THREAT

In this chapter, the Ottoman responses to the British threat in the Persian Gulf will be analyzed. The British threat shaped the Ottoman politics and reforms for the Gulf³⁹⁶ since it was believed in that "... problems were the fault of foreigners (Britain)...".³⁹⁷ The Ottomans were aware that the consolidation of the Ottoman administration in the region was an indispensable requirement for the prevention of British intervention. Thus, impeding British intervention was the main motivation in making Ottoman reforms in the region. The priority of the Ottomans led some scholars to assert that if the Ottoman government had devised and implemented reforms that made the lives of the local people better rather than obsessed with the "self-assumed" British threat, the region likely would be supportive of the Ottoman state and eventually British intervention would be inhibited automatically.³⁹⁸ Nonetheless, Ottoman statesmen thought that if they would inhibit the British penetration, they would consolidate Ottoman rule and bind the region to the centre. In this regard, making reforms for people and generating responses to prevent British encroachment were not two separate and contradictory goals, but were highly complementary. It is seen from below reports of the Ottoman bureaucrats that the Ottomans suggested reforms in order to hinder the British threat, to gain the loyalty and affection of the local people and to eliminate the traditional political structure ensuring the maintenance of the autonomy of the sheikhdoms that impeded the establishment of a sound Ottoman state administration. Considering all of these objectives and the conditions of the region, the Ottoman bureaucrats believed that if necessary measures would not be taken, such as reform of the administration and consolidation of the navy and army in the Persian Gulf, the region would have slipped from Ottoman control in a few years.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 6.

³⁹⁷ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 85.

³⁹⁸ For this perspective, see Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*.

³⁹⁹ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 136; Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*: p. 55.

This chapter, firstly examines the general reform suggestions related to various issues. Such general recommendations provide a general perspective with regard to what the Ottomans could do in order to prevent the British intervention. It can be seen from these reform proposals what the Ottomans wanted to do, and what difficulties they encountered. Rather than offering specific reports recommending the requirement of reform in a particular field such as administration or navy, some general reports gave general guidance about how to hold the Persian Gulf. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to begin analyzing general recommendations with regard to the possible reforms in the Persian Gulf. The dilemma of preferring “reform” (*hüsn-ü tedabir and muamele-i hasene*) or “power” (*kuvvet*) in order to hold the region will be touched upon in this context. It is seen that the Ottomans mostly preferred “reform” to consolidate its rule in the region. Secondly, the Ottoman areas of reform, such as administrative regulations and dispatching ships, will be analyzed in the following parts. The Ottomans faced a number of difficulties in their struggle for reform, such as the lack of a budget for ships. More importantly, Ottomans occasionally were forced to suspend modern administrative reforms because of the opposition of the autonomous leaders who were backed by Britain.

6.1. General Recommendations

Ottoman bureaucrats were highly engaged in seeking measures to contain the British threat and to reinforce the Ottoman existence in the region. In this framework, a commission was also founded, made up of members of the Council of Ministers, to provide recommendations for the bureaucrats in the Gulf, particularly for the Basra Governor; Hidayet Paşa, and the Necd Mutasarrıf, Akif Paşa. The commission prepared a report sent in 1889 to Basra and Necd. The report highlighted the strategic importance of the region and the British encroachments to the region. It was reported that the British Consul in Basra claimed sovereignty rights of Britain over Bahrain. Furthermore, it was emphasized that Britain would take the littoral of Necd under its control if required measures were not taken. It was pointed out that keeping Necd and Hasa as parts of the Ottoman Empire would be achieved by taking necessary measures. These necessary proposed measures are discussed below.⁴⁰⁰

⁴⁰⁰ 5 Şaban 1306: BOA, DH.MKT 1613/19.

First of all, the local sheikhs who impeded the establishment of a direct administration in the Gulf presented as ‘tyranny’ of the region. The commission reported that the events revealed that the local sheikhs in Necd and Hasa had oppressed local people due to the inadequacy and inefficiency of the Ottoman administration in Necd. In this context, it was proposed that an effective administration should be established in the region in order to obstruct the oppression made by the sheikhs. Indeed, this move was thought to have the effect of strengthening the ties of the local people with the state.⁴⁰¹

The second recommendation of the commission was the outcome of the Ottoman view with regard to the effectiveness of the British ships in the Persian Gulf. It was believed that the British claims over Bahrain stemmed from the role of Britain in the protection of the littoral of Bahrain by its ships; thus the Bahrain Sheikh was pro-Britain. Therefore, it was advised to take measures including dispatching Ottoman ships to the littoral of the Gulf, which would facilitate taking Bahrain under the rule of the Ottomans.⁴⁰² Thirdly, the security of people in the Gulf was emphasized because security would strengthen the allegiance of the people to the Caliphate. Therefore, security and order would be provided and consolidated by sending troops to the strategic and vulnerable regions. It was added that the activities of the gangs should be prevented.⁴⁰³ Lastly, it was recommended not to use force in attempting to gain control over Bahrain. It was reiterated that the Sheikh of Bahrain was pro-Britain and that Bahrain was protected by British ships. As a result, replacing the Bahraini Sheikh with another member of the family was found difficult. Furthermore, it was emphasized that the Ottoman state could not allow its relations with Britain to deteriorate because of Bahrain. As a result, the settlement of Bahrain Question should be based on the parameters of diplomacy.⁴⁰⁴

One year after the above report of the Council of Ministers, a new report was prepared by the commission in the Ministry of the Internal Affairs and sent to the Basra Vilayet and the Commission of the Selection of the State Officials (*İntihab-ı Memureyn Komisyonu*). The report, full of recommendations and analyses regarding the conditions of the Gulf region, placed an emphasis on the littoral of the Persian

⁴⁰¹ 5 Şaban 1306: BOA, DH.MKT 1613/19.

⁴⁰² 5 Şaban 1306: BOA, DH.MKT 1613/19.

⁴⁰³ 5 Şaban 1306: BOA, DH.MKT 1613/19.

⁴⁰⁴ 5 Şaban 1306: BOA, DH.MKT 1613/19.

Gulf and Necd, underscoring that the consolidation of the Ottoman administration and promotion of the contact between the local people and the Ottoman state had gained importance to a great extent. To achieve all of the report's recommendations, a commission was founded with an aim of determining required reforms in Necd. For instance, it was decided to appoint directorates to Beheyr, Adid and Zibare with a 750 *kuruş* salary. Moreover, it was recommended to appoint a Deputy Kaymakam (*Kaymakam Muavini*) to Qatar. Officials who were familiar with the culture and language of the local people were thought to be suitable to consolidate the Ottoman presence in the Gulf. To assign a person knowing both Arabic and Turkish with 500 *kuruş* salary to the Directorate of the Official Documents (*Tahrirat Müdürlüğü*), and to assign an assistant to this post with 300 *kuruş* salary.⁴⁰⁵

In the report, the special conditions of the region were taken into account, and it was recommended to do away with the modern courts (*nizamiye mahkemeleri*) in Necd because of the lack of the consent of the local people with regard to it. It was advised to appoint a *naib*, a clerk (*katip*) and deputy clerk (*katip muavini*) to the only central liva and Katif for looking for the trials of the people. It was deemed appropriate to give permission to the regional commandership to dispatch troops when an event emerged until the telegraph line was extended to Necd. In other words, initiative was given to the local administration because of the special conditions of the region.⁴⁰⁶

The greater authority proposed for the local administration did not mean the commission proposed the withdrawal of the Ottoman central authority from the region. On the contrary, the issue of the demonstration of power was also given importance in the report. For instance, Britain conducting shooting practice (*atış talimi*) with its ships in the coast of the Persian Gulf. Therefore, it was suggested that the Ottomans also hold shooting exercises in the Gulf in order to demonstrate the power of the Ottoman state to the local people. It was also recommended that the Ottoman ships should follow pirates and other criminals in the sea. It was advised to construct a coal depot in Bahrain. The appointment of 500 camel riders and two divisions of troops was offered to hinder disorder and provide peace and security in the places under the Ottoman control in the Gulf region. The appointment of

⁴⁰⁵ 1 Şubat 1305: BOA, DH. MKT. 1700/33.

⁴⁰⁶ 1 Şubat 1305: BOA, DH. MKT. 1700/33.

directorates together with adequate number of troops to Zibare and Adid with 1000 and 750 *kuruş* salaries, respectively, was advised as well.⁴⁰⁷

The commission recommended that the Ottoman presence should not be limited only to the littoral of the Gulf but the establishment of a bureaucratic administration, deployment of troops and military reforms were deemed necessary for Necd. The appointment of a harbor master (*liman reisi*) knowing Arabic to the port of Qatar to inspect passengers at the port was advised. It was further suggested that a Deputy Kaymakam (*kaymakam muavini*) be appointed to Qatar who knew Arabic and understood the culture of the local people. The assignment of 250 *kuruş* for the members of the Qatari administration council was advised due to the poverty of the people. It was advised to appoint 50 troops to A'la for security and to build a castle. It was also recommended that the Beryeman castle, which had been covered by sand, should be cleaned and repaired; and then the 50 troops should be garrisoned there. The addition of two divisions consisting of 98 troops to be posted to Qatar was suggested as well.⁴⁰⁸

The commission calculated the costs and benefits of such a great venture. Although these recommendations required a lot of financial resources, these measures would hinder foreign intervention into the littoral of Bahrain, Necd and Hasa. In other words, the benefits outweighed the costs. It was advised that these proposals should be evaluated carefully by the Basra Province (*Vilayet*) and the Commission of the Selection of the State Officials (*İntihab-i Memureyn Komisyonu*).⁴⁰⁹

The Ottomans genuinely believed that it was possible to place the large and strategic Necd Sancak, stretching from Kuwait to Qatar, under Ottoman rule if necessary measures would be taken. The general perspective regarding the holding of the Gulf was highlighted in a report prepared by the ministry of foreign affairs in 1905. It was stated that the Gulf could be preserved, firstly, by power (*kuvvet*) and secondly by fine measures (*hüsn-ü tedabir*). Necd was far away from Basra by land, but it was close to it by sea. However, the communication with the center of Basra province (*Vilayet*) remained deficient due to the insufficiency of Ottoman ships in

⁴⁰⁷ 1 Şubat 1305: BOA, DH. MKT. 1700/33.

⁴⁰⁸ 1 Şubat 1305: BOA, DH. MKT. 1700/33.

⁴⁰⁹ 1 Şubat 1305: BOA, DH. MKT. 1700/33.

Basra. Therefore, necessary and expedient responses could not be provided by the Ottomans in spite of British efficient and rapid actions. In this environment, it was advised to protect a land route stretching from Basra to Necd, which would bypass Kuwait. This would help secure the loyalty of local sheikhs in Necd thanks to the contact between them and the Ottoman state.⁴¹⁰

The proposal with regard to the measures continued, suggesting the establishment of an effective administration including the officials who would explain to the local people the merits of justice and development (“*esas-ı adalet ve terekkiyatın fezaidini halka anlatabilecek icraata muktedirin memurlardan güzel bir idare teşkili*”). Secondly, it was proposed that this effective administration would not levy people with heavy taxes, and would not rule by any system other than the classical rule of Islamic jurisprudence (*Şeriat*). Thirdly, in spite of the importance of a land way from Basra to Necd, it was advised to send an Ottoman ship to Basra that would carry passengers and goods to the ports of the Persian Gulf, including those parts which were not under Ottoman rule. Fourthly, it was advised to send small but efficient gunboats to provide security in the Gulf coast. Fifthly, it was advised to restore the Basra shipyard in order to produce and repair ships for the Ottomans in the Gulf.⁴¹¹ These general recommendations covered a wide range of issues from security to the prosperity of the people, impressing the people by propaganda to hinder the tyranny of local leaders and dispatch ships. However, the means to realize these recommendations can not be determined in these reports. It is seen that “reform” (*hüsn-ü tedabir and muamele-i hasene*) and “power” (*kuvvet*) were proposed to achieve these reform recommendations. However, there was not any agreement among the Ottoman statesmen on the preference of using either of them.

In general, reform referred to ‘reconciliation with local people and leaders’, ‘regulations made for making lives of people better’ and ‘making regulations to amend the Ottoman disabilities such as lack of the Ottoman ships’; on the other hand “power” refers to “military operations” and other coercive methods such as sanctions that prompted people to act in the line with Ottoman interests. Both reform and power were proposed by the Ottoman bureaucrats; the Ottomans applied one or both

⁴¹⁰ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR. SYS 104/10.

⁴¹¹ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR. SYS 104/10.

which so as to ensure maximum benefit, influence and expediency for the Ottoman government.

The Ottomans mostly preferred “reform” in their management of the Gulf because Ottomans often considered its shortcomings as the reason for the British threat to the region. For instance, as analyzed in the Chapter 2, the Ottomans accepted misgovernment of the Ottoman administration in the Gulf as the reason for close relations between local leaders and Britain. The same perspective was valid in evaluating the lack of Ottoman ships and the eventual inability to prevent the encroachment of British ships. As a result, this perception, considering it as responsible for thwarting the British threat, the Ottomans gave priority to making reforms to amend its weaknesses, such as lack of ships and misgovernment.

In addition, reform (reconciliation with people) was given priority owing to the requirements of the region, such as vastness and so much population. In Sadun’s report, it was claimed that experience showed using reconciliation rather than military power had been expedient in the Persian Gulf because the peninsula was large and the population was high; hence many troops were needed to control all points of the region, but the budget was insufficient to feed a lot of soldiers in the region.⁴¹² Therefore, it was noted that only reconciliation with the local leaders would provide influential Ottoman rule in the Gulf.

The prosperity and security of the people were deemed the primary requirement for achieving consolidation of the Ottoman state in the Gulf, so making “reforms” was emphasized. Sadun wrote that the consolidation of the influence of the Caliphate (Ottoman government) would be possible if the people of the Persian Gulf would live in prosperity and security. What is more, he suggested that the Ottoman Empire would gain prestige in the eyes of the European states by improving the life standards of the people, thus securing its presence in the Gulf.⁴¹³ The need for peace and security was affirmed by the Commission of the Council of Ministers’ report. It was stated that the allegiance and attachment of the people to the Caliphate would be ensured by the peace and tranquility of the region. In this respect, it was suggested to

⁴¹² 14 Mayıs 1299: BOA, Y. PRK. UM 5/100.

⁴¹³ 14 Mayıs 1299: BOA, Y. PRK. UM 5/100.

dispatch officials and troops with the view of suppressing gangs disturbing the local people.⁴¹⁴

In spite of these proposals for reform, there were also some Ottoman bureaucrats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who claimed that the Ottomans could prevent British penetration through using “power”. For instance, it was considered possible to hold Necd under the rule of Ibn-i Reşid and Ibn-i Saud. In this view, the better and most expedient way of holding this region was “power”, it was represented as the first and most expedient way, and “reforms” (*hüsn-ü tedabir*) was offered as the second preference

*“Kuveyt’ten Katar’a kadar olan ve Ibn-i Reşid ve Ebu’s Suud idarelerindeki kıtaat-ı cesmiye-i dahiliye’nin sahilini teşkil eden bu cesim ve mühim sancağın idare-i devlette muhafazasını temin mülhem ve mümkün olduğu mülahaza edilmektedir. Bunun esbab-ı muhafazasına gelince vareste-i arz olmadığı üzere memalik-i baide’nin mahfuziyyeti ez-cümle kuvvet ile derece-i saniye’de hüsn-ü tedabir ile olup...”*⁴¹⁵

A similar approach proposing “using power” to hold the region was seen evident evaluating the rise of Ibn-i Reşid. The commission examining his actions in the region asserted that bedouin society could be taken under the centralist rule by launching a military operation because this society did not understand anything other than “power” (*kuvvet*).⁴¹⁶ Nonetheless, Abdülhamid II ultimately preferred reform over power.⁴¹⁷

However, some Ottoman bureaucrats had doubts about using only “reform” in the suppression of rebellions, which might imply the weakness of the Ottoman state. Therefore, using “military power” was advised along with using “advise”. The Chief of the General Staff (*Serasker*) Rıza Paşa reported in 1893 that if the Nakib-ul Eşraf went to Qatar alone to advise Casim El-Sani to end his rebellion in 1893, this would imply the impotence of the Ottoman state in the suppression of this rebellion. Therefore, he offered to send the troops with an aim of showing the strength of the

⁴¹⁴ 5 Şaban 1306: BOA, DH. MKT 1613/19.

⁴¹⁵ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR. SYS 104/10.

⁴¹⁶ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa’da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 146.

⁴¹⁷ Kurşun, *Necid ve Ahsa’da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*: p. 148.

Ottoman army to Britain, which had “harmful” objectives with respect to this region. Furthermore, showing the tribes that the Ottoman state could suppress such an uprising with military power could bolster the Ottoman influence in the region. He recommended that if it was decided to send the Nakib-ul Eşraf to Casim El-Sani to advise him, he must go with these troops. Otherwise, the state might imply a sense of weakness to Casim, Britain and other local sheikhs.⁴¹⁸ Thus, the suggestion of using “power” was related with showing the strength of the Ottomans and bedouinness of the people in the region.

Preferring the use of “reform” or “power” was not a result of confusion or ambiguity; the Ottomans used whichever was more expedient and efficient. The guiding principle behind this policy was to maintain maximum control over the local population and its leaders at a minimum cost.⁴¹⁹ Although using power was suggested and applied occasionally, the Ottomans mostly opted for “reform” in the region whereby the Ottomans could not establish direct control, and the local leaders continued to be autonomous. Ottomans believed that “while direct rule was imposed by force, it could be maintained by persuasion”.⁴²⁰ The preference for reform was seen in particular fields, such as in administrative reforms and the dispatching of ships in which specific measures were proposed to prevent foreign intervention and to consolidate Ottoman rule. All of the fields to be analyzed below reveal that the Ottomans considered their weakness in particular fields as the main reason of foreign intervention in the Gulf and the weakness of the Ottoman state. Therefore, reform in these areas was offered in order to consolidate the allegiance of people to the Ottoman state. It was believed that if the state would serve people, the people would be loyal to the state. In the end, the consolidation of the Ottoman presence in the Gulf would eventually avert the British threat to the Persian Gulf.

6.2. Administrative Reforms and Ships

The most prominent areas of “reform” were the establishment of an administrative structure in the Persian Gulf and the dispatch of the Ottoman ships to

⁴¹⁸ 30 Mart 1309: BOA, Y. MTV 76/133.

⁴¹⁹ Al-Rasheed, *The Politics in an Arabian Oasis*: p. 201.

⁴²⁰ Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*: p. 55.

avert British ships. Some authors, such as Anscombe, claim that the Ottomans ignored the establishment of an administrative structure in the Gulf while struggling with Britain. The argument goes as such if the Ottomans had given priority to establishing an administrative structure and making reforms, the Gulf already would have been protected from British intervention in a more efficient way.⁴²¹ Yet this view does not do justice to the Ottomans, as there was an Ottoman administration in the Gulf, and both İstanbul and the local government in the Gulf developed bureaucratic reform projects to consolidate this administrative structure. Ottoman statesmen believed that a sound administrative structure would firstly provide an effective resistance mechanism against British intervention, and, secondly, ensure the loyalty of people in exchange for security, stability and prosperity.

The Ottoman bureaucratic structure worked according to the conditions of the region, and Ottoman central government sought to increase its existence there. For instance, in 1900, it decided to appoint a Deputy Kaymakam (*Kaymakam Muavini*) to Qatar Kaymakam of Sheikh Casim El-Sani. The Deputy Kaymakam was the actual representative of the central government while the Kaymakam, who was the sheikh of the tribe, held this title symbolically. Apart from this, some members to the Council of Administrators (*İdare Meclisi*) were appointed and they were given monthly 250 *kuruş*.⁴²² One year later, the Ottoman central government appointed new bureaucrats to various posts. For instance, Mehmed Bey was appointed to the Deputy Kaymakamlık, Abdulgafur Bey was appointed to Directorate of the Official Documents (*Tahrirat Müdürlüğü*), Vafi Efendi was appointed to Deputy Directorate of the Official Documents (*Tahrirat Müdürlüğü Vekilliği*) in Qatar, Asaf Efendi was appointed to the newly established Directorate of Zibare and Halef Efendi was appointed to, newly established, Directorate of Adid. It was stated that the Deputy Kaymakam of Qatar would take 2,000 *kuruş* salary, the Tahrirat Müdür of Qatar would take 500 *kuruş*, the Deputy of him would take 300 *kuruş*, the Müdür of Zibare would take 1,000 *kuruş* and the Müdür of Adid would earn 750 *kuruş*.⁴²³

Regulations and orders sent by İstanbul with regard to salaries and promotion, punishment and rewards of the Ottoman officials in the Gulf indicated that Ottoman

⁴²¹ See Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*. The book depended on this assertion.

⁴²² 25 Mart 1306: BOA, DH. MKT 1722/28.

⁴²³ 5 Haziran 1307: BOA, DH. MKT 1842/88.

administration was present.⁴²⁴ It was directed from Istanbul that an official would not be given his salary if he left his post without the permission of its seniors according to the salary regulation (*Maaşat Kararnamesi*). In this regard, Süleyman Efendi, Deputy Kaymakam in Qatar, would not get his salary because he left his post without permission.⁴²⁵ In addition to the punishments, a number of rewards and promotions were given to some officials in the region. For instance, Deputy Kaymakam in Qatar, Mehmed Emin Efendi, and a member of the Qatif administration council were rewarded due to their excellent services to the state on 8 December 1902.⁴²⁶

It is essential to note that the Ottoman administrative existence in the region was recognized by the local people. For instance, in 1896, the people of Qatar sent a petition to the Council of Ministers with regard to insecurity for pearl diving, which was the most important business at that time, in the Persian Gulf. The people stated that Britain had sunk the local people's ships used for pearl diving after the Zibare incident. Hence, they no longer possessed ships or security for pearl diving.⁴²⁷ This event indicated that the people in the region considered the Ottoman Empire as a viable protector in many ways.

However, the Ottoman presence in the region was not adequate to meet the needs there. These deficiencies in the apparatus of the central government were the result of the conditions of the region, which worked against the interests of the Ottoman state; therefore, the Ottomans strove to improve the Ottoman local administration. It is understood from these proposals that the main objectives and motivations for these suggestions were the thwarting of British intervention through the consolidation of the administrative structure and promotion of the loyalty of the local people.

In this framework, administrative reforms were offered as measures to counter British threats to the Persian Gulf. For instance, in 1905, the foundation of the *nahiyes* was proposed. It was suggested that the foundation of these *nahiyes* be instituted owing to imminent threats of Britain and its influential alliance with Mübarek El-Sabah.⁴²⁸ It was expected from the foundation of the *nahiyes* that the

⁴²⁴ 12 Kanun-u Sani 1309: BOA, DH. MKT 122/4.

⁴²⁵ 5 Ağustos 1315: BOA, DH. MKT 2235/81.

⁴²⁶ 19 Kanun-u Sani 1318: BOA, DH. MKT 645/69.

⁴²⁷ 19 Haziran 1312: BOA, DH. MKT 88/35.

⁴²⁸ 2 Rebi'ül Evvel 1323: BOA, MV 111/33.

Ottoman administrative structure would go to rural and nomad areas where Ottoman officials did not have a presence. The Ottoman administration desired to demonstrate itself in broader areas by founding new *nahiyes*.

Earlier in 1888, the consolidation of Ottoman rule and promotion of the loyalty of the people to the Ottoman state in the Persian Gulf was considered possible by appointing a capable Mutasarrıf familiar with the problems and the culture of the region. As has been discussed in the Chapter 3, the lack of loyalty from people in the Gulf was related with the incompetence and misgovernment of the Ottoman governors and officials. Hence, a “capable” governor was considered necessary for the establishment of an effective central administration in the region.⁴²⁹ Although the term of “capable” was not defined clearly in above report, there was an implication in the report sent to Yıldız Palace in 1888, that “capable” referred to familiarity with the language, culture and morality of the people along with possessing the characteristics of being just and fair.⁴³⁰

Some military reforms were also suggested along with administrative reforms to support them. Dispatching troops were necessary to suppress gangs and to provide order among the tribes. The motivation for the consolidation of Ottoman rule was also underlined in the military reform proposals. In the report sent to the Sadaret by the ministry of internal affairs in 1894, it was decided by the Council of Ministers that 500 camel riders and 200 horsemen should be employed in the littoral of the Persian Gulf in order to consolidate the Ottoman administration. Furthermore, 200 gendarmes were to be added to the Necd commandership. It was added that a castle should be constructed in A’la, and at the port.⁴³¹

The Ottomans did not limit their presence in the region to their military and civil officials. The Ottoman political elite, such as the governors in the provinces, thought that construction of government buildings and military facilities that would exhibit the grandeur of the Ottoman state were necessary to maintain and expand Ottoman rule in the provinces. Furthermore, the buildings had importance because they would indicate the effectiveness of the state and its role in undertaking the management of public affairs. Ottoman state elites believed that the construction of

⁴²⁹ 30 Kanun-u Sani 1304: BOA, DH. MKT 1593/108.

⁴³⁰ 20 Cemaziyelahir 1305: BOA, Y PRK TKM 11/62.

⁴³¹ 27 Eylül 1306: BOA, DH. MKT 1771/92.

buildings would have positive effects on the local economy because the construction would provide security for the market, and it would mobilize the productive factors which would create national wealth.⁴³²

Ottoman officials in the region perceived the lack of state buildings in the region to imply the non-existence of the Ottoman state. Therefore, British hopes for intervention increased. To counter such plans, it was required to show the presence of state represented by tangible buildings. Furthermore, it was considered that existing buildings seemed “ruined” in spite of the strategic importance of the region. This “ruined” image was found inappropriate for the “glory” of the Ottoman state so the construction of modern official buildings was suggested. Furthermore, new buildings were necessary for a more practical reason: the function of the government and bureaucracy.

In a document sent by the Basra Vilayet to the Interior Ministry, it was pointed out that although Zibare and Adid, which were nahiyes of Qatar, were important littoral points, they did not have monuments (buildings) representing civilization; “*eser-i umman*”. This outlook was seen to facilitate the intervention of Britain and the sheikhdoms under its auspices. As a result of these possible dangers, it was stated that both of the nahiyes needed a government building (*Hükümet Konağı*) to provide accommodations for administrators, directorates, and gendarmes. It was stated that permission for funding for these buildings should be given by the interior ministry because of the political and strategic significance of these two places despite the lack of funds for these buildings in the budget of the Vilayet.⁴³³

The glory of the state was given priority; therefore the old and poor appearance of the buildings in the region was seen inappropriate for this glory.⁴³⁴ In a report sent by the Province (Vilayet) of Basra to the Sadaret in 1893, it was reported that the building in Qatar used to accommodate Ottoman troops was old and made of dried mud. The construction of a new fort which would be in an appropriate place was proposed.⁴³⁵

⁴³² Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: pp. 189-91; Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*: p. 130; Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*: p. 60.

⁴³³ 12 Eylül 1325: BOA, DH. MUI 34/2.

⁴³⁴ 20 Haziran 1309: BOA, Y. MTV 113/79.

⁴³⁵ 6 Ağustos 1309: BOA, DH. MKT 117/42.

Another area of reform was dispatch of Ottoman ships to the Gulf coast. The Ottoman administrative elite tried to demonstrate the presence of the Ottoman bureaucratic apparatus in the region to signal Ottoman sovereignty over the region; however the absence of Ottoman ships in the area was underlined in the reports prepared by the Ottoman statesmen as a master deficiency in displaying Ottoman strength in the Gulf. Local leaders and bureaucrats in the region believed that the presence of Ottoman ships would prevent British penetration and strengthen the Ottoman influence in the region. This belief stemmed from the perception that held British ships to be the reason for British supremacy in the region.⁴³⁶ The Ottomans considered that the absence of Ottoman ships was the source of British threat in the Persian Gulf. Therefore, the presence of Ottoman ships, including gunboats, steamships and boats likely would hinder British penetration, make Ottoman rule more feasible in the region and consolidate the loyalty of the people.

In this context, the reports with regard to sending Ottoman ships to the Gulf coast turned around three interrelated issues: the existence and effectiveness of British ships and their intervention in the Gulf coasts; the absence of Ottoman ships and the Gulf's eventual openness to British intervention and several other problems such as pirates; dispatching Ottoman ships with the aim of preventing the British encroachment.

These points were either individually or collectively indicated in the reports of the Ottoman bureaucrats from the region. Nafiz Paşa, the Governor of Basra, gave detailed information about this issue in his report of 1887. Nafiz Paşa firstly noted the presence of British ships in the Gulf and their subsequent penetration into the region. He stated that Britain navigated numerous steamships for the aim of both commerce and impressing people. These ships presented serious threats for the region. If necessary and efficient measures would not be taken against the navigation of the British ships in the Gulf, the rule of Britain in the region would strengthen gradually, and the region would resemble the current position of Aden which was under the protection of Britain.⁴³⁷

Secondly, he explained the current situation of the Ottoman ships. In contrast to the great number of British ships, the Ottoman empire had only two corvettes; the

⁴³⁶ See Chapter 3.

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

“Zühaf” and “Merih”, which were not very effective due to their old age. Given the need for effective rule in the Gulf and the British intrusions into the region, there were not enough Ottoman ships to satisfy these expectations. Therefore, he believed that this situation opened the Gulf to British incursion. Furthermore, in spite of the natural tendency of the people towards the Ottoman Empire due to their religion, Ottomans could not endure this sympathy because of the inadequate number of the Ottoman ships. He stated that the people coming into the centre of province to visit him complained from this situation, and explained their relations with Britain in terms of the existence and efficiency of the British ships in the region.⁴³⁸

Thirdly, Nafiz Paşa pointed out that dispatching Ottoman ships to the Gulf would obstruct the British incursion along with providing a number of benefits. He considered that the Ottoman ships would ensure the Gulf’s security; thus the British accusations and eventual penetration based on this pretext with respect to the lack of security would end. Nafiz Paşa also indicated other ways how the Ottomans would benefit from dispatching the Ottoman ships in order to prevent British influence: First of all, the Ottomans would be informed about the events in both sea and land. Secondly, the affection of local people towards the Ottoman Empire would be strengthened. Thirdly, it would contribute to the consolidation of the Ottoman influence in a vulnerable region, Necd. Lastly, these steamships would make British intrusions in the Gulf ineffective. In addition to the political benefits of these steamships, in terms of hindering the British intervention, the ships would provide commercial benefits for the state, and the cost of these ships would be funded by transportation activities carried out by these ships. In concluding his report, Vali Nafiz Paşa proposed that two corvettes and two ships be sent to the Gulf instead of dispatching the old and useless “Zühaf” and “Merih”.⁴³⁹

Apparently Nafiz Paşa’s suggestions were not implemented, for in the report of the ministry of internal affairs, the same perspective and recommendations were repeated: Firstly, the existence of the British ships seriously threatened the Ottoman interests in the Persian Gulf. Secondly, this was possible due to the lack of Ottoman ships in the Gulf. Thirdly, it was suggested that a gunboat be sent to the coast of Necd in order to consolidate the influence of the Ottoman Empire in the region. This

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

⁴³⁹ 31 Teşrin-i Evvel 1303: BOA, A.MKT. MHM 496/10.

point was especially crucial, as the political importance of the Gulf coasts required the presence of Ottoman ships in the region.⁴⁴⁰ Along with the above two reports, other Ottoman bureaucrats shared the idea that effective usage of Ottoman ships in the region would hinder several means of British penetration into the region, such as gun smuggling. In addition, using the Ottoman ships would ensure the suppression of the disquiets, consolidation of the loyalty of people, establishment of postal service and pursuit of pirates.

As explained in Chapter 3, Ottomans complained about the gun smuggling done by Britain through the route of Bahrain, which was a hub for this type of trafficking. Gun trafficking was an obvious and tangible mean of this British intervention that resulted as a consequence of the Gulf coasts from Qatar to Aden being left and unprotected. It was suggested to send Ottoman ships to the littoral of Bahrain. The Ottomans had an idea that they would control foreign ships navigating in the seas of the Gulf due to their ships being dispatched to the Gulf.⁴⁴¹

The Commander of the Sixth Army, Nusret Paşa stressed the lack of Ottoman ships in the Persian Gulf as a major drawback as well. In this framework, the guarantee of order was surrendered to British ships and trade to its companies as a result of the Ottoman incapacity to maintain merchant steamers and sufficient warships in the area. Hence, he proposed that regular Ottoman naval patrols must be instituted along the shores of the Gulf below Basra.⁴⁴²

Ottoman statesmen expected that the Ottoman ships would hinder the British threat to Ottoman interests in the Persian Gulf. Besides, the allegiance of the people to the state would be strengthened by these ships.⁴⁴³ The Commission of the Council of Ministers suggested the navigation of the ships at least once a month. It also offered the assistance of the ships in pursuing the pirates. The navigation of postal ships was also recommended.⁴⁴⁴ Nusret Paşa reported that if five or six ships were sent to Basra in addition to an adequate number of troops and equipment, the emerging conflict would be overcome. He offered this in wake of Casim El-Sani's

⁴⁴⁰ 29 Kanun-u Evvel 1314: BOA, DH. MKT 2158/49.

⁴⁴¹ 10 Mayıs 1308: BOA, DH. MKT 1952/23; 18 Teşrin-i Evvel 1309: BOA, DH. MKT 160/48.

⁴⁴² Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 135.

⁴⁴³ 6 Ağustos 1309: BOA, DH. MKT 117/42.

⁴⁴⁴ 1 Şubat 1305: BOA, DH. MKT 1700/33.

uprising in 1893, and the subsequent defeat of the Governor of Basra in Qatar.⁴⁴⁵ In the report of the Chief of General Staff in 1895, it was reported that Casim had the intention of re-launching an insurrection so a ship should be sent to the littoral of Need with an aim of deterring him.⁴⁴⁶

In addition to above mentioned functions and benefits of the navigation of the Ottoman ships in the Gulf, a much more fundamental function of this navigation was also underlined by an Ottoman intellectual, though he was far from Basra, Osman Hamdi Bey. He believed in that the navigation of the Ottoman ships and keeping the Ottoman flag flying along the coast of Basra would be essential for declaring the survival of the Ottomans along while displaying the Turkish and Muslim flag to all nations.⁴⁴⁷

In spite of the explicit Ottoman resoluteness to assign ships to the Gulf, some fundamental problems such as lack of funds and an inadequate number of ships obstructed the realization of this objective. The Navy Ministry indicated several times that there were no ships available, so the Basra Vilayet had to use the ships under the command of the Basra Commandership.⁴⁴⁸ The construction of the ships was also canceled as a result of an insufficient budget despite the obvious need for the ships.⁴⁴⁹ In 1880 and 1882, the Porte planned to strengthen its naval presence in the Gulf with the purchase of new ships and the construction of new shore facilities at Basra. However, lack of funds prevented the implementation of these plans.⁴⁵⁰ Several projects for construction of new vassals failed as a result of the inadequate budget.⁴⁵¹

6.3. Obstacles to the Reforms

In addition to above-mentioned problems in dispatching ships, there were some obstacles in carrying out reforms in the field of administration. Modern reforms

⁴⁴⁵ 30 Mart 1309: BOA, Y. PRK. ASK 89/67.

⁴⁴⁶ 21 Teşrin-I Evvel 1311: BOA, Y. PRK. ASK 107/85.

⁴⁴⁷ Quoted in: Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 212.

⁴⁴⁸ 10 Mayıs 1308: BOA, DH. MKT 1952/23.

⁴⁴⁹ 20 Kanun-u Sani 1309: BOA, DH. MKT 84/21.

⁴⁵⁰ Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*: p. 130.

⁴⁵¹ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*: p. 76.

were suspended due to the opposition of the local leaders and people. There were several reasons for this opposition: The first reason of this opposition was the locals' desire for autonomy. Secondly, they thought that these reforms were in contradiction with their traditions. Thirdly, they found the reforms to be against their interest, particularly with regard to taxation. In this context, the Ottomans sometimes deferred on the issue of making administrative-modern reforms that aimed at strengthening the Ottoman presence in the region.

It should be kept in mind that Abdülhamid II was centralist in principle, and rejecting the distribution of authority to the provinces. He assumed that decentralization might be a disaster for the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁵² Nevertheless, Abdülhamid II had to concede to leave authority with the local leaders in the regions that had been autonomous for centuries such as Arabia, Albania and Eastern Anatolia.⁴⁵³ In this regard, he applied decentralist policies involving abolishment and suspension of the administrative regulations in the Persian Gulf.

In the context of the peculiarities of the Gulf such as British intervention and autonomy of the tribes, the Ottomans realized that they could not govern the Persian Gulf and people there like other parts of the empire such as Ottoman Europe, Anatolia, or Ottoman Syria where government influence was much stronger. Therefore, Ottoman statesman established an administration based on these different conditions.⁴⁵⁴ hence, Abdülhamid II and his administration sometimes abolished or suspended modern applications in order to gain the support of the local leaders and people.⁴⁵⁵ In the case of the Persian Gulf region, he abolished or postponed taxes, modern courts (*nizamiye mahkemeleri*), recruitment of troops, census, and modern institutions such as modern schools (*mektebs*).⁴⁵⁶

It is well known that taxation has been a main controversial issue between a state and its subjects (citizens) for ages. Taxation has been the main reason for many revolts and revolutions, so a state ought to be highly cautious in obtaining revenue through taxes while not provoking people by levying excessive taxes. Eventually, the

⁴⁵² Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: p. 21.

⁴⁵³ Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*: p. 23.

⁴⁵⁴ Kuhn, "Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism": p. 316.

⁴⁵⁵ Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam*: p. 259.

⁴⁵⁶ Mahmut Nedim Bey, *Arabistan'da Bir Ömür*: p. 30; Kuhn, "Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism": p. 316.

Ottomans were forced to face this problem. They, on the one hand, wanted to establish an effective administration with the officials who could explain the benefits of justice and development to the people (“... *esas-i adalet ve terekkiyatın fezaidini halka anlatabilecek icraata muktedir memurlardan güzel bir idare teşkili*”). On the other hand, it was understood that this administration should not impose upon people taxes and duties strange to them

“... *ve icraat def’aten varidat ihdasında varidat vergi tarhı aranmayıp ve halkı alıştığı tekalif-i şer’iyyeden başka mükellifiyat tezyid olunmayıp evvel-emirde fiili ve hakiki bir irade-i muktedire vücuda getirmek*”.⁴⁵⁷

The petitions against personal duty (*vergi-i şahsi*) were sent by the people of Necd after January 1906.⁴⁵⁸ In fact, the complaints of the local heads and people were influential in shaping the decisions of the Ottomans with regard to the suspension of modern applications.⁴⁵⁹ As a result, the taxes gathered from Necd were in half compared with the tax collected from other sancaks including Basra, Müntefik and Amara. On the other hand, the expense for Necd was higher than other Sancaks except for Basra.⁴⁶⁰

Another modern application placing the state at odds with people in the Gulf was the census. For instance, people in Hasa revolted against the census registration in 1904.⁴⁶¹ It should be taken into account that the census frightened people in the entire empire, including Muslims and non-Muslims because it was directly related with taxation and recruitment.

The people in the Gulf were not content with modern justice system because of inappropriateness for their tradition. In the report of the commission established under the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1890, it was reported that the people in the Persian Gulf was not content with the modern justice system (*nizamiye mahkemeleri*)

⁴⁵⁷ 8 Mayıs 1905: BOA, HR. SYS 104/10.

⁴⁵⁸ Kırmızı, Abdülhamit, *Abdülhamid’in Valileri, Osmanlı Vilayet İdaresi 1895-1908*, İstanbul, Klasik, 2007, p. 172.

⁴⁵⁹ Mahmut Nedim Bey, *Arabistan’da Bir Ömür*: p.19.

⁴⁶⁰ Babuçoğlu, Eroğlu and Özdiç, *Osmanlı Vilayet Sınamelerinde Basra*: pp. 131-132.

⁴⁶¹ Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Alman Nüfuzu*: p. 141.

so the system should be abolished. The trials of the people would be sued in only Necd and Katif by administrative courts.

“... *ahali-i merkumenin usül-ü adliyeden adem-i hoşnudiyeleleri ... oralarca usül-ü mezkurenin lağvıyla, ahali tarafından vukubulacak daveynin Meclis-i İdare ve temyizce rüyet edilmek üzere yalnız merkez Liva'da ve Katif kazasında birer naib, ve katip, ve katip muavinleri bulundurulması*”).⁴⁶²

This offer was turned into a decision, and also sent to the Ministry of Justice on 19 June 1890.⁴⁶³

The suspension of modern reforms was not particular to the Persian Gulf. In his relations with Arab chieftains, Abdülhamid II preferred a policy of compromise rather than strictness in the implementation of law.⁴⁶⁴ For instance, the modern justice system was also removed in other parts of Arabia such as Hejaz and Yemen. The Şeriat courts were set on instead of modern courts.⁴⁶⁵ It was recommended to the officials of census in Libya not to terrify people and to apply moderate and smooth measures.⁴⁶⁶ The last Governor of Yemen, Mahmut Nedim Bey, claimed in his memoirs that Abdülhamid II considered closing modern schools (*mekteb*) in Yemen due to the complaints of people. Sultan shared his plans with Mahmut Nedim Bey.⁴⁶⁷ Therefore, Abdülhamid II and his statesmen believed in the expediency of the deferring modern regulations in order to retain problematic regions.

Local tribal heads also opposed the establishment of some modern institutions such as buildings. For instance, an Ottoman mission went to Hail, the capital of Ibn-i Reşid, to persuade him to construct a mosque and a government school, but Ibn-i Reşid refused these proposals.⁴⁶⁸ It was seen that even Ibn-i Reşid, an ally of the Ottomans was opposed modern reforms (buildings) when he considered them detrimental to its autonomy. In fact, buildings were a sign of the presence of the state

⁴⁶² 1 Şubat 1305: BOA, DH. MKT 1700/33.

⁴⁶³ 7 Haziran 1306: BOA, DH. MKT 1736/46.

⁴⁶⁴ Akarlı, “Abdülhamid’s Islamic Policy in the Arab Provinces”: p. 55.

⁴⁶⁵ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 194.

⁴⁶⁶ Deringil, *Simgeden Millete*: p. 212.

⁴⁶⁷ Mahmut Nedim Bey, *Arabistan’da Bir Ömür*: p. 19.

⁴⁶⁸ Al-Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*: p. 207.

in a particular region so Ibn-i Reşid did not want to limit its autonomy in front of the eyes of his people. As a result, the opposition of people and local leaders became an obstacle for the Ottoman reforms in the field of administration. This opposition became possible with the autonomy of local sheikhs, which endured with the support Britain and British policy of using them as autonomous agents (*protégés*) against the Ottoman Empire.

Ottoman bureaucrats and local leaders generated several projects to counter the British menace. Although there were two options, reform and power, the Ottomans mostly preferred reform to hold the Gulf region. The Ottomans tried to make reforms in the areas of administration and the dispatch of ships. However, they faced some problems in making these reforms, such as opposition from the local people toward the administrative reforms and an insufficient local budget for dispatching new ships. To overcome such problems, in spite of the fact that the Ottomans were highly convinced of the significant benefit of the centralist modern reforms, they were put aside with the same objective of making reforms; to hold the region and to meet the British threat in the context of the opposition of the autonomous local leaders. In conclusion, the Ottomans tried to give responses against the British threat, but they could not reach their aims completely because of several economic, political and socio-cultural obstacles.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The Ottoman Empire conquered the Persian Gulf region, covering today's Kuwait, Qatar, Hasa, Necd and Bahrain in the era of Süleyman I (1520-1566), but Ottoman direct control in the region was a very short lived one. By the end of the 17th century, the empire had lost direct control over the area. The Ottoman government, however, under changing circumstances of the 19th century, attempted to re-establish its central authority in this region in 1871 during the Baghdad governorship of Mithad Paşa. However, Britain was already securely entrenched in the region and had established its supremacy there since the beginning of the 19th century, with the aim of protecting the route to India from other powers, including, the Ottoman Empire. Britain regarded the Ottoman re-entrance into the region as a threat to its hegemony over the area, and decided to undermine its presence immediately.

It should be kept in mind that the British policy toward the Ottoman Empire shifted dramatically at the beginning of Abdülhamid II's reign. British policy turned from defending the preservation of the territorial integrity of the empire to being favor of its disintegration. Thus, Britain became the most hostile state for the Ottoman Empire. In this context, the British threat to the Ottoman presence in the Persian Gulf was a reflection of the negative British policy toward the empire. Furthermore, the British policy toward the Arab provinces of the empire demonstrated that Britain was highly determined to separate Arabs from the Ottoman state, and took them under its protection for its imperial objectives, such as an Arab Caliphate under its auspices. Hence, the British threat was intensified in the Arab regions close to the Persian Gulf, so the region could not be spared from this threat surrounding it.

In addition to the general British menacing policy that aimed for the breakdown of the empire, Britain had a special policy for the regions analyzed in this study to undermine the Ottoman existence there. This policy emanated from the British policy of protecting its supremacy by excluding other powers. Britain had signed a number of protection agreements with the local sheikhdoms stipulating that

they were not to alienate territory to other states and not to enter into relations without the consent of Britain. As such, these sheikhdoms became the protégés of Britain. These protégés, excessively supported by Britain, threatened the Ottoman authority in the region to a great extent. The Ottomans regarded them as such a menace that they were thought to be able to give harm to the Ottoman existence in Hejaz.

As was discussed in the first two chapters of this study, the arguments of the British government during the reign of Abdülhamid II and modern scholars, which assert that the Ottoman perception of the British threat was solely groundless suspicion of the Ottoman statesmen, are not convincing. Indeed, Britain threatened the Ottoman existence in the Persian Gulf because of a dramatic shift in its foreign policy against the territorial integrity and maintenance of the Ottoman state and British specific policy against the Ottoman existence in the Persian Gulf stemming especially from the protection of its supremacy over the route to India.

There were several means employed by Britain to threaten the Persian Gulf, but gun smuggling and incitement of the tribes against the Ottoman government, coercing people to act in line with the British interests, and most importantly, using British ships effectively were significant British tools used to threaten the Ottoman existence in the Persian Gulf. Along with these British methods, the Ottoman view of the region, as a whole, was shaped in the context of the British threat. The Ottomans generated an outlook with respect to the people's level of civilization and their loyalty to the Ottoman state, which were considered as the factors that would obstruct British threats. On the other hand, Islam was considered to bind people to the Ottoman state, but the realities did not correspond with the Ottoman assumption of the influence of religion. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire legitimized its existence in the Gulf by demonstrating its sovereignty over the region on the grounds of history, geography and international law. However, Britain did not consider these sovereignty rights and produced counter-arguments demonstrating as groundless the Ottoman sovereignty claims. Moreover, Britain used military power to enforce the Ottomans to step back from its attempts to reinforce its presence. The outlook of the region also influenced the policies generated for the region. For instance, the Ottoman administration took into account the bedouinness of the people in making reforms in the region.

The autonomy of the local sheikhs made the British penetration to the region possible. They entered into relations with Britain whenever their interests would be maximized. They used Britain as a shelter when the Ottoman administration attempted to threaten their interests. This “playing off” policy provided them a great area of autonomy but significantly hindered the Ottoman presence because it made British encroachment possible. Even the ally of the Ottomans in the region, Ibn-i Reşid, entered into relations with Britain when he thought it would be more beneficial for himself. In this context of mistrust, the Ottomans did not allow for the establishment of the dominance of Ibn-i Reşid over the region. Another case study analyzed in the framework of the policies of the local leaders is Casim El-Sani. He successfully manipulated the Ottomans and Britain while maintaining its autonomy.

Ottoman state elites, including both those from centre and in the local region were highly engaged in finding the measures to obstruct the British threat. There were several recommendations with regard to the measures to be taken against the British threat. These recommendations included the suppression of local leaders who oppressed people, elimination of gangs and other criminals and establishing many more ways of contact with the local people. The Ottomans were also highly engaged with the question of whether or not the “reform” (*hüsn-ü tedabir and muamele-i hasene*) or “power” (*kuvvet*), involving military operations and forcing people to act in line with Ottoman interests, would make the responses against the British threat successful. Reform was mostly recommended and applied by the Ottoman administration. Two particular fields of reform were especially underlined in the Ottoman documents: making administrative reforms to demonstrate the Ottoman existence to both Britain and the local people, and the dispatch of the Ottoman ships to counter the British threats and ensure order and security at sea. However, these reforms encountered some set-backs such as lack of funds for the dispatch of ships to the Gulf coasts and opposition from the British backed local leaders against the modern administrative reforms. Although the Ottomans wanted to generate responses against the British threat by making various reforms, these responses faced the challenges that stemmed from the existence of Britain and the autonomous sheikhdoms supported by Britain.

In the period examined in this study, the Ottoman central government and its provincial extensions, which regarded the existence of Britain in the region as a menace, desired to maintain the Ottoman presence in the region and to have

influence there by conveying centralist authority. However, the British supremacy and its close relations with the local leaders, which had existed for decades, and, explicitly, the limit of the Ottoman resources for following a forward policy made it difficult for the Ottoman state to be as effective as it had wished to be in the region. Nevertheless, the Ottoman state, at least, did not have to leave the region until the end of the Abdülhamian era.

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